

first hand

arts,
crafts, and
culture created by
PEI women
of the 20th century

Prince Edward Island Interministerial Women's Secretariat
Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women



first hand:

arts, crafts, and culture created by PEI women of the 20th century

PDF edition for Women's History Month 2017 unupdated & uncorrected.
Originally published in 2000 at www.gov.pe.ca/firsthand and as a CD-ROM

Created by

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women and
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And we thank ...

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first hand

Introduction

**by Jane Ledwell
and Sasha Mullally**

Introduction

In “Sing Your Own Songs,” Prince Edward Island visual artist and writer Elaine Harrison reminds readers that “Art is an adventure for you alone to experience first hand.” *First Hand: Arts, Crafts, and Culture Created by PEI Women of the 20th Century* is a history of women’s contributions to arts, crafts, and culture in Prince Edward Island meant to initiate readers into the adventure of art by introducing the accomplishments of women artists and artisans who have contributed much to their small communities and the broader world.

Why “First Hand”?

Throughout the past century, women’s hands carried out a variety of important tasks: from kneading bread to hoisting children, from typing memos to building houses; from playing pianos to knitting, to mat hooking, to painting, to sculpting, to basket weaving, to shooting photographs, to writing poems, to making quilts. In fact, the list of tasks that have busied women’s hands is as endless as work itself.

The historical modules that follow explore some of the creative work of women’s hands. This work is often a *first hand* account of their experience and their imagination, transformed into words, photographs, quilts, baskets, or mats. The modules also include some of their *first hand* narratives of the struggles and challenges they faced to become women artists and artisans.

This history fills a gap in our public knowledge of women’s contributions to arts, crafts, and culture. By telling the stories of women’s creative production, this history hopes to be a *first hand* extended to the women artists and artisans of the past century: a hand that will draw them out of obscurity, that will draw back curtains that have been closed over their work, that will join other hands in applauding their remarkable achievements.

May many hands follow this first one. And may many Prince Edward Island women take Elaine Harrison’s challenge to venture into the arts themselves, to experience it “first hand.”

Why was this project worth doing?

Why should anyone be interested in doing or reading a history of women in the arts and crafts? The history of what women do is interesting because women did it, because it builds upon our knowledge and understanding of the roles and daily activities of all our historical forebears—what they did and what they thought, what they discarded, and what they valued and held dear.

It is also interesting for more concrete reasons. There are particular cultural economies that formed the fabric of Prince Edward Island life that were exclusively feminine domains. Quilting bees, for instance, organized a female artisanal tradition around a lively social ritual that bound together the craft tradition and, simultaneously, created ties of friendship and community. Hooking parties or frolics not only fostered development of a craft and a sense of neighbourliness but also maintained a traditional female sphere of economic activity. The hooking of rags into mats stands as a metaphor for the crucial role women played in contributing to the viability of Island household economies as they wove, used, reused, and occasionally sold textiles that kept their families warm and their homes beautiful. In particular, Mi’kmaq women who wove baskets preserved communal ties and made money for their families, but also exported aboriginal culture to white society. They thus disseminated a record of Island Mi’kmaq tradition, which would help future generations resist assimilation and ensure a degree of cultural survival with every carefully woven strip of wood.

Then, there are art forms that have always been dominated by male artists and artisans—such as the writing of prose and poetry, the shooting and developing of photography, and the visual arts of painting and printmaking—where women enriched and enlivened the traditional canons they challenged and of which they became a part. Women artists and writers were in the vanguard of late-20th-century revivals of folk art and the publication of local literatures. As photographers and painters, they have also played a critical role throughout the century as educators and purveyors of their art forms.

They were the heart of mid-20th-century “camera clubs,” which they organized and to which they lent both their enthusiasm and their technical prowess, giving instruction on the creative ways to make and develop images. It was also mainly young women artists who embarked on journeys to the “centres” of their cultural universes, bringing the excitement and the cultural riches of these worlds back to our province. The “sojourner” immigration patterns of certain young women at the beginning of the last century were links that brought the work and the influence of some of the most accomplished artists of that time to Prince Edward Island.

Why focus on arts, crafts, and culture?

Art is the product of civilization and shared community. Our most ancient of ancestors created arts and crafts that allow us a window into their culture. In imaginative detail cave paintings, pictographs, and sculptures record tales of heroic hunts, religious beliefs, and sacred animals valued by cultures in a variety of regions of the world. Archeologists can track the development of civilization through intricately designed clay pots, jewellery, and delicately woven textiles—not to mention the carefully fabricated flutes, stringed instruments, and drums that created music and rhythm. Over many centuries—even millennia—the stories these objects tell remain interpretable, though some of the animals in the paintings are long extinct, the jewellery has gone out of style, and the clay implements have given way to metal ones. The tunes they played may be lost, but flutes still testify to a harmonious past.

We understand historical and archeological images and objects, music and decoration because the individuals and communities who experienced events took the time to express themselves: to tell their stories. Arts and culture are crucial activities in all communities because they help express our human desires to make meaning, to create order, and to establish patterns that communicate across time and will transcend individual experience to help us understand each other more fully.

The human desire to create art, then, arises not only out of a need for self-expression, but also out of a need to communicate with other people. For this reason, books and photographs are published or reproduced and distributed around the world; visual arts are

displayed in galleries and public spaces; functional items such as baskets, mats, and quilts make homes more beautiful and find their ways into displays in provincial exhibitions, museums, and galleries.

Women’s work in arts and culture does much more than “pretty up” the community. It *creates* the community by forming bonds among individuals. It provides one more means and many different media for people to share their experiences, hopes, and dreams. It defines the community by providing outlets for individual and collective stories. The artistic works of Prince Edward Island women are the community’s history because they are the concrete, readable, usable evidence of traditions that have been carried out by generations and passed on so that we remember old stories and have a variety of forms for telling new stories.

What makes arts and crafts important?

Arts and crafts are sometimes considered luxuries or unnecessary extras, but they fundamentally influence how we see ourselves and how others see us. They *place* the community they create and define it in its global context. As just one example, people around the globe know about Prince Edward Island from Lucy Maud Montgomery’s phenomenally popular books. How amazing that a story one Island woman imagined has made our Island known to so many, and that so many of them have chosen to see for themselves if the story Montgomery told about this place is true.

Of course, it is easy to see why Montgomery’s work in the arts is valuable work. Her success is measured by the number of visitors to Green Gables House and the number of copies of her books in print. It is more difficult to assess how much the Island has been enriched by the achievements of artists and artisans whose work is less famous—whose work might only have been seen by family or community members. It is difficult to quantify the importance of a basket that was made with care and with attention to both its beauty and its functionality; after all, it carries a whole tradition. Because it is difficult to ascribe value to less recognized works, we need to take care to challenge *how* people evaluate the creative works. We must think critically about how people and systems have selected what arts and crafts will be remembered.

Why the selected arts and crafts?

What makes the art and craftwork selected for this project worth remembering? Perhaps the best evidence of the far-reaching impact and the importance of the art forms discussed in these modules is how much they overlap and influence each other. The women's art profiled in these modules demonstrates that women artists were aware of each others' creative work. They recognize connections within the community of creators and pay homage to each others' creative forms. Even those women who were working in apparent isolation in their homes are remembered in—or even were inspired by—songs and stories and poems and paintings.

Thus, many of the women profiled in the modules that follow carried their personal creative expression into more than one sphere. Lucy Maud Montgomery is best known as a writer, but she was an avid quilter and a skilled photographer, as well. Elaine Harrison has had enormous influence as a writer and publisher as well as a visual artist. Visual artist Hilda Woolnough played an important role in supporting the development of a renewed crafts industry on the Island and contributed to the movement for local publishing through her partnership with Réshard Gool, who helped ensure that Island women's writing would find an audience. These multi-talented women and others helped forge links among the various sectors of the artistic community and likewise helped break down artificially constructed barriers among artistic disciplines.

Other women demonstrate in their work how ideas from one art form influence others and can be translated from one medium to another. Photographer Margaret Mallett approached her photography like a painter approaches her medium—manipulating colour in her photographic prints to render her own vision of the pastoral realism popular in paintings of the time. Mat hooker Hélèn Gallant incorporates designs by local visual artists into her mats, while other mat hookers incorporate quilting patterns. In turn, contemporary visual artists such as Brenda Whiteway incorporate quilting patterns into their visual arts. The woven forms in Mi'kmaq baskets are mirrored in ribbon appliqué, wearable art that influences quilters' designs. Quilter Edie Zakem has created a quilt that tells a story about L. M. Montgomery's life and writing. Writers and folk poets such as Elaine Harrison, Leone Ross, Leah Maddix,

Catherine Matthews, and Margaret Furness MacLeod help memorialize traditions associated with women's crafts in their writing and thus establish and help to reinforce the arts' and crafts' fundamental value.

Why did our authors profile the artists and artisans they did?

Any project that focusses on women, making a political point about historical representation, must necessarily remain sensitive to the wider need to represent ethnic, racial, and class diversity. The six art forms we have researched—photography, visual arts, writing, basket weaving, mat hooking, and quilting—were chosen for three reasons. First, we knew that there was enough primary research already accomplished so we could put this project together in time to mark the new millennium. Second, we knew that incorporating certain art forms, such as quilting and basket weaving, would allow us to profile the contributions of ethnic groups of women on Prince Edward Island: particularly the Acadian and Mi'kmaq communities. Third, by balancing “high” art forms with “popular” art forms, we knew we could represent the cultural contributions of significant numbers of working-class or farm-based women, as opposed to focussing a project on the history of the privileged few who had the money and leisure to dedicate to art forms that were not utilitarian. We believe we have achieved a workable balance, and it is our hope that this project may inspire researchers to compile histories of a major branch of art and culture not represented: music and entertainment.

Each module is written as a history of the form, as opposed to a list of names and dates of achievements. The history focusses is on the movements and groups, trends and developments, that provide a backdrop for highlighting the works of certain individuals. Although biographical information is important in understanding people's approaches to arts and crafts, the organization of this work is not primarily biographical.

When we chose individuals as examples to profile a trend, style, or innovation, we worked with three very flexible criteria in making the choices. First, they had to be leaders or significant contributors to the practice and development of their art form on Prince Edward Island. Second, they had to be “historical,” in that they had to have already achieved a *corpus* that we can claim as part of our Island cultural heritage and legacy;

naturally, we were also forced to make choices based on the accessibility of information. Finally, the women had to be from Prince Edward Island. And an “Islander” we defined as someone who made her home here for a significant period of time and practised most of her art or craft in and for the communities of this province.

Who created *First Hand*?

Although some of our authors are professional historians and writers, bringing degrees and accreditation to bear on this endeavour, *First Hand* is very much a popular and populist historical exploration of how women create and maintain culture. We have accomplished and renowned artisans contributing pieces to these histories; others are interested writers and researchers, new to history, who thought of their grandmothers as they wrote. We are a cooperative and diverse group who have worked together to tease out themes and ideas, trends and opinions as a small community.

Each researcher/writer has brought a wealth of experience and commitment to this project, and each has contributed her knowledge with intelligence, wit, and sincere appreciation.

Sasha Mullally brings a scholarly understanding of the 20th-century history and her passion for uncovering and understanding how Prince Edward Islanders adopted and adapted to new technologies in the 20th century.

Jane Ledwell brings her experience working with Prince Edward Island writers and her strong appreciation of the value of using the written word to interpret Prince Edward Island to Islanders.

Anne Nicholson brings her years of experience working with women and women’s organizations and her expansive view of women’s contributions to society.

Ann-Louise Beaumont brings her unquenchable enthusiasm for quilting and her breadth of knowledge of trends in quilting in many parts of North America.

Edie Zakem brings her quilter’s focussed attention to detail and her strong connection with the Island quilting community of which she is such a valued part.

Sandy Kowalik brings her experience of living and working as a visual artist in the Prince Edward Island community and her deep, abiding interest in art history, and especially the history of women artists.

Tiffany Sark brings her sense of the value of Mi’kmaq cultural heritage and her experience communicating her people’s achievements through her work as Director of the Lennox Island Mi’kmaq Cultural Centre.

The project committee is proud to have assembled such a capable team.

The project committee itself has been brought together by Sandra Bentley of the Interministerial Women’s Secretariat, Government of Prince Edward Island, together with Heidi Rankin and Lisa Murphy of the Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women. They assembled an eclectic and imaginative steering committee with representatives from community groups, from arts groups, from educational institutions, and from across government. Policy and politics can make great history; this group of enthusiastic women kept the process going and got things done.

Our final thanks to Elaine Harrison, whose daring perspective in “Sing Your Own Songs” provided light for the journey.



Collage created for *First Hand* by Sandy Kowalik.

Sing Your Own Songs

Sing your own songs paint your own pictures
write poems build houses and think your own thoughts
And don't for heaven's sake let the professionals
or critics tell you that you can't
that you are trespassing on their territory on forbidden ground
the holy ground of art for the artist the professional
And don't let them tell you that you need a course or a degree
before you can paint or write or bake bread or plant a garden
or do anything

Depend more on yourself and less on others to tell you
what you can do
recover the lost self-reliance of the
artist craftsman builder and thinker
Dare to create something of your own and be proud that
you did it yourself and it will have something of you in it
and not be just like all the other synthetic things
advertised for consumers of this and that

Don't be intimidated by talk about conceptual art minimal art
romantic realism cubism etc or by literary talk of
influences sources metres and figures of speech
To create a painting or song or poem is better than just
to know all about the history of art or poetry
Approach art directly rather than through an ambush of
historical or biographical material and let your imagination
take you beyond photographic reality and don't be afraid to
say you like it or you don't like it—
don't wait for the critics to tell you what you should like
Art is an adventure for you alone to experience first hand

—Elaine Harrison



first hand

**Mi'kmaq Baskets:
Our Living Legends**

**Researcher/Writer:
Tiffany Sark**

Introduction: Monuments

It would be interesting for people to realize how a Mi'kmaq community is, if they have never had the opportunity to visit one. Mostly when I went to school, there was never anything about the Mi'kmaq history or the Mi'kmaq view. It is only when I started asking my own questions and with the help of Mi'kmaq people and professors at the University of Prince Edward Island that I began to gain a greater understanding and pride of my culture. When I was in school, my identity was somewhat confused because of the biases that were presented to me. The television shows were negative about native people; images in the media were negative. What was a child to think with all this negativity about her culture floating around her?

Early History and Economy

It is evident that the role of women in the profession of basket weaving has been mostly ignored up until the latter part of the 20th century. Upon careful analysis of the information before me, it seems that we must critically review not only the historical texts that explore basket weaving but also the actual women who have dedicated their lives to the art for the survival of their families, from time immemorial to the present.

Most of the history that has been written about the Mi'kmaq people from the early explorers until the latter part of the 20th century was biased, written from the European point of view, with their impressions guided by the judgements from their cultural background.

Monuments

Ai! Mu knu'kaqann
 Mu nuji-wi'kikaqann
 Mu weskitaqawikasinukl kisna
 mitekni-napuikasinukl
 Kekinua'tuenukl wlakue'l
 Pa'qalaiwaqann

Ta'n teluji-mtua'lukwi'tij nuji-
 kina'mua'tijik a.

Ke'kwilmi'tij,
 Maqamikewe'l wisunn,
 Apaqte'l wisunn,
 Sipu'l
 Mukk kasa'tu mikuite'tmaqanmk
 Wula knu'kaqann.

Ki'kelu'lk nemitmikl
 Kmtne'l samqwann nisitk,
 Kesikawitkl sipu'l.
 Wula na kis-napui'kmu'kl
 Mikuite'tmaqanminaq
 Nuji-kina'masultioq,
 We'jitutoqsip ta'n kisite'tmekl
 Wisunn aqq ta'n pa'qi-klu'lk
 Tepqatmi'tij L'nu weja'tekemk
 Weji-nstiuita'timk.

Aye! No monuments,
 No literature,
 No scrolls or canvas-drawn pictures
 Relate the wonders of our yesterday.

How frustrated the searchings
 of the educators.

Let them find
 Land names
 Titles of seas,
 Rivers;
 Wipe them not from memory.
 These are our monuments.

Breathtaking views—
 Waterfalls on a mountain,
 Fast flowing rivers.
 These are our sketches
 Committed to our memory.
 Scholars, you will find our art
 In names and scenery,
 Betrothed to the Indian
 Since time began.

—Rita Joe,
 from *The Mi'kmaq Anthology*



Many explorers and historians dissected the culture of the Mi'kmaq and passed judgement that Mi'kmaq ways were not right because they were not like the European ways. The Mi'kmaq people believed in *different ways* within a *different* culture than that of the Europeans. They had their own world view, and that view was equally as valid as the European view.

Much European-based history that I read was based on texts and on events as they were *written down*. Native culture and history were mostly passed on orally, looking at traditions as they were *handed down*. The treaties of 1725 promised the Mi'kmaq people the "right to wares" (such as baskets) and promised that Mi'kmaq people would be permitted to gather products of the forest to satisfy their needs, but the treaties do not tell the cultural value of the wares and the forests. Too much history looks at treaties, not traditions. Basket weaving is a tradition that not many histories of the Mi'kmaq people have looked at in detail.

Often, major Canadian publications about Atlantic Canada's native peoples talked about the Mi'kmaq only in relation to Europeans, instead of looking at their own identity. In 1974 in *The Native People of Atlantic Canada*, published by McClelland and Stewart, for instance, basket weaving is looked at only in relation to economy and trade with non-natives. It also focusses on the men who were involved in the business side of basket weaving. It does say that weaving has "a

continuous history from aboriginal days" but then insultingly says, "a few old women at Shubenacadie still can do skilful porcupine quill work." (139) "A few old women" is not a respectful way to refer to elders of a community keeping an age-old skill alive for their community and culture.

For this history, I tried to look mostly at sources that were written by Mi'kmaq people from a Mi'kmaq perspective. We Mi'kmaq people are telling our own stories now, and we are passing on our stories through books, the education system, television, and even the Internet. For example, an ETV series about the Mi'kmaq was written for schools by Mi'kmaq people, and it tells us the Mi'kmaq culture had its own self-sufficient economy based on the resources of the land and sea: "It was an economically and socially viable culture with a complex and indigenous technology, a culture adapted to life in a Northern Maritime environment" (*Mi'kmaq Teacher's Handbook*). Some of the information in this history was told to me, orally, by the Mi'kmaq men and women I have met and spoken to. Some of them told their own stories of weaving baskets. Some gave me more background about the Mi'kmaq world view. Noel Knockwood, an elder who has studied Mi'kmaq spirituality, helped explain traditional emphasis on women as the life-givers in families and communities.

Recently, some writers have been working to preserve basket weaving heritage, even here on Prince Edward Island. Darlene Bernard, in her book of profiles of Mi'kmaq women of Lennox Island, talks about basket weaving as a daily part of almost all the older women's lives. She almost could not profile them without talking about their weaving: it was so much part of their lives.

Throughout the 20th century, many Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq women learned the art of basket weaving from a very early age. Research in early Mi'kmaq material culture has stated that women were traditionally the artists in Mi'kmaq families. Since far back in history, women have woven baskets. The baskets were not designed to spruce up their homes, because homes were not permanent in the early days of the Mi'kmaq. Women and their children made baskets not to make money, but to use in daily life as part of their means of survival, even before the introduction of the trading system between the Europeans and the Mi'kmaq. Later, baskets helped sustain the survival of the Mi'kmaq people, and they still do today.

It is now time to use a Mi'kmaq perspective to reveal the secrets of the Island women weavers who gave birth to and raised the art of basket weaving. Let the story be told.

A Mi'kmaq perspective

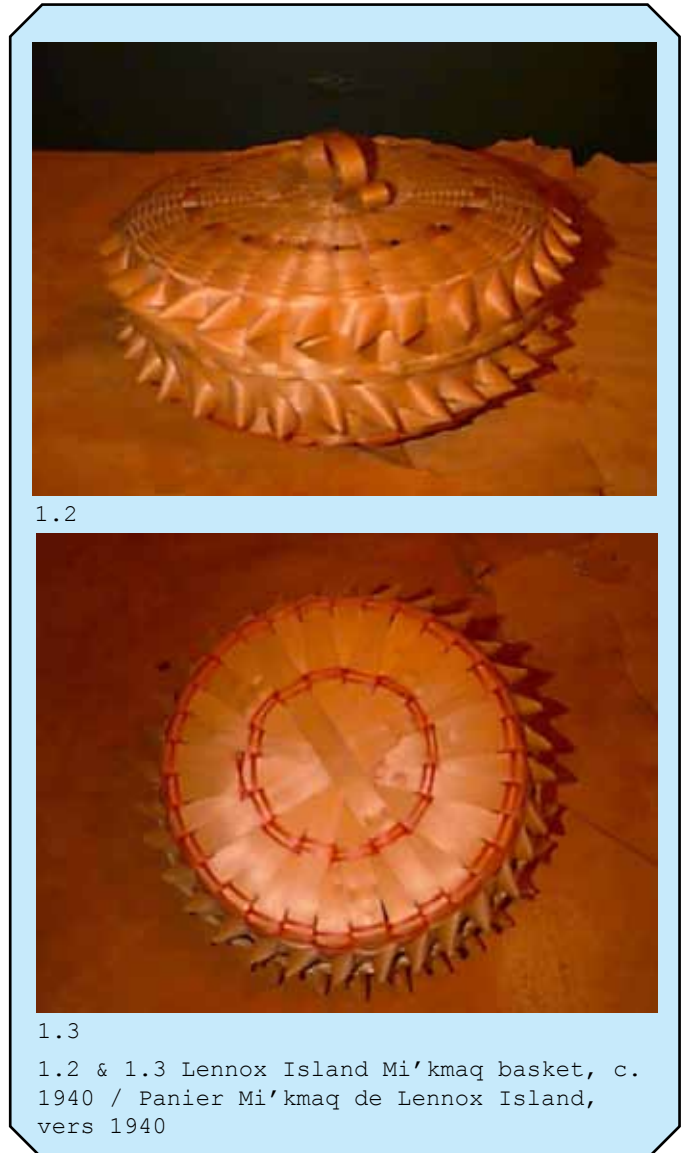
Although this tradition of making baskets almost slipped through our fingertips, basket weaving in modern society is a living legend. The tradition of the Mi'kmaq people, the oral tradition, taught its children through legends. Legends are stories told over time. They include sacred history as well as community history, and they establish people's relationships to the natural world. Baskets are legends because their tradition and their lessons have been handed down by the elders.

The elders are very important within the Mi'kmaq way of life. It is through learning the knowledge held by the elders that Mi'kmaq youth would learn to live in harmony with themselves and others around. In early days, they learned to be careful observers and listeners, to receive the wisdom that the elders revealed. **Matilda Lewis** was interviewed when she was the eldest member of the community, in her 90s, in the 1980s. She remembered that the legends had many morals and teachings:

The elders held a position that was respected . . . the children would help in any way to make them comfortable . . . they respected the elders. The elders would tell stories to the children, some scary, but most of the stories had to do with life's lessons. The children would sit on the floor and be very still and listen, for each story had a lesson to be learned in the life of each person there.

Knowledge of weaving baskets, mats, and bags was part of the important knowledge young Mi'kmaq women learned from their elders. Over the past 500 years or even more, the tradition was passed from generation to generation, from women to children, with great patience and technique.

The women of the Island carried on the tradition of basket weaving to unleash the strings that would give us all a great deal of pride and respect for the women who produced the baskets and are noted as the originators of the craft. According to the ETV Series about the Mi'kmaq way of life, "It is very likely that all the many weaving techniques . . . were invented by women" (*Mi'kmaq Teacher's Handbook*).



1.2

1.3

1.2 & 1.3 Lennox Island Mi'kmaq basket, c. 1940 / Panier Mi'kmaq de Lennox Island, vers 1940

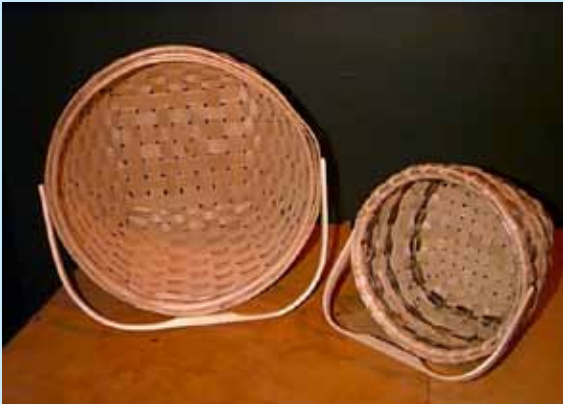
Baskets in early times were mostly made out of grasses, rushes, and reed, though some were also made of wood splints—wood that was peeled, shaved, pounded, and split into thin, workable strips that could be shaped and woven. A popular grass that was used then and is still used today is sweetgrass, which is also a sacred grass used in Mi'kmaq ceremonies such as the sweetgrass ceremony that purifies and cleanses body, spirit, and mind. In other Maritime provinces, porcupine quills were used in making many things and were used in decorating baskets, but Prince Edward Island is not the home of the porcupines. In those days, the Mi'kmaq of the Island travelled not only on Epekwit'k (the Mi'kmaq name for Prince Edward Island; it means "cradle on the waves") but all over the Maritimes, so it would be likely that they would have



1.4



1.5



1.6

1.4 A Mi'kmaq family making baskets.
/ Une famille Mi'kmaq en train de
fabriquer des paniers.

1.5 A Mi'kmaq family making wood
splints. / Une famille Mi'kmaq en train
de fabriquer des éclisses.

1.6 Mi'kmaq baskets by Tommy Sark /
Paniers Mi'kmaq par Tommy Sark

picked up a few quills on their travels. When Mi'kmaq women wanted to include colour in their baskets, they could also dye strips of reed and grass, using berries in various concentrations to create the colours they wanted.

Early history of basket weaving

Traditionally, baskets made by Island Mi'kmaq women were used for a variety of purposes. Prior to the introduction of early European explorers, traders, and settlers, early baskets were used for carrying and storing food and materials; they were important to survival within the Mi'kmaq society. When families travelled from place to place on the Island and across the Maritimes, sometimes over long distances, baskets would be used to carry all their belongings. Women in those times had enormous responsibility to ensure the survival in the camp. Each gender and each member of the community had responsibilities to keep life going within the environment.

Baskets were not only used to contain food, though. They contributed to Mi'kmaq survival also by being used for fishing purposes: "The larger fish were caught most commonly by two methods: one was to build a weir across the stream and to place a basket net in the mouth of a small opening. When the basket filled, it would be emptied and returned to the water." Both women and men participated in fishing.

Mi'kmaq women made baskets and taught the tradition within the laws of nature, like all traditions are taught in the Mi'kmaq society. Mi'kmaq women would use grasses from the Maritime environment to weave items that were necessary to live in that same Maritime environment. All of nature was respected within the world view of the Mi'kmaq people, and all resources from nature were obtained and utilized to their fullest extent. There was no such thing as wasting a product that was made by the Creator; if anything were to be wasted, then Mi'kmaq people believed something bad might happen to the people, animals, or nature. In the Mi'kmaq tradition, when a tree is split for a basket or anything is taken from nature, then something is given in return as an offering to the Creator. Often tobacco would be left on the ground or in the water, as a sacred offering. This tradition dates back before history. It was with these lessons of the culture in mind that Mi'kmaq women taught the young children how to weave.

Weaving was important to young women, even in preparing for the ritual of marriage. Weaving was seen as a necessary skill for raising a family and participating in the community. The ETV Series mentioned earlier features scenes of a bride “gathering rushes, which she will dry, dye, and weave into mats, bags, and baskets” (*Mi’kmaq Teacher’s Handbook*). The same source notes, “As a girl grows older, she will take on more responsibilities, perfecting her skills in sewing, weaving, and basketry.” It is interesting that many similar skills were valued in young women in rural non-native communities. In both Mi’kmaq and non-native households, work was divided according to gender roles.

Because baskets were important to survival, when a woman wove or taught her children to weave, she gave life and also taught her children how to produce the means of their survival. Education in early Mi’kmaq years was not institutionalized—it was environmental.

After initial contact with Europeans, basket weaving took on new meanings and new importance, but remained important to Mi’kmaq communities’ survival as part of the trading system. Basket weaving, which had been part of a natural subsistence economy, came to be part of the trade- and money-based economy. Because baskets could be traded for European goods, they became an even more vital part of Mi’kmaq life and survival.

Photograph 1.7 below depicts a Mi’kmaq family posing around their seasonal home. Notice the checker-woven apple baskets made of pounded ash woodsplints.



1.7 The photo depicts a Mi’kmaq family posing around their seasonal home. / La photographie montre une famille Mi’kmaq posant autour de leur demeure saisonnière.



1.8 A Mi’kmaq family making baskets. / Une famille Mi’kmaq en train de fabriquer des paniers.

Photograph 1.8 was taken in 1894. The photo is of a Mi’kmaq family near a wigwam making wood splint baskets. The woman second from the left is just beginning to weave a basket and has threaded four woodsplints at right angles through four others. These will form the base of the basket, and perhaps with others added to them, and then will be bent up to form the standards (the warps) for the basket sides.

Economy of basket weaving

In the profession of weaving baskets, the economy reflected and was based upon the environment. Early Mi’kmaq economy was self-sufficient. In the early days, resources on the land were plentiful, though the work to sustain families was hard. Sadly enough, the economy changed with changes to the lifestyle of the Mi’kmaq people with the arrival of Europeans. The opportunity to pursue a traditional way of life diminished as new people arrived on the Island and began to claim portions of the land and cut down or use up its forests. When the Holland Survey of the Island divided the Island into lots and apportioned them to non-resident landowners, not one lot was set aside for the Mi’kmaq, the original occupants. The Mi’kmaq people were eventually pushed aside, with little assistance from governments, and their old traditions were forbidden. The Indian Act had been established in 1876 to bring together all the Canadian legislation that dealt with native peoples. In 1884, the Act was amended to ban many traditional practices related to First Nations culture and religion.



1.9



1.10

1.9 Akwasasne basket / Panier d'Akwasasne
1.10 Mi'kmaq basket by Margorie Lewis Paul
/ Panier Mi'kmaq par Margorie
Lewis Paul

The massive numbers of Europeans embarking on this land of the Mi'kmaq carried with them new economic conditions, and they changed the environment. They traded metal and flour for Mi'kmaq furs and material culture, including woven items. As settlers became more accustomed to their new land and began to have the ability to trade among themselves, even these trading practices changed: "Decline of the fur trade and loss of traditional lands for hunting and fishing reduced many to starvation, and epidemic outbreaks of disease continued to take a dreadful toll" (*Native Peoples*). As settlers cleared land for farms and cut tall trees for shipbuilding, the environment the Mi'kmaq had lived in changed.

After the trading system died out, the Mi'kmaq continued to make baskets, but these baskets changed. They were made differently, with more technology. Weavers and their families now had European saws and axes to cut down trees, and they had hammers and pounding machines to make wood splints. The baskets were frequently made out of birch, maple, black ash, and white ash, often instead of traditional reeds and grasses. The sturdier baskets made of wood were made possible by the new technology, and they also probably better fit the new agricultural economy within the province of Prince Edward Island. Other baskets began to be made to suit other purposes in the households of descendants of the European settlers. These baskets, whether fancy or plain, were saleable in the non-native community.

Through the 1900s, basket weaving was a part of daily life for aboriginal people of Prince Edward Island. Many families such as that of **Anita Bernard** of Lennox Island would remember moving around PEI with the different seasons, living in the woods. They would set up their camps at locations where they would be able to obtain the appropriate wood for baskets and where they could easily sell the baskets they wove. Many families would make baskets in mass production to receive money for supplies, food, or clothing. In an interview with Matilda Lewis done by Irene and Dave Haley, Mrs. Lewis remembered her grandparents and parents making baskets. She remembered they used wood from the maple tree a lot. Weavers had no frames to work by; they made their own designs from their own heads. Anything that they did make was made for a purpose. They made potato baskets, egg baskets, sewing baskets, clothes hampers, picnic baskets, comb baskets, and fishing baskets. Some of the fancier baskets had what they called "*jikiji'*" curls—raised curls decorating the outside of the baskets. Like many Mi'kmaq designs, the curls paid respect to observations from nature. "*Jikiji'*" is the Mi'kmaq word for "snail," an animal with curls in its shell like the curls on the baskets.

When Mrs. Lewis was very young, her job was to shave strips of wood to be woven and to secure handles when the baskets were made. Sometimes, the handles were secured with nails. Mrs. Lewis's family would sell baskets of all kinds in Tyne Valley and Summerside at Easter and Christmas, good times of the year for selling the baskets that were practical and beautiful: good gifts



1.11 Mi'kmaq baskets by Tommy Sark /
Paniers Mi'kmaq par Tommy Sark

during times when there was not much money for gifts. The baskets were inexpensive—usually much less than a dollar each. But it is partly because the baskets were so popular and well-used in the non-native community that the skills of making baskets continued to be passed on to Mi'kmaq children, so the legend would not be lost.

Baskets and Daily Life

As was stated above, many Mi'kmaq women learned to weave baskets by listening carefully to and observing their mothers. Women such as **Irene Haley, Anita Bernard, Becky Sark, Irene Peters, Barbara Jadis, Roseanne Sark, Margorie Paul, and Peggy Rydzewski** remember their parents making baskets. It was so much part of their daily schedule, it was just like cleaning the house daily. Peggy remembers her mom sitting on the floor, talking to the children, making bottoms for baskets while her husband, the late Chief Jacob Sark, had other chores to do for the production of the basket. Everyone in the family had a job to do when creating a basket, whether it was selecting the right tree, taking it home, peeling it, pounding it, splitting it, shaving the wood, shaping the bottom, weaving the basket, or making the handles. Some Mi'kmaq women today have memories of getting ready to go to winter camp to make baskets, while other women remember their moms at home making baskets. In the past, Mi'kmaq children would start learning the skill by making bottoms of baskets or playing with extra strips of wood.



1.12



1.13

1.12 Mi'kmaq basket by Margorie Lewis Paul containing sweetgrass and a medicine bag / Panier Mi'kmaq par Margorie Lewis Paul contenant le foin d'odeur et un sac à remède

1.13 Mi'kmaq baskets by Tommy Sark / Paniers Mi'kmaq par Tommy Sark

Mi'kmaq camps on PEI

Little is said today about the camps that the Mi'kmaq people set up in the different seasons. In the traditional ways of the Mi'kmaq, everything was done around the seasons, as part of the cycle of life. Today, native people often use the medicine wheel to describe and explain native spirituality and their world view. The medicine wheel is a circle, representing the life cycle. The circle contains the cycles of the four seasons, the four directions, the four colours of human beings (red, white, yellow, and black) and the native medicines (sacred,

ceremonial plants—cedar, ash, sweetgrass, sage, and tobacco). The circle made sense of every living thing and every other thing around them, and helped them understand the life sources. The circle of the medicine wheel is interrelated and interconnected, meaning it is holistic. Missing one element means everything else will not be right. The circle is always going from the East to the North, from Birth to Death, from Spring to Winter; it is always going and never stops.

The seasons brought about routine in the early days of Mi'kmaq survival. When they lived in the traditional manner, Mi'kmaq did not occupy only one place on Prince Edward Island or in the Maritime provinces. In 1870, the Aborigines Protection Society based in London, England, purchased Lennox Island for Prince Edward Island's Mi'kmaq. Despite this assigned territory, families did not stop setting up camps all over their traditional territory, "Mi'kmaqki."

Anita Bernard is an Island craftsperson who makes beautiful baskets with her husband, John Henry Bernard. Anita's mother taught her how to weave. Anita would remember as a child going to camps in Portage in the 1930s and 1940s. Anita's family would camp near the woods, where, like Mrs. Lewis's family, they could access a good wood supply and still sell their baskets. It was the way it was, to be able to move according to what resource was needed. Anita's family lived in tar paper camp shacks "near the river, the store, and the stream." Summer and winter camps were common places for Mi'kmaq families to produce baskets, while they would go back to Lennox Island or other reservations for the oyster season and hunting season. Anita remembers they used to make ten to fifteen baskets a week. This seasonal cycle of basket-making complemented the way of life. And since Easter and Christmas were good times of the year to sell baskets, it also fit the non-native traditions, marking the seasons of the Christian calendar, and it showed another way the Mi'kmaq people adapted to the economy and the world-view of the non-native community.

Weaving at Mid-Century

Bigger families meant more baskets. In the mid-20th century, the baskets were traded for necessities. With the restrictions of the Federal government regarding the Mi'kmaq of PEI and other Maritime provinces, times were tough for families. Mi'kmaq children were

often sent to the residential school at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, where they were not permitted to speak Mi'kmaq or follow traditional ways. Back at home, in the communities, the government's Indian agent dictated behaviour, and little self-sufficiency was allowed to the Mi'kmaq people. Land was set aside for agriculture, so by this time, most families had small farms. The family stood together and bonded for the survival of each member.

By this time, mid-century, because of the changes in the original ways of life with the land and resources, Mi'kmaq men joined women in basket weaving. The family became a team. Gilbert (Tommy) Sark remembers Island Mi'kmaq women and men making baskets in the mid-20th century. He remembers that one had to be skilled at choosing the right type of tree. Usually, one looked for ash. Sometimes, to choose a good tree, one would have to bite the tree or even gnaw on it for a little while to make sure it was right, to find out the right texture and the right sap, and to gauge that it would split correctly. Tommy remembers the good times, since they would have fun making baskets by making a race out of it. Tommy and his daughters picked the sweetgrass for the baskets. Often, at mid-century, the men would make the baskets along with the women, but, mostly, the men would be viewed as the business part of the team, selling the baskets to places such as farms in non-native communities.

This July 1958 photograph (1.14) shows men loading baskets to transport them from Lennox Island to Port



1.14 This July 1958 photograph shows men loading baskets to transport them from Lennox Island to Port Hill. / Cette photographie prise en juillet 1958 montre des hommes chargeant des paniers pour les transporter de Lennox Island à Port Hill.



1.15



1.16



1.17

1.15 Mi'kmaq basket by Tommy Sark /
Panier Mi'kmaq par Tommy Sark

1.16 & 1.17 Loading baskets, Lennox
Island (c. 1975). / Chargeant des
paniers, Lennox Island (vers 1975)

Hill.

Not only did the Mi'kmaq people put a lot of effort and time into choosing the appropriate wood and making the baskets, they mostly transported the baskets themselves and brought them to central locations where they could find buyers. They would go all over Prince Edward Island, the Annapolis Valley (NS), all over the Maritimes, and sometimes even into the United States.

Before 1972, there was no bridge to connect Lennox Island to Prince Edward Island. (After 1972, the bridge built from Lennox Island meant more connectedness to the outside, which had its advantages and disadvantages.) Because Lennox Island was an island off an island, the basket makers had to go across the river or the ice, because there was no bridge to cross. Sometimes, they had to hitch up horses and sleighs; other times, they would have to walk for lack of any other type of transportation. Baskets made for mass production would be loaded on buggies or sleighs or on dories to go off to the market (1.16 and 1.17).

Dave and Irene Haley interviewed **Bessie MacNeill**, who had been a storekeeper in Tyne Valley through the middle years of the century. She remembers that during rough winters and some tricky spring crossings from Lennox Island to Port Hill, some people even died transporting baskets. She remembered baskets arriving "by the hundreds" to Port Hill: from potato baskets to fancy baskets trimmed with sweet hay. She remembered baskets selling for \$.25 in 1914. Mi'kmaq boats that arrived loaded with baskets departed loaded with rations received once a month—tea, molasses, sugar, and potatoes.

Once on Prince Edward Island, some families would go door to door, selling baskets and receiving very little money in return. Anita Bernard remembered receiving \$.65 a basket in the 1950s. Many Mi'kmaq people sold their baskets to potato farmers, who used the baskets to collect potatoes during picking season.

Supplying baskets for potato picking became an industry in itself. What the non-Mi'kmaq people did not realize was the history behind the baskets, the life source from which the baskets were born. Many non-native people did not know that every day they picked potatoes, they were using baskets that were living legends, created through ageless traditions. The Mi'kmaq knew that the agricultural business would consume this product. They



1.18 A basket-weaving course, Lennox Island, c. 1974 / Un cours de tressage de paniers, Lennox Island, vers 1974

made them once again to survive in their environment, in a changed society.

Baskets for work, baskets for display

The middle years of the 20th century, right through to the 1970s, were tough times in Mi'kmaq history. But in the 1960s and 1970s, with more Mi'kmaq people educated and more social movements across North America inspiring minorities to stand up for their rights and themselves, the Mi'kmaq people started finding self-knowledge, community knowledge, and world knowledge. Sometimes in life it is the rough times that make people stronger. Today there is less demand economically for baskets for agriculture, since potatoes are harvested using machinery, but there is a new demand for baskets as artistic and decorative works. There are basket making courses offered at times, and there is more literature on the subject. Non-native people are even interested in learning basket weaving, and basket-weaving demonstrations are often part of cross-cultural training programmes. Some Mi'kmaq women today collect different styles of baskets, taking pride in their beauty and their legends. Tourists often ask about where they can purchase baskets; today, some non-native people from all over the world appreciate the art of the basket rather than the wear-and-tear work of it.

The following series of photographs shows John Henry Bernard and **Judy Peters** (Anita Bernard's daughter) demonstrating contemporary basket weaving to a group of cadets at the Atlantic Police Academy, as part of a cross-cultural awareness session.

The first three photographs (1.19, 1.20, and 1.21) show John Henry shaving the ash.



1.19



1.20



1.21

1.19, 1.20 & 1.21 John Henry Bernard shaving the ash. / John Henry Bernard en train d'émincer le frêne.

The next two (1.22 and 1.23) show him pounding the ash with a pounding machine to separate it into splints, helping the process along by bending and manipulating the wood.

The final photos (1.24 and 1.25) show Judy weaving the basket with the splints.



1.22



1.23

1.22 & 1.23 John Henry Bernard pounding the ash with a pounding machine to separate it into splints, helping the process along by bending and manipulating the wood. / John Henry Bernard en train d'écraser le frêne avec une machine, pour le séparer en éclisses. Il facilite l'opération en pliant et manipulant le bois.



1.24



1.25

1.24 & 1.25 Judy Peters weaving the basket with the splints. / Judy Peters en train de tresser le panier avec les éclisses.

It seems that during the 1960s, basket weaving became in the eyes of the non-native person more of an art form than a product for household and farm work. Tourists and people alike seem to have become interested in the beautiful and unique designs of the baskets. Now, prices for baskets in the 21st century are high enough to reflect the work and hours and artistry that go into baskets, because finally basket weaving is being recognized as an art—an art that takes a tremendous amount of skill and passion to do. Like other crafts, baskets have also become recognized as art because they have stopped being used just for their original purposes, and since craftspeople have become scarce: basketwork is done by the few instead of the many. For all these reasons, the work began to be seen as valuable—not just the work of life, but the art of life. Today, prices for baskets that were once only \$.65 can top \$50.

The Mi'kmaq community has changed, as well, and is more responsible for its own self-sufficiency again. Now, on Lennox Island, there are many services managed by the Lennox Island Band, including a cultural centre, where visitors and Mi'kmaq people can learn more about our traditions. There is a craft shop run by Doreen Sark, where baskets are sold, and there are many small businesses operated by Mi'kmaq entrepreneurs, tying together tradition and what is needed to survive in



1.26 Tiffany Sark, Lennox Island Cultural Centre

today's consumer economy. Educated people have strong goals for creating their own businesses.

Conclusion: Women as Educators

Mi'kmaq women are educators in basket weaving. Our female ancestors and their knowledge are still present today in Mi'kmaq communities, because of their teaching of their beautiful art of basket weaving. Women reached full circle and left this earth knowing that maybe one day their dedication and education to their children would finally be recognized. Women such as **Irene Lewis, Matilda Lewis, Anne Marie Peters Thomas, Dorothy Bernard, Madge Labobe, Elsie Sark, Alma Sark Mitchell**, and many others were the elders who kept the art alive. The legend will live on because the culture is alive. But without the teachers of their children, it may slip away once again. In some ways, it is already dying as an art.

But Prince Edward Island still knows skilled Mi'kmaq basket weavers. Irene Lewis used to make baskets on Lennox Island. She taught her children how to make them. Margorie Lewis Paul has perfected the skill and now teaches the art to other Mi'kmaq craftspeople. Dorothy Bernard learned the art from her father and mother.

Anne Marie Peters Thomas was very active in teaching basket weaving to native and non-native peoples. Her passion took her to Toronto to teach her skills. She was even featured in an article in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* describing the Ontario Science Centre's summer show from the mid-1970s, "The Native Heritage." The article describes the accompanying newspaper photo:

Peter and Marie Thomas of Prince Edward Island will show the making of splint baskets in the technique of the Micmac Indians [sic]. They first remove the bark from fresh ash logs, then pound the log with a mallet or split it with an axe. Pulling and prying releases the splint from the logs and then the splints are coaxed into a thickness suitable for weaving into baskets.

Madge Labobe, Irene Haley's beloved sister, knew the craft well, and she was part of a basket making course in the 1970s. As an Acadian married to a Mi'kmaq man, Alma Sark Mitchell caught on very quickly to the traditions of Mi'kmaq survival. With a large family, she made baskets constantly and taught the art to some of her children. **Nancy Anne Peters** is known for her ability

to blend colours and dye her own colours. Elsie Sark taught basket making to her daughters Becky and Vera Sark, who also perfected the art of the culture. Becky remembers her Auntie Agnes cutting and splitting wood to make all her baskets on her own.

Many Mi'kmaq women still carry on the tradition of basket weaving today. Some young people are involved in making baskets, but some youth are too busy with their homework and extracurricular activities. Tommy Sark's daughter Shanna can make baskets, because she learned from watching her dad from an early age. But there are only a few people left who do know the craft and sell their products.

I will not merely end this essay on a goodbye. It is my hope that further research will be explored on the topic of basket weaving on Prince Edward Island. Women in Island history have been pushed aside by historians who select what they want to write about, and the subject of history books is usually men. In this essay, I have clearly demonstrated Mi'kmaq women in their roles as keepers and teachers of the living legend, of our treasures of woven baskets. Throughout history, the ways in which baskets were produced gradually changed, primarily due to European contact, trade, and the changing economy. The reason for sharing my story is to open your minds for further enlightenment of women's roles in Mi'kmaq society from past to present. It was told to me that women are strong; they are life-givers, so they should be respected for all that they do for the well-being of society. The Mi'kmaq women essentially throughout time held on to the gifts that their mothers and grandmothers had revealed to them. It is evident that their culture is still alive, especially when you touch an ash basket and hold it in your hand or smell the sweetgrass entwined within a fancy basket: All you have to do is open your heart and mind and feel the power of the Mi'kmaq women in their skill of basket weaving.

As a Mi'kmaq woman, I am proud of my Mi'kmaq sisters and brothers who have this art in their souls and express it through the hands that were made by the Creator. The future generations will thank them because they are the ones who will carry the art into the 21st century, and the children will someday embrace it with open arms because weaving is who we are, my sisters. We are the

Mi'kmaq women who must educate.

Acknowledgements

This project has mostly been compiled through oral research. This is important because it is through oral tradition that much Mi'kmaq culture and history has survived through the times. I thank all who helped in this valuable project knowing that children and adults would be educated on native history and crafts. I thank you for your precious inspiration and time. And thanks to everyone who I missed thanking; your help is greatly appreciated.

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Images

1.1

Courtesy of / Courtoisie de Tiffany Sark, Tammy Arsenault, Margaret Sark

1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 1.11, 1.13, 1.15

Courtesy of / Courtoisie de Tammy Arsenault

1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 1.8

Courtesy of the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island, Mitchell Collection, ACC 3466 / Courtoisie du Bureau des archives et des documents publics de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, Collection Mitchell, ACC 3466

1.9, 1.18, 1.26

Courtesy of / Courtoisie de Tiffany Sark

1.10, 1.12

Courtesy of / Courtoisie de Margaret Sark

1.14

Courtesy of / Courtoisie d'Irene Haley

1.16, 1.17, 1.19, 1.20, 1.21, 1.22, 1.23, 1.24, 1.25

Courtesy of / Courtoisie d'Anita Bernard



first hand

**Freeing Verse and
Liberating Stories:
Literary Writing by
Prince Edward Island
Women of the 20th
Century**

**Researcher/Writer:
Jane Ledwell**

Introduction: Modernism

English novelist Virginia Woolf is considered by many the first great woman novelist of the 20th century. In her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, she addressed the problems that women of her day faced if they wished to become writers. In that essay, she said, “. . . it is necessary to have five hundred [pounds] a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry.” She went on to explain, “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things . . . And women have always been poor . . . Women have had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves. Women, then, have not had a dog’s chance of writing poetry. That is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one’s own.”

Virginia Woolf was one of the most important literary innovators of the *Modernist* movement that came to dominate 20th-century literary writing. Modernism in literature placed high value on style and content that were seen as new, original, ground-breaking, shocking, and challenging to the status quo. Modernists challenged the literary forms and conventions that had guided writers of the previous centuries. For instance, Modernist poetry frequently rejected traditional end rhyme and consistent metre that made up familiar poetic forms. Modernist prose experimented with fractured and multiple narrators and points of view and with psychological realism expressed through stream-of-consciousness writing. Modernist writing also took on themes that had previously been taboo. Sexuality, violence, bodily functions, religious doubt, the senseless waste of war, and the world’s ugliness all became fair game for writers.

Modernism took hold of literary communities in England and America particularly swiftly. Literary experimentation in the 1890s helped create the groundwork, but most critics date the beginnings of real Modernism to the period following the First World War (1914–1918). Many of Modernism’s foundational texts, by writers such as Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, were published in England in the early 1920s.

In Canada, writers were slower to apply Modernism’s experiments to the newly emerging national literature. Canadian writing in English still looked to the colonial models of England and to the grand traditions of British

literature in English for models. Much of Modernism’s impetus to challenge traditional forms and subject matter came from the intense cruelty and violence seen in the First World War. But Canada’s participation in the First World War was interpreted differently in Canada: while Canada’s troops participated in a British imperial project, they also found some measure of independent identity. Gradually, Canadian writers found new forms appropriate to express a young country’s landscape and experience and came to express uniquely Canadian identities.

Prince Edward Island Writing and Modernism

Prince Edward Island’s best-known woman writer of the 19th century was Elizabeth Lockerby, best remembered for her epic poem “George and Amanda,” which evokes the destruction of the deadly Yankee Gale of 1851. Writing in 1866, she felt compelled to apologize for herself, her experience, and her choice to write about Prince Edward Island:

To my esteemed friends, the critics, I would remark, that these writings are but the thoughts of an inexperienced country girl, who, at the time the book was written, had never seen a mountain, or any more sublime scenery than the cornfields of Prince Edward Island, and the rolling billows of “the blue St. Lawrence” that surround them.

—Elizabeth Lockerby, from *The Wild Brier*

Her modesty is partly a pose that was expected of women poets of her time; nonetheless, she knew the expected “sublime” subject matter she “should” aspire to as a poet.

On Prince Edward Island in the early part of the 20th century, writers, both men and women, remained more likely to look to 19th-century British writing for models than to the Modernists. Nonetheless, Modernism informed Island writing in some important ways. Modernism did away with some of the “tics” 19th-century poets had developed: certain kinds of poetic phrasings and phrases that lost their originality and much of their meaning through overuse. By putting strong emphasis on “realism” and often on the negative aspects of human experience that had been sugar-coated in much of 19th-century writing, Modernists redressed the imbalances that had crept

into the portrayal of sentiment. Influenced by literary trends over the course of the century, Island writers' imagery gradually became more spare, their language more direct, their forms more experimental and open to naturalistic flow of ideas.

A number of important trends influenced the development of Island women's writing in the 20th century. These included the professionalization of women's writing in the early part of the century; a movement from oral tradition to written tradition both in writing English and writing in French beginning at mid-century; and the development of a homegrown Island publishing industry from the late 1960s to the century's end.

Other trends cropped up consistently throughout the century. What makes Island women's writing of the 20th century difficult to evaluate in many ways is that it is out-of-step with the major movement of international, canonical English literature. Neither is Island writing in French visibly descended from Modernist writing in Europe or even Quebec. What is significant, however, is that Island women writers often explicitly *chose* to resist Modernism and other mainstream literary trends. In their writing, they actively *critique* the aesthetic values imposed by literary institutions. As a result of their choices to swim against the literary tides, Island women writers sometimes excluded themselves from conventional academic writing about literature, which all-too-frequently undervalued women's writing (particularly in the early part of the century) and almost inevitably valued Modernist, avant-garde texts over the more traditional forms Island women writers chose.

Of course, Prince Edward Island women writers did not set out to obscure themselves in literary history. In an article called "The Literary Culture of Atlantic Women Between the Wars," Carole Gerson discusses some of the reasons women's writing from Atlantic Canada failed to become part of the *canon* of recognized Canadian and international "literary" writing during the period when Modernism was taking hold in Europe and North America. The first kinds of reasons Gerson cites were personal: women writers were not often prolific, and they frequently did not produce books until later in

their lives. The second kinds of reasons she cites were institutional: women in Atlantic Canada were doubly marginalized as women "in a masculinist society" and as Atlantic Canadians "when national Canadian culture was largely defined from a Centralist/Western outlook."* The convergence of personal and institutional factors meant that much of Island women's writing was excluded from national publications and, even locally, much of their writing is forgotten and is now difficult to access, available only in out-of-print volumes in archives and special library collections.

Professionalization of Writing

Women in Prince Edward Island did not often have money and rooms of their own to engage in their writing. They did not have the privilege of free time because their work in the household was integral to the economy. Much of the women's writing that came to us from the 19th century was written by women of the upper classes, whose time had fewer demands made on it. However, by the turn of the 20th century, some women of middle and lower classes were able to justify their habits of "scribbling" by selling their poems and stories to the widely distributed popular magazines and newspapers of the day. The money they earned from their writing became a valuable supplement to farm or family income, or became an endowment in their own independence. These women helped make it possible for writing to be considered a career option for talented and ambitious women who, by reason of their gender, may have been barred from other careers.

Turn of the Century

At the beginning of the 20th century, writing values were determined primarily by public tastes and by the editorial decisions of newspaper and magazine editors who selected what would be purchased from writers for publications. Such newspapers and magazines were widely subscribed to and read in Prince Edward Island communities. Notably, Prince Edward Island even had its own magazine, *Prince Edward Island Magazine*, that served as an important outlet for local literary and historical writing and helped create a popular written tradition. Written works and reading were

* Gerson goes on to discuss the development of Atlantic institutions that "resisted marginalization." She especially discusses the *Dalhousie Review* as a journal with an Atlantic-centred academic gaze and she cites the substantial contribution of Prince Edward Island's *Ada MacLeod* to the *Review*.

further encouraged by literary societies and debating societies across the province. These groups provided opportunities to discuss the relative merits of the great works of British Romantic and Victorian writers and undoubtedly extended the influence of such works to local aspiring writers.

In the newspapers, we find occasional articles that talk about how Island writers were perceived in their own day. One such article was published in the *Patriot* in 1901. The unnamed writer admits that Prince Edward Island writing was, in many ways, in its infancy:

The poetry that has already been produced by our Island writers is too fragmentary, and in many cases mediocre, to obtain recognition . . . While the work of the majority of Island writer's [sic] will not warrant them a position beside our greater Canadian poets, it is nevertheless not without some gems, which betoken poetic power of a superior type, and places its producers above the mere rhymers whose productions are not even fit for a newspaper.

From these comments, we can already glean that a shift away from "mere rhyme" was occurring; this shift would eventually develop into Prince Edward Island Modernism. Among those poets who rise above "mere rhymers," the newspaper commentator includes three women writers: first, **Evelyn S. MacLeod**, whom he names "our best known Island Poetess," and of whom he says, "Her work has called forth praise outside our own country and this fact is sufficient to show that it is of unusual merit and strength"; second, **L. M. Montgomery**, who, he says, "although a young writer, shows marked ability and promise. She has an easy, graceful, charming style, coupled with excellent descriptive powers"; and third, **May Carroll**, whose style, he says "has a peculiar sweetness which marks her as a graceful writer of superior talent."

All three of these women would have earned money for their publications. Montgomery, for example, reported earning \$591.85 for her writing in 1904 and over \$700 by the end of 1906. Her first royalty cheque for *Anne of Green Gables* in 1909 totalled \$1,730 (see Gillen). Montgomery continued to make sufficient income from her writing to maintain the "room of her own" and the household help that permitted her to write even when she became a busy minister's wife and

a mother. However, Montgomery's success and her drive to succeed and to make a living as a writer were extraordinary, not usual. The overwhelming success of her novels for children surpassed the fame and sales success of any other writing undertaken on Prince Edward Island.

Montgomery, MacLeod, and Carroll all wrote poetry that shows the characteristic sentimentality of turn-of-the-century Canadian writing—sentimentality that was popular and well-received among newspaper and journal readers.

In the following short excerpt from Elizabeth S. MacLeod's poem "Orwell Bay," we can see that the descriptions match just about any idealized landscape and are not particularly specific to their Prince Edward Island locale. The language and poetic models that MacLeod relies on are from the British poetic tradition, not from the Canadian experience, although her popular collection of poetry was called *Carols of Canada*:

Sweet, pale-faced Queen of silent
night!
Calm-seated on thy azure throne,
Shed forth thy beams of silvery light
Till nether realms embrace thine own.
Till gleaming spire on tree-crowned
hill,
With waving corn on valley land;
Till peaceful flood and noiseless mill
Seem burnished of enchanter's wand.

—Evelyn S. MacLeod
from *Carols of Canada*

This sentimental 1899 "Prose Poem" by May Carroll uses the free verse style that would come to dominate poetry in the 20th century. Despite the innovative form Carroll uses, her subject matter is very much in the 19th-century tradition, encompassing themes including love, death, the beauty of nature, and the artist's response to natural beauty. The poem creates its two moods—the first joyful, the second mournful—by employing a poetic device known as *pathetic fallacy*: ascribing human traits and emotions to natural objects and landscapes. The poem's language also relies heavily on the poetic diction and poetic vocabulary that would be familiar to readers of 19th century poetry.

The phrases reflect poetic tradition and convention more than natural speech and language that would inform more Modernistic 20th-century poetry. Phrases like “sweet refrains,” “plighted our troth,” “the mighty deep,” “the weary winds,” and “a doleful requiem” by the 20th century had mostly become clichés:

As an example of how widespread and clichéd a once-original poetic phrase might become, in my research I noticed that almost every single poem that women poets of Prince Edward Island wrote about PEI’s landscape in the early 20th-century described the Island as “sea-girt,” just as May Carroll does.

Two Pictures (*Prose Poem*)

'Twas a rocky coast.

White craggy cliffs reared their
gaunt forms

From out Old Ocean’s heavenly bosom,
But the sunlight smiled upon them
And the silver-lipped sea sang sweet
refrains
as it wooed each moss-clad crag.

'Mid the rocks and cliffs I met a
maid,
Peerless as the white-winged gulls
That circle round her sea-girt home;
And beside those cliffs we plighted
our troth,
While the birds warbled and wind and
waves echoed
The joyful notes that rang from our
happy hearts.

'Twas all of love, joy and hope.
Our little world seemed bright as the
golden dreams of Eden.

One year later:

The same gaunt cliffs stand out like
sentinels

Guarding Old Ocean’s pearly gates,
But no sun shines down upon them.
Black angry clouds skud swift and
fierce

Across the sullen sky.

The wild waves toss aloft their foam-
flecked crests

Like human arms reaching from out the
caverns of the mighty deep.

The turbulent sea in fury lashes the
beetling crags,

And the sea birds cry above them
In wild weird notes sharpened with
agony.

Under the lowering clouds I kneel,
My heart as cheerless as the dreary
rocks around me;

For the wild waves moan

And the weary winds sob a doleful
requiem

O’er the lonely grave on the cliffs
above the sea.

—May Carroll

from *A Collection of Poems*

Democratization of Poetry

By 1922 (the same year that major Modernist works including T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* were all published), literary values were beginning to shift even on Prince Edward Island. The shift is reflected in Fred J. Nash's comments in an article called "Prince Edward Island Poets and Poetry" published in the magazine *The Maple Leaf* in December 1922. Nash comments on the democratization of poetry with the popular expansion of the use of "free verse," though he indicates low uptake among Island writers:

Never, we are told, were poets so numerous and so prolific as today, and we wonder whether this apparently irrepressible output may not be attributed to the discovery of "free verse" which, by removing the barriers of rhyme, has admitted the multitude. . . We in Prince Edward Island have not been visited by any such epidemic of poetic passion, although not a few have developed into versifiers as a result of the strain and stress of the recent war [that is, the First World War].

—Fred J. Nash from *The Maple Leaf*

Among highly recognized Prince Edward Island women poets, he notes the continuing contribution of L. M. Montgomery, "a poetess of considerable merit," and introduces **Lucy Gertrude Clarkin** as a poet who "has come rapidly to the fore as an Island poetess." He reports, "She is looked upon as a regular contributor to many magazines in Canada and the United States, and her verses are always highly appreciated and much sought after by editors. Probably, she is the best paid poetess the Island has ever produced."

Many of Lucy Gertrude Clarkin's poems—and those of her contemporaries—take religious themes and morals as their focus. On one level, the poem "To Peace" can be read as an imaginative re-telling of the Christian Gospel story of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. It expresses both the horror of Christ's torture and the hope Christians derive from faith that, with his rising from the dead, he has overcome sin. On another level, the poem can be read as an allegory of war: the suffering and death of an individual soldier, but the ultimate triumph of the British and Canadian forces and a return to peace. Part of the reason Clarkin is able

to write a poem that supports both interpretations is that theology and hymnals of her time often used militaristic language—the language of victory and defeat, of struggles and soldiers, of allies and foes—to relate Christian ideas. Knowledge of hymns would help the readers of Clarkin's day interpret the poem.

To Peace

Not smooth the road nor blossom-
sweet,
That leads to this triumphant day;
Ah, there are prints of bleeding feet
To mark the way!

Here Sorrow walks and weeps alone,
For loneliness is kin to loss,
And on the path before is thrown
A shadowed cross:

(Pale symbol of a mighty woe,
Of love beyond our cold surmise,
The only guiding-post we know
To Paradise).

This is the road He set that lifts
And winds across the hills of pain,
Whereon a white-winged stillness
drifts,
And hopes remain.

Once more the stone rolls back and
we,
Who mourn for our beloved dead,
Shall in this ageless victory
Be comforted.

—Lucy Gertrude Clarkin
from *Three Women Poets of PEI*

In many of the modules in this project, we have seen how the gender roles applied to women have circumscribed and limited their creative output. Clarkin's "No Other Way," explores how the gender role applied to a working class man—the obligation to work to support a household and family—affects his ability to work as an artist. Work does not stifle his creativity, but it eliminates the *leisure time* that might otherwise be available to him to become the sculptor he dreams of being. His position as a widow's son (and, presumably, a family's sole support) does not afford him the privilege of time for creating art.

No Other Way

In dreams he wrought on marble, and
within
The cleanly workroom of his mind he
stored
Groups of white symmetry; a precious
hoard
of uncreated beauty, Did he sin,
This man who made no effort to begin
The artist's mission? He who daily
poured
The riches of his youth for bread and
board—
Who feared to lose, and shackled,
could not win?

Nay, he was barred, as captive things
are barred
By chain or cage. He yearned for
modelling clay,
Yet gave his hands to labour that was
hard:
He felt the spur of Duty night and
day:
There was a home to keep and lives to
guard,
A widow's son, he saw no other way.

—Lucy Gertrude Clarkin, from *Island
Prose and Poetry: An Anthology*

Although not specifically named in Nash's article, **Anne Alley** was an Island writer who became a "versifier" partially in response to the "strain and stress" of the war. Alley's verse depicts the horror of war for both the dying soldier and his love left back at home.

Coming

They parted at night by the
moonbeam's pale light
While she wept with the wind's
sobbing moan;
And this was her cry, with a heart-
welling sigh:
Ma-vour-neen, don't leave me alone.
"Acushla Machree, come back soon to
me,
For I'll miss you each day more and
more:
Light of my heart! Oh let us not
part!
But stay with your loved one,
asthore."
At his country's call, he has severed
them all,
Left home, fame, and love ties behind
him;
And all of life's worth, that he
cherished on earth,
When the battle cry sounded to bind
him.
The maiden still grieved, as the
whispering wind breathed,
And chanted their moans o'er the lea,
While this sad refrain, she sang it
again:
"Oh come back, Ma-vour-neen, to me.
Acushla Machree, Oh! Come back to me!
For I miss you each day more and
more;
Acushla Machree, my heart yearns for
thee,
And I'm weary of waiting, asthore."
At the eve of the day, while his life
ebbed away,
And he lay in the battlefield's gore,
With dying eyes glazed his voice he
upraised
Crying: "Coming, I'm coming,
asthore."

—Anne Alley,
from *Leaflets of Verse*

Alley does not challenge traditional poetic forms in her verse. One of the most popular ways of sharing poetry in the late 19th and early 20th century was public recitation at concerts and at meetings of literary societies. Anne Alley's "Coming" would be an ideal recitation piece for such events, since its subject matter is dramatic and tragic, and its language draws on the accents and vocabulary of Gaelic ancestors. The poem would also have been easy for her 1923 readers to memorize, particularly because it is written in *common measure*, a rhyming form consisting of a line with four accented syllables followed by a line with three. Common measure was frequently used for *ballads* like this one—song-like narrative poems with death as their major theme.

Both Anne Alley and Lucy Gertrude Clarkin work within traditional poetic form and tell stories and provide images considered "poetic" in the 19th century tradition. Their poems found wide audiences in publication and earned their writers some additional income and professional respect in the community. In the early 20th century, among women writers, only L. M. Montgomery earned a livable professional income as a creative writer on Prince Edward Island.

Mid-Century

Writers such as May Carroll, Evelyn MacLeod, Anne Alley, and Lucy Gertrude Clarkin set important precedents for women who would use writing to supplement household income. In the latter part of the century, literary writing became unprofitable when magazines and similar periodicals became less popular in households as people looked to radio and later to television as their most important sources of news and entertainment.

A mid-century Prince Edward Island writer, Margaret Furness MacLeod, provides an example of a writer whose work post-dates the boom in paid poetry published in small journals. Much of her writing was self-published in small (though popular) editions. In order to publish these volumes, however, she had to supply the money and the means herself. For her, publication was a privilege she had by virtue of her class, not a profession through which she sought her income.

Margaret Furness MacLeod was based in Montreal for much of her writing career but remained inspired by Prince Edward Island. She maintains some of the sentimental ideas and "poetic" phrases of poetry from earlier in the century, but shifts from traditional to more contemporary poetic forms. These three haikus by Margaret Furness MacLeod represent the precise, naturalistic detail valued in Imagism, a Modern movement in poetry spearheaded by American poet Ezra Pound:

A chirping cricket
Brooding over lost summer
Is silenced by snow.

*

Grey pussy-willows
Toss velvet caps in greeting
The reluctant spring.

*

Were I an artist
I would sow dandelions.
But I must grow wheat.

—Margaret Furness MacLeod
from *Haiku*

All three of Furness's haikus suggest multiple meanings in the imagery. The first is a seventeen-syllable fable; the second, a celebratory personification; the third, the artist's sorrowful acknowledgement of duty's constraints.

In her Island-published poem "The River Vernon," MacLeod uses fairly standard poetic imagery and even transposes the familiar place name of "Vernon River" to "River Vernon" to make it more "poetic":

The River Vernon

The moon lies on the placid river's
breast
Lured by her own reflection
So soft she rests, that not a ripple
Stirs the curving edge.

So deep the silence
That the wise owl blinks
And dares not break it.

This beauty lies so near the heart
That it would choke the veins
Were it not for wild geese flying
And the dark form of the stately
crane
resting on one stilt,
And you, so long away, returning.

—Margaret Furness MacLeod
from *Sand Patterns*

The placidity of the imagery is beautiful, but ambiguous. There is a threat in the stillness that “chokes the veins” until redeemed by change and movement—the wild geese, the resting crane, and the return of an unidentified “you.” The pending threat signals a change from pure sentimentality. The “free verse” style also signals a shift from the tradition of recitable, orally-transmitted poetry to page-based Modernist poetry.

The New Professionals

Surviving as a professional literary writer became more challenging after L. M. Montgomery's day, but writing did not revert to being a bastion of the leisure classes as it might have at mid-century. In fact, professional writing in many ways became more accessible to more people, as long as they were not expecting *literary* writing to be their sole source of support. In other words, professional writing and professional literary writing ceased to be synonymous when the market for poetry and fiction became less lucrative.

In the last thirty years of the 20th century, professional women writers have most frequently turned to journalism as their “income” writing and have done literary writing “on the side.” Other Island women have made their primary income as fishers, farmers, or teachers and have used their literary and other writing to supplement family income. For the most part, these women's literary works have been self-published in small, limited-distribution publications or published occasionally, in magazines or newspapers rather than in collections or monographs. Contemporary rural women such as **Brigitte Van Vliet**, **Beverly Roach**, **Adele Townsend**, **Pauline Cusack**, **Elizabeth Cran**, **Mary Graham**, and **Dorothy Griffin-Farish** are all examples of women in this category. Their work is often focussed on the local and particular and is small in scale.

Nancy Russell is a journalist/children's writer who was an emerging voice at the end of the century; her writings for children—books *Farewell to the Ferryboats* and *One Magical Summer*—were set locally and professionally published.

The professional literary tradition of L. M. Montgomery also established precedents for contemporary Island women writers. Three major Island writers at the end of the century could be categorized as professional literary writers: **Deirdre Kessler**, **Elaine Breault Hammond**, and **Lesley-Anne Bourne**. All three earn an important part of their incomes exclusively through literary writing (though all have other income or work); all three spend significant portions of their working days writing literary work; all three devote weeks of their working years to professional development, whether that development takes the form of reading on book tours or giving and attending workshops.

Interestingly, all three of these women came to Prince Edward Island from elsewhere, and, although they draw on Prince Edward Island settings to varying degrees, their broader experience of place helps them create works that perhaps appeal to a wider Canadian audience. At the end of the 20th century, locally focussed work from Atlantic Canada still faced challenges attracting national attention, thanks to lingering (though not insurmountable) centralist biases in literary institutions.

Lesley-Anne Bourne is known for her intimate and personal prize-winning poetry, published in the

collections *The Story of Pears*, *Skinny Girls*, and *Field Trip*. Bourne also has the distinction of having published a novel of note: her 1998 book *The Bubble Star*, set in Ontario, is the only novel for adults by a Prince Edward Island woman published in the last decades of the 20th century. Through her work teaching in the creative writing programme at the University of Prince Edward Island, Bourne continues to help develop a generation of Island writers for the new millennium.

Elaine Breault Hammond is known for her nationally popular historical young adult novels, *Beyond the Waterfall*, *Explosion at Dawson Creek*, and *The Secret Under the Whirlpool*. In Hammond's books, elements of time travel and adventure draw young readers into Canada's past, into events real and imagined.

Deirdre Kessler is known for her fiction for children that demonstrates love of animals, profound connection to the natural world, and sense of *home*. Her series of children's novels following the life and travels of an adventurous Island cat named Brupp are much loved and have found a wide audience in English and in translations. Her illustrated books for younger readers include *Home for Christmas*, *Lena and the Whale*, and *Spike Chiseltooth*. Kessler is also a teacher, editor, biographer, and publisher.

It is interesting that both Kessler and Hammond are known best for their writing for children. It would be fair to say that L. M. Montgomery inspired a number of Island writers to produce works for children and that her work prepared Canadian and international imaginations for Island-based writing for children. It would also be fair to say that at century's end there was a stronger or more cohesive Canadian market for children's publications than for adult literary writing. But perhaps the most important reason for the success of Island women's writing for children in the last decades of the 20th century has been the presence of Ragweed Press, an Island-based publisher with a will to develop Island writing and an excellent national reputation for publishing writing for children. Ragweed Press published most of Kessler's and all of Hammond's books for children. Ragweed Press receives fuller treatment later in this study.

Resisting the Trends

Except the most recent professional writing, most of the literary writing that I have discussed or presented previously would have been considered "old-fashioned" by academics even when it was first published. Island women writers often bucked the century's literary trends. Because they bucked the trends, their work has sometimes been dismissed as second-rate and unoriginal by the standards of Modernism and the movements that have followed Modernism. However, a careful reading of Prince Edward Island women's writing reveals that many of PEI's women writers have *deliberately chosen* to write in a different mode than that prescribed by the *literati* of their days.

As Robert Campbell notes in an introduction to her verse, "Lucy Clarkin betrayed her attitude toward the new experimental poetry in an article praising the 19th century Irish poet Thomas More, whose lyrics will be read, she said, 'long . . . after some free-verse lyrics (so called) of today are forgotten'" (qtd. in *Three Women Poets of PEI*).

L. M. Montgomery

There is no better example than L. M. Montgomery of a writer bucking academically defined literary trends in favour of a combination of independent literary values and capitulation to commercial pressures. For many years, Lucy Maud Montgomery's writing was ignored by "serious" literary critics and by university English departments because it was considered popular writing and because its style and themes were out of step with the Modernist style and themes. Even in her own day, Montgomery recognized that her writing was not in step with Modernism. She deliberately chose to write using a different style, and she defiantly criticized the literary orthodoxy that would label her writing "scribbling" compared to the "serious literature" of those who followed Modernist trends.

She makes a vitriolic attack on "free verse" in a "poem" she sent off in a letter to her friend and longtime correspondent George Boyd MacMillan.

Vers libre

I feel
Very much
Like taking
Its unholy perpetrators
By the hair
Of their heads
(If they have any hair)
And dragging them around
The yard
A few times
And then cutting them
Into small, irregular pieces
And burying them
In the depths of the blue sea.
They are without form
And void,
Or at least
The stuff they produce
Is.
They are too lazy
To hunt up rhymes
And that
is all
That is the matter with them.

—L. M. Montgomery

After writing it, she breathed a sigh of relief in her letter, writing, “I feel better.”

Montgomery iterates her resistance to Modernist negativity most especially in her journals. Here, she offers a critique of Canadian Modernist, Morley Callaghan:

Callaghan’s idea of “Literature” seems to be to photograph a latrine or pigstye meticulously and have nothing else in the picture. Now, latrines and pigstyes are not only malodorous but very uninteresting. We have a latrine in our backyard. I see it when I look that way—and I also see before

it a garden of color and perfume—over it a blue sky—behind it a velvety pine caressing crystal air—a river of silver and aquamarine—misty hills of glamour beyond. These things are as “real” as the latrine and can all be seen at the same time. Callaghan sees nothing but the latrine and insists blatantly that you see nothing else also. If you insist on seeing sky and river and pine you are a “sentimentalist” and the truth is not in you.

—L. M. Montgomery from her *Selected Journals*

It is important to remember that as much as a statement of her own poetics, Montgomery’s critiques of Modernism stem partly from her own defensiveness and insecurity for being dismissed by Modernists.

Feminist criticism has redeemed Montgomery’s writing and Montgomery scholars now praise her biting social satire and her portrayal of women’s friendships.

After L. M. Montgomery

To some extent, Lucy Maud Montgomery was guided by the values of the reading public who purchased her books and supplied her income. In the latter part of the 20th century, those who wished to make a living or to supplement their income by poetry frequently had to apply for artists’ grants. Their applications were reviewed by peers in the artistic community who judged their work primarily by the aesthetic standards of Modernism.

In “On Some Modern Poets and Poetry,” Island writer **Florence Roper** borrows a poetic form from 19th-century British poet Rudyard Kipling to critique what she sees as the negative poetic values espoused by arts granting agencies of her time in the 1960s and 1970s. Much of the impact of early Modernism had come from shock value and from breaking taboos; by the 1960s and 1970s, writers were going further and further to shock increasingly desensitized audiences. Roper’s poem criticizes the orthodoxy of the time, pointing out that Modernism’s rebellions against tradition had by her time become mainstream and its efforts to shock had become too extreme.

On Some Modern Poets and Poetry

(with apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

If you can write with words devoid of meaning

Nor leave a trace of understanding seen;

If you can have an ending and beginning

With not an ounce of sense laid in between;

If you can scorn the words of classic beauty

And only vain vulgarity deploy;

If you reject philosophies and virtues

And every sentimental thought destroy;

If you can fill your works with innuendoes

That spawn among the psychopathic tide:

If you can banish patriotic fervour

And your people and democracy deride;

If you can stage assault upon the senses

And only stark repulsiveness incite;

If you can make obscurity your master

So no one sees the nothingness you write;

If you can cast aside the works of Masters

For hodge-podge of disordered ramblings done,

You'll join the ranks of pseudo-academics

Assured to have a Council grant, my son.

—Florence Roper, from *Island Prose and Poetry: An Anthology*

It is tempting to valorize Island women writers like Clarkin, Montgomery, and Roper who feistily challenged the prevailing values of their times and who insisted on their own visions. It is equally important to look at these women's antimodernism in a critical frame and to ask whose interests it served.

In *The Quest of the Folk*, historian Ian MacKay argues that Nova Scotia in the 20th century adopted cultural antimodernism for economic ends, to create a nostalgia economy, to sell an oversimplified image of itself to tourists and to the world. MacKay argues that Nova Scotians adopted a view of themselves as a people and their home as a place that was characterized by "innocence":

[The culture's] true essence, resided in the primitive, the rustic, the unspoiled, the picturesque, the quaint, the unchanging. . . . Local cultural producers . . . tended to highlight in their novels, painting, broadcasts, and photographs those aspects of Nova Scotian society and history which they knew would succeed in the international cultural marketplace.

—Ian MacKay, from *The Quest of the Folk*

According to MacKay, the antimodernist, "innocent" view of Nova Scotia culture served the powerful and was limiting and false in that it did not admit the diversity of culture in communities, recognize change in the culture, or acknowledge the more problematic realities of life in urban and rural communities.

His argument might apply also to Prince Edward Island culture. Part of the impetus to resist Modernist trends in Prince Edward Island's women's writing seems to be to maintain a pastoral, rural, uncomplicated view of life on the Island, and it is undeniable that such a view of the province plays into the hands of tourism promoters.

From Oral to Written Tradition

All 20th-century writing on Prince Edward Island has been influenced by the shift that took place mid-century from *oral* to *written* tradition. Until the middle of the 20th century, the most important mode for communicating local identity through history, stories, and poetry was neither written nor published but oral. Islanders “published” their stories by hearthsides and around kitchen tables, in church halls and at community dances, where they told stories, made songs, and recited verse. The dominance of the oral tradition in the first part of the 20th century is one explanation for the fact that the first half of the century saw so little fiction developed compared to poetry—again with L. M. Montgomery offering the most notable exception. In general, storytelling was the domain of the oral tellers, not the writers.

PEI historian David Weale identifies the change in emphasis from oral tradition to written tradition as “the break.” As a result of “the break” and Island writers’ sensitivity to “the break,” preservation of previously oral stories has been an important part of literary tradition in the latter half of the 20th century. Some women sought to preserve local stories and tradition in writing; others sought to create a record of their own experiences before and after “the break.”

Finding the Local Voice

In the mid-century, the content of Island writing became more recognizably local: focussed on the events and people and language most commonly used here. Writers moved away from British models, to a certain extent, and moved beyond sentimentality. Among the Island writers who helped bridge oral and written tradition are **Grace Matthews Wells**, a rural West Prince poet who brought Island idioms into her poetry; **Olive O’Brien** whose stories in short books such as *Running with the Wind* and *Susan* evoke childhood in rural Prince Edward Island; and **Gertrude Pendergast**, who used her writing talents to preserve folkloric stories. Other women, including memoirist **Bertha Mae MacIntyre**, inscribed their own experiences in memoirs that preserve a past Island culture.

Often, the writing that preserves oral stories and records personal experience has as its goal preservation and recording rather than creating a work of literary

art. Much of the writing mentioned above would be most appropriately discussed in the context of another important trend in women’s writing throughout the years: the tradition of women’s biographical and autobiographical writing.

When discussing the shift from oral tradition to written tradition, writing by Prince Edward Island Acadian women requires special attention. In the Acadian community, oral and musical tradition have remained dominant over written tradition to a much larger extent than in the Island anglophone tradition. Close-knit communities and dedication to preserving the cultural heritage contained in the Acadian language are the most important reasons for this notable trend.

The Mi’kmaq culture on Prince Edward Island has the longest local oral tradition to preserve, and their stories have been most severely challenged by pressures of colonization and development. Although there are currently increasing efforts among Mi’kmaq communities to preserve traditional story and to reclaim cultural heritage, few examples of 20th century literary writing by Mi’kmaq Islanders exist, and no published works by Mi’kmaq women can be said to be representative.

Below we can see one example of the shift from oral tradition to written tradition as it affected literary writing in English. What is most charming in Grace Matthews Wells’s verse is her simple and unpretentious diction. In other words, her poetic voice is not over-cluttered with clichéd “poetic” language, but is closer to the patterns of uncomplicated Island speech. In “Stanley Bridge,” she applies her voice to the Island landscape and comes up with some startlingly lovely, simple images. The repeated phrase “all its windows open to the sea” is especially resonant. The image is immediately recognizable, but its meaning is suggestive and multiple. The “rock-made, winding lane” Wells describes also suggests agency and responsiveness in a landscape that forms *itself* in response to the human presence.

Stanley Bridge

A charming touch of Paradise on earth
(For such we dream that Paradise must
be)

A cottage fit to welcome Royal birth,
And all its windows open to the sea.

Here in this restful place you pause
awhile

To fill your soul with beauty, as you
will;

The sweet alyssum blossoms at your
feet

And marigolds run riot on the hill.

When autumn paints her loveliest,
lavishly,

I feign would wander to this spot
again,

Where every window opens to the sea
And flowers trim each rock-made,
winding lane.

—Grace Matthews Wells
from *Three Women Poets of PEI*

In prose, Olive O'Brien's writing takes a different tack on capturing the Island voice. Her *Running with the Wind* stories recount the observations and experiences of a young woman named Susan in rural Prince Edward Island. The following excerpt from the opening of "The Pied Piper, the School Mouse and Me" illustrates her straightforward style and her simple capturing of the young heroine's voice:

O'Brien's writing is not driven by plot nor by psychological investigation nor by highly imaginary incidents. Her stories brim with detail, but the primary goal of the detail appears to be to record memory, to memorialize a past or passing way of life in rural communities. Her goal seems to be to use the written word to preserve an oral culture.

It was my first day at school. Mama had made me a new dress. It was cotton duck of a dark blue colour trimmed in red to match my hair ribbon. My shoes were high black leather laced boots with toe-caps of patent leather. How proud I was of them! After Mama had combed my hair into two long braids and tied them with the red ribbon, I put on my outfit. Like a peacock I preened myself in front of the pretty mirror Mama had won as a prize for selling subscriptions to the "Heart and Home." Then I stood at the window and watched for my cousin Lillian. She too was attending school for the first time.

After waiting impatiently for hours, so it seemed, I saw Lillian coming out of her house. I raced across the field, not bothering to go by the little gate that separated their place from ours. Not waiting for my sister Rachel who was coming behind me, I crawled under the fence. But that barbed wire fence hooked into my new dress, and tugging at it, I knew it had punctured a hole before it let go. I stood up and noticed that I had dirtied the knees of my long tan ribbed stockings. With a flick of my hand, I brushed off the clay as I ran to meet Lillian.

But when I looked at her outfit mine seemed poor indeed. She had on a pink muslin dress with a real ribbon sash the same colour as her dress. Her stockings were white, but what made me gulp in envy were her shoes, black patent leather sandals which had just come in style. Oh, how pretty compared with my high ones! How pretty she was. She looked like the pictures in Mama's Holman's Catalogue. And she was as good as she was pretty.

—Olive O'Brien, from *Running with the Wind*

Acadian Writing

To investigate the shift from oral to written tradition in Acadian and French writing on the Island requires that we begin by exploring the folk poetry of Acadian songmakers. Women participated fully in the tradition of songmaking in English, but in English communities, songmaking less discernibly feeds into literary writing; it exists more separately, a stream of its own.

As folklorist and historian Georges Arsenault reports in an article called “Les chansons acadiennes de composition locale”:

Si la communauté acadienne de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard n'a fourni qu'un nombre infirme de littérateurs, en revanche elle peut s'enorgueillir d'avoir produit au cours des siècles une pléiade de poètes populaires. Ceux-ci ont composé et chanté à leur manière une quantité de chansons sur des sujets les plus divers.

[Translation: If the Acadian community on Prince Edward Island has provided us few literary writers, it can still take pride in the counterbalancing of that lack with a plethora of folk poets who have composed and sung in their own way a great many songs on the widest diversity of subjects.]

One of the most noted Acadian songmakers and folk poets of the 20th century was **Leah Maddix**. In her “Le Frolic à houker” she recounts the amusement she and her neighbours had at a mat-hooking frolic attended by more people than could fit in the kitchen. Here, the short excerpt from the long song provides a taste of the rollicking repetition of the song. Repetitions ask us to notice variations; in Maddix’s song, the repetitive and familiar activity of hooking gets interrupted by much fun.

Among the themes that Georges Arsenault identifies as part of the particularly Acadian character of songs and poems like Maddix’s are “a refined sense of humour, profound attachment to religion, a taste for celebration, and sympathy for the afflicted.”

Le frolic à houker

Ah! c'était par une belle soirée
Aldona s'faisait un frôlic à houker
On voulait toutes y aller
Oh! oui bien!
Pour avoir une bonne bouchée.
Oh! vous m'entendez bien.

* * * * *

J'ai-t-une conseil à vous donner
Si vous faisez des frolics à houker,
Faisez-les pas l'après-souper,
Oh! oui bien!
Parce qu'il en viendra de pas
invités.
Et vous m'entendez bien!

Ah! si vous voulez écouter chanter
La chanson que je viens de composer,
C'est pas pour en insulter,
Oh! oui bien!
C'est juste pour en ajouter,
Oh! vous m'entendez bien.

—Leah Maddix

These are themes that a later “folk poet,” popular songwriter **Angèle Arsenault**, included in her songs and poems about her home community. Arsenault had the opportunity to share her vision of Acadian life with the Francophone world, becoming a phenomenally popular *chanteuse* in Quebec and in France.

In “Le Monde de par chez nous,” Angèle Arsenault writes with love of the people and traditions in the Acadian community where she grew up. She describes their complicated names and nicknames, all identified by their relationships among each other. Arsenault’s poem tells us that for outsiders, it’s easy to get confused by the folks in her community; they are best interpreted by an insider. But Arsenault shows herself to be an insider who is proud to share the inside story with the

world. At the same time, her poem's speaker describes the difficulty people of her home community have in telling their own stories because they don't know what language to use, whether French, English, Canadian, Chiac (an Acadian dialect), Quebecois, or Acadian, so they speak instead with their smiles. In the fourth stanza, the speaker describes the economic situation in her community: the lack of work and the collapse of the

traditional fishery. In the fifth stanza, she gently satirizes the high birth rate. The speaker of the poem identifies closely with her neighbours throughout the poem, and even closes the poem by bringing the list of names and nicknames back to her own family by establishing her own relationship with her "Aunt Marie," reemphasizing the poem's discussion of lines of lineage.

Le Monde de par chez nous

J'vais vous parler du monde de par
chez nous

Ce sont des gens gais qui aiment
s'amuser

Ils sont très gentils et sans
cérémonie

Mais vous pourriez les trouver
compliqués

Si vous essayiez de les démêler
Parce qu'ils ont de drôles de noms
les gens de par chez nous

Béline à Phil, 'Melda à Cyril,
Florence à Jack à Ferdinand

Josephine à Jos Cateline, Jos
Philippe à Cabortan

Jos Canae pis Jos Bibienne pis Jos
Manuel pis Jos Lament

Arcade à Philomène à Bélonie Marie

Le monde de par chez nous sont
embêtés

Ils ne savent pas quelle langue
Ils devraient parler

Le français l'anglais ou l'canadien

Le chiac le québécois ou l'acadien

Alors même s'ils ont bien des choses
à dire

Ils parlent avec le sourire

Les gens de par chez nous

Par chez nous y a pas beaucoup
d'ouvrage

Pour ceux qui font la pêche

Ceux qui font le labourage

On n'peux plus vivre de ces
métiers-là

Puisque les terres sont vendues aux
états

Et pis du poisson y en a plus
beaucoup

Non y en a plus beaucoup

Dans les eaux de par chez nous

Le monde de par chez nous sont bien
contents

Même s'ils n'ont pas d'argent

Ils font beaucoup d'enfants

Pour la survie c'est pas très
inquietant

Parce que s'y continuent à cette
vitesse-là

Ils vont tout'envahir le Canada

Et pis tout l'monde s'appelera

Pareil comme par chez nous

Béline à Phil, 'Melda à Cyril,
Florence à Jack à Ferdinand

Josephine à Jos Cateline, Jos
Philippe à Cabortan

Jos Canae pis Jos Bibienne pis Jos
Manuel pis Jos Lament

Arcade à Philomène à Bélonie Marie

Arcade à Jos Bibienne et pis ma
tante Marie

—Angèle Arsenault, from *Première*

Beyond the tradition of folk poetry and songmaking, Acadian writing has sought to preserve the kinds of traditions sung about by Maddix and Arsenault. In two books, one written in English and one in French, **Antoinette Gallant** sought to capture the Acadian language as well as the stories and traditions communicated in her community's dialect. Gallant's books represent very clearly the move in literature to use the published medium to record the stories of yesteryear, the traditions of rural Prince Edward Island society, and the rhythms of the language as spoken on Prince Edward Island. Gallant's texts go to great lengths to recreate phonetically the Acadian style of speaking and storytelling. In English, her writing captures the accent of Acadian speech when Acadians speak English. In French, her writing captures the nuances of Acadian dialect, spelling words as they would be pronounced. Examples include "maisangs" for "maisons," "taigne" for "temps," and "pis" for "puis."

Tings was mighty scarce in dem ol' days, an' I guess jus' about de scarcest ting was money.

One time when I was right small I was diggin' in de groun' with' a spoon an' I foun' someting roun' an' flat an' black. I give it to me mother an' she said it was a cent an' she was real glad to get it. A cent was wort' a lot in dem times.

I remember before me brother Jerry got married to Annie, he asked her to de tea-party. He jus' had fourteen cents in his pocket, an' he had a great time on dat. Dey ed, an' dey went on de rides, an' dey played de games an' everyting. I wonder if fourteen dollars would go dat far at de Exhibition now?

-Antoinette Gallant, from *Little Jack an' de Tax-Man*

Dans ce temps-là, quand i' y avait des grands familles dans des petites maisangs, pis y fallait haler de l'eau du puits pis laver pis nettéyer toute à la magne, c'était malaise à tiendre la maison nette tout le taigne. Su' Joe è Casimir, i' y en avait une dizaine d'enfaignes en dessous de tchinze aignes, pis une journée toute 'tait à bas, pis ils avont voulu garder dehors pis le prêtre qu'arrivait. Eh Jéricho! La femme courait pou' asseyer de ramanser de quoi, pis le vieux, lui, attrape son gros casque de poils qu'il avait su' la tête, pis i' le jeute dans le coigne pis c'a 'té droète dans le quart à farine, pis pouf! La farine a volé par en l'air, pis quand le prêtre a rentré ou 'oyait riagne en toute!

-Antoinette Gallant, from *Le Journal d'une raconteuse*

The goal of much Acadian women's writing to date has been cultural preservation. Life writings by memoirists such as **Jean Halliday MacKay**—whose **The Home Place: Life in Rural Prince Edward Island in the 1920s and 30s** was published in 1999—are another extension of the desire to translate what has been known orally into written form, to preserve the culture of Prince Edward Island in the early 20th century at the end of a century of rapid cultural and technological change.



Homegrown Publishing

One of the great joys of researching Prince Edward Island women's writing in the 20th century was discovering how much of it has been well-preserved and re-issued in a variety of publications. Many of these publications are out of print, but the fact they were ever in print at all is attributable to the blossoming of Island-based publishing, and to the role Island women took in publishing. Since the late-1960s, Island publications have run the gamut from "vanity press" self-publishing of folk poetry, to small-scale publications put out by regional arts councils, to carefully selected and edited texts published by professional publishers.

In the late-1960s, Island writers were facing increasing challenges having their work published. "National" publishers were not interested in publishing work they perceived as having been produced for a "local" audience. Island writers were finally finding their own voices and beginning to address the issues, the landscape, the people, the folklore, and the language of the Island they inhabited, instead of trying to fit Island experiences into the ill-fitting mould of British experience. Yet, national publishers did not see much potential for wide appeal in the texts being produced on the Island.

Thus, committed Islanders who felt strongly about the importance of publishing and distributing Island stories took up the challenge of producing Island books right here on Prince Edward Island. Virtually all the small presses recognized the importance of publishing women's writing. In fact, most of the publishers were inspired by personal conviction, commitment to Island

culture, the Women's Movement, and left-wing politics; all of these impetuses provoked them to actively seek to save Island women's writing from obscurity.

Further, in the early 1970s, as the Island prepared to celebrate 100 years since the province joined Confederation, Islanders were taking stock of accomplishments and putting together collections of accomplished writing. The strength, variety, and quality of work by Island women writers was strongly in evidence.

Modernism Takes Hold

Island writing and publishing flourished simultaneously in the 1960s and 1970s, and most of the new work that was published finally incorporated some of the conventions of Modernism. A new set of aesthetic values had taken hold, supported and promulgated by strengthening cultural and educational institutions. Locally and nationally, arts councils and granting agencies began functioning as gatekeepers for artistic production because they judged the merit of artists' applications for funds that allowed artists the privilege of time to work. More importantly on Prince Edward Island, by the 1960s post-secondary education was more accessible to more Islanders than ever before, and the influence of post-secondary institutions became more important. A creative writing course was offered as an elective at Saint Dunstan's University from 1965 on. When Saint Dunstan's later was combined with Prince of Wales College to form the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), creative writing continued to be taught. The Island's other emergent post-secondary institution was Holland College, a vocational school that saw an

explosion of teaching and learning traditional crafts and visual arts. UPEI and Holland College students and faculty alike found outlets for their creative expressions in small journals such as *Katharsis* (published only a handful of times in the mid-1970s) and *Sand Patterns* (published twice in 1972, six times in 1973, and four times a year until 1978; later, a commemorative issue was published in 1983).

In the 1970s, when *Sand Patterns* was being published, new literary values dominated in the newly institutionalized literary culture on Prince Edward Island; finally, free verse and formal experimentation had taken hold. But where the early half of the century saw publication of much mediocre verse from “mere versifiers,” the latter half of the 20th century most certainly saw publication of much mediocre *free* verse. From his post as the creative writing instructor at the University, Professor Frank Ledwell had significant editorial and tutorial influence on PEI’s developing writers. In 1977, he offered criticism of *Sand Patterns* to encourage its improvement and the improvement of its writers. From his comments, we can discern some of the literary values that had come to prevail. Ledwell advocated pursuit of reality and truth, and expulsion of the hackneyed and clichéd: “The novelist remembers his characters truthfully and . . . the poet recalls life authentically,” said Ledwell. Writing, he posited, “must be the voice of the real mind, in the real body, in the real world.” He advised against poses of sophistication, flights into abstraction, and indulgences of sentimentalism, and he concluded:

First, a piece of writing that takes five minutes to pen deserves one minute of reading, no more. Second, overweening subjectivity and heavy-handed didacticism ought to be eschewed in any kind of writing, especially in poetry. Third, the masters of the art are still our models.

It is Modernist Ezra Pound Ledwell names first as a master to model after.

A creative writing student and a regular member of the *Sand Patterns* editorial committee was poet **Florence Roper**. Roper also was among the editors who selected poetry and prose for Centennial publications that were widely distributed in 1973, celebrating one hundred years after Prince Edward Island joined Canadian Confederation. Her writing was widely published in Island publications throughout the 1970s.

October Rain

Today is washday
And the sky
Is washing piles
Of dirty clouds.
She tumbles, pokes
And pushes them around,
Then wrings them out,
Leaving grimy water streaks
Upon the sun-crazed ground.

—Florence Roper from *Three Women*
Poets of PEI

Winter

I watched a woman
As she piled up
Swirls of cold cream
On her face
Until
It hid the scars,
And softened all
The crowsfeet left
By birth and death,
And her
Features once again
Seemed clean and fresh,
And then I felt
The coolness
Of her cheek.

—Florence Roper from *Three Women*
Poets of PEI

Her poem “October Rain” uses a metaphor from women’s traditional work in the home to describe landscape. Likewise, “Winter” personifies the season of winter as an elderly woman and uses a domestic image—that of an elderly woman applying cold cream—as an elaborate metaphor for the accumulations of snow.

Where Ledwell critiqued contemporary writing in *Sand Patterns*, other professors at the University brought the standards of Modernism to bear on earlier Island writing. One groundbreaking publication devoted

to women's writing was *Three Women Poets of PEI*, published by Reshard Gool's Square Deal press—a book that features writing by Grace Matthews Wells, Lucy Gertrude Clarkin, and Florence Roper. Not only does *Three Women Poets* select a strong sampling from each poet, it also includes critical essays that comment seriously on each woman's contribution to literary tradition (and each woman's place within the development of Modernism on the Island). Two of these articles are by University of Prince Edward Island professors (Gool himself and Robert Campbell).

Square Deal also published a monograph of poems by Leone Ross called *Beach Pebbles*, bringing this talented poet's voice and strong social criticism to the reading public.

In Leone Ross's "Inventory," we peek into an elderly woman's store of possessions and receive two views of what might be valuable among them. The person

quoted in the poem values old stamps that may have monetary value, but he or she dismisses the worth of the woman's artistic expressions—her afghan, quilt, hooked rug, and sampler—not to mention her mementoes of youth, beauty, and romance. By presenting the quoted statements as harsh, crude, and sexist, the speaker of the poem implicitly criticizes the insensitive intruder into the elderly woman's memories and asks the reader to consider carefully their value and meaning.

In the poem "The Brook," Leone Ross challenges the traditional presentation of the Prince Edward Island landscape as pastoral paradise. She counters Victorian vocabulary such as "babbling brook" and words like "limpid" and "clear" and Victorian subjects such as brook and song-sparrow and field with a new vision of environmental degradation. Here, finally, is the hard-edged realism of Modernism.

Inventory

A crocheted afghan,
 A pieced quilt,
 A rug hooked of rags
 In a scroll design,
 An old sampler, somewhat faded,
 reads, "Home, Sweet Home."
 A shoebox tied with string
 Inside, three letters. "Here,
 I'll take the stamps. They're old."
 A lock of hair tied with a ribbon,
 An obituary, a yellowed clipping,
 A very dried out rose,
 "That old crone couldn't have been
 The bride in this blurred snapshot!
 And that's all."
 "Why do they let them take anything
 To the Home? We have enough to do
 Without these in our way.
 Well, who wants them?
 They mean nothing."

—Leone Ross, from *Beach Pebbles*

The Brook

The babbling brook
 Of yesteryear,
 So well remembers,
 So limpid, clear,
 Squirms restlessly
 Beneath green slime
 And to its bank
 A rusted VW climbs
 Whose vacant eyes
 Stare unseeingly
 At fields well sprayed
 With 2-4-D.
 The song-sparrow's trill
 Halts brokenly
 Competing with
 The cacophony
 Of diesel bursts
 And traffic's road.

—Leone Ross, from *Beach Pebbles*

Women publishing/publishing women

Painter and writer **Elaine Harrison** started her own publishing company, Elaine Harrison and Associates, and through her publishing and distribution brought the public stories by Antoinette Gallant, Olive O'Brien, and **Emily LaViolette**. Harrison's company never flinched from publishing texts whose focus was extremely local. Harrison's own finest poems reveals her intense identification with the local. In one, the poet's speaker evocatively tells readers, "I am an Island that dreams." Her poems encourage women to express themselves artistically, to express themselves fearlessly.

Elaine Harrison's "Woman in Backyard" emphasizes the importance of one woman's artistic expression

through quilting. Harrison contrasts the carefully made, colourful quilt with the poorly kept, ramshackle house. By focussing on the joy the woman takes in her quilt and its flowers, Harrison quietly transforms the quilt into an expression of the richness of the woman's internal life as well as a testament to a life circumscribed inside a house through the "long winter days." The quilt is identified very strongly with the landscape the woman is described in, especially considering Prince Edward Island's landscape is frequently described as a "patchwork" of green fields and red soil. Harrison's poem so neatly sews its pieces together that it becomes difficult to distinguish woman from landscape from quilt: they are all one fabric.

Woman in Backyard

The house behind her
is old and gray
not a lick of paint on it
no curtains at the windows
the rickety foundation is
just boulders thrown
together anyhow with pieces
of dented tin stuck in the
openings where cellar windows
should be.

But she sits there among
the green weeds in the backyard
with red hens feeding all around her
and the morning sun shining
down on her neatly parted
white hair, she has a strong
beautiful face and long
artistic fingers.

And there spread out before her
is her cloth of glory a patchwork
quilt of red yellow and blue like the
sea
all kinds of shapes flying in
all directions with lovely flowers
growing all over it that had
brightened the long winter
days in the old house.

She looks down at her work and
touches lightly the yellow flowers
in the corner lying on her lap.

—Elaine Harrison
from *Voices Down East*

The most unflinching voice of all in Island publishing soon became **Libby Oughton**, who became owner of Ragweed Press in the early 1980s. Ragweed Press had been founded by Harry Baglole as a reaction to Central Canadian presses' evident lack of interest in "regional" or "local" stories. When Oughton became Ragweed's publisher, her potent feminism and dogged determination to establish a successful Island-based publishing business created the most welcoming climate that had ever existed for Island women writers.

In 1982, in the wake of an extremely successful Island Women's Arts Festival, Oughton's company oversaw publication of an important anthology called *Island Women: Our Prose and Poetry*. Before selling Ragweed and leaving Prince Edward Island, Oughton eventually realized her longtime dream of setting up a press devoted entirely to publishing women's writing. Gynergy Press, an imprint of Ragweed, continues to publish feminist and lesbian writing exclusively.

Throughout her tenure at Ragweed, Oughton wrote frequently about the challenges of being a woman business owner and a woman artist. (Many of her inspirational statements were published in *Common Ground Magazine*, an Island-based publication dedicated to women's news and views, edited through most of its history by **Anne McCallum**. *Common Ground* provided yet another space for publishing Island women's writing.)

*

I believe that artists are vital to influencing how we see ourselves and how we interpret our world. And isn't it strange when you look at the arts throughout history? Look at the visual artists, the painters. Look at the architects, the composers and musicians, the writers? Do you see many women in the list? Very few, I bet! But did not women paint, compose, write and play music, write and act in plays, write novels and poetry, exercise their very creative minds? They are beginning to be heard and seen now. So what happened? Why are the lists of artists so predomin[ant]ly male? Where is our women's artistic history?

These are probably enough questions to begin this article. I find just writing them down makes my fingers get furious. . . .

*

Of all the books published, only about 1 out of every 5–6 is by a woman. Is this because we write [less] "well" or because we write "differently" and thus have a hard time getting published, because most publishing houses are owned by men who may subtly or not-so-subtly censor our writings?

*

Not wearing my pinstriped suit and tie, I knocked on the door of the office that said Loans—Commercial. The man behind the desk said, "What do you want? You're in the wrong department. This is commercial loans." I did not know whether to break into tears, or become violent at all the implications his tone implied, "I want to borrow money to buy a computer for my company," I said. "What company are you representing?"

"No," I said. "You misunderstand me. I own the company."

*

I want to see the creative energy of women everywhere now—whether they stitch, paint, write, make up stories for children, write only in diaries, sit in the late night hours at the piano composing tunes of their own, or compose symphonies, choreograph ballets, become chefs, make films, write all the soap operas. I want our creative visions and interpretations to be seen and heard. It seems important to me, to you and to our families that we find a different way to live on this earth, interact with each other and care for each other.

—Libby Oughton

Libby Oughton's own poetry is also exceptional. Her book *Getting the Housework Done for the Dance*, for instance, offers the best examples of experimentation with poetic form of any book published by an Island woman in the 20th century. Her poem, "the fullerbrushman calls," below, provides an excellent example of the flexibilities and possibilities free verse allows. The poem contains several voices, and the form of the poem helps communicate the differences among the primary voices. The speaker of this poem,

for instance, refers to herself as “i” (without a capital letter) and her thoughts are structured with short lines but minimum punctuation. Oughton takes advantage of the Modernist technique of reproducing a “stream-of-consciousness.” The “fullerbrushwoman” has speeches that run like prose and have capital letters and punctuation. These grammatical inconsistencies are not errors. They represent deliberate choices the poet has made; she wants her writing style to help express the characters of the two women.

Oughton’s poem tells a feminist story of a woman who is seeking her independence by taking on a new job—a job that we know by the poem’s very title has been traditionally a man’s role. Oughton’s poem amplifies the situation with such poignancy that a reader knows that the fullerbrushwoman’s fears of “having to send [things] back” can be read as a metaphor for having to turn back from the brave path she is forging in her new life.

the fullerbrushman calls

these days i live with a country
horizon
where hardly anyone visits but last
Saturday surprised
by an afternoon knock
i opened the door and a woman
in worn k-mart clothes said slowly
a speech she must have practised for
hours
as a carful of kids
pressed windows to watch in awe
mom really using those words

Hello. I’m the fullerbrushman.
Remember us? Fine quality pro-
ducts brought directly to your door.
We have just about every-
thing the little homemaker could
want. Everything from
brushes to our new line of health
products with that fuller
quality you’ve learned to respect.
Are you the lady of the
house and could I take just a moment
of your time to show
you . . .
please come in

Oh thank you, thank you. I get so
nervous. I’ve just started

doing this. My old man ran off I’ve
got a lot of kids to feed and
had to do something. Everytime I got
a job usually waiting on
tables at night so at least some of
the kids were in bed, I’d just
get so tired up day and night and
have to quit and I hate the
welfare. Now I’m trying to do
something on my own. So I
started going door to door in town
but they don’t seem much
interested in my products. Too many
stores I guess these days.
So I’m trying out here. And it’s so
hard to go up and just knock
on someone’s door but country people
are a little nicer don’t
you think and that woman up there in
the trailer at least
looked at my catalogue. Can I show
you? There’s no obligation
none at all. Here. I’ve got this pen
for you as a sample. Look. It
has my name on it. See? There. Of
course it’s not a brush is it
eh, like we used to get when I was
little but if I could just sell
something, then I can get fancier
samples you’ve got to buy
them you know. Oh I didn’t mean to
talk so much . . .

she shows me page by page by page
 a careful speech for each item and i
 pay
 attention to household cleaners
 herbal teas
 brushes for my toilet
 and to a woman's first (and bravest)
 step
 i choose a few small things
 and the carpet sweeper
 and when i do
 her hand trembles as she writes it
 down
 (it's forty-nine dollars) in a
 whisper
 she asks if i'm really sure
 while one finger traces the spelling
 m u l t i p r o e l e c t r o s t a t
 i c

Wish they'd call these something
 simple but I wouldn't want
 to write it wrong. They might not
 accept my order. It could
 take a week or two but as soon as it
 comes I'll bring it right out
 will you be home. You don't have to
 pay now I'd never take
 money without giving customers their
 things. Nobody's
 ever bought one of these before. O
 thank you, thank you. Bye.

Today she drove the thirty miles
 from her home only to find me out
 and my niece here who says
 a fullerbrushwoman

with the saddest face i've ever seen
 came by

Oh I'm so sorry. I should have called
 but your aunt ordered
 these products and they just came in
 this morning and I didn't
 want to keep her waiting will she be
 back soon? I really want to
 give them to her. I should've called
 . . .

She phones and makes the trip again
 unpacks the treasured sweeper
 demonstrates exactly how it works
 for half an hour every detail is
 explained
 how to get the smallest cat hair off
 the rug
 and how useful the packing box will
 be -

then spends ten minutes cleaning the
 brush
 am i satisfied it is worth the money?
 yes yes yes i say
 and with the softest smile she lifts
 her head

Oh I'm so happy, so glad. All today I
 was sick to death with
 worry
 I might have to send it back.

-Libby Oughton, from *New Poets of
 Prince Edward Island*

Oughton's poem "lilacs" describes in poetic form some of the feminist poetic values she helped encourage in other women through her publishing ventures and her activism. The speaker of the poem suggests that instead of using poetic form to obscure the details of her life story "paring her poems into skeletons / to hide in her closet," she should tell her story as she tells it to her intimate friend: with all its details and its unprotected joys and sorrows. "Write it that way," she says, and the gift of her insight brings a return of the unprotected, unhidden beauty of new lilacs.

The importance of Libby Oughton and Ragweed's commitment to developing and publishing Island women writers was reinforced in 1999 when **Rachna Gilmore** was awarded the Governor General's Literary Award for Children's Literature (Text) for *A Screaming Kind of Day*. Ragweed had published Gilmore's first children's book, *My Mother Is Weird*, in 1988, when Gilmore was living on Prince Edward Island.

Prince Edward Island women continue to play an important role in publishing. In the 1990s, **Catherine Matthews** (who had edited *The New Poets of Prince Edward Island* for Ragweed and had been a member of the poetry performance/self-publishing group The Secret Swarm) spearheaded publication of the poetry journal *blue SHIFT*. **Alice Anna Reese** provided much driving force behind the self-publication of a TWiG (The Writers in Group) anthology. Deirdre Kessler's Indigo Press published occasional volumes, including two biographies of important Island women: Mona Wilson and Wanda Wyatt. **Laurie Brinklow's** Acorn Press published "books about Prince Edward Island, by Prince Edward Islanders," including Jean Halliday MacKay's *The Home Place*.

Conclusion

Throughout the 20th century, Island women writers have challenged literary status quo and struggled to find their own voices, to express their experiences as women and as Prince Edward Islanders in the words and literary styles they found to be most appropriate to them. As a group, they have witnessed and participated in the professionalization of writing, the shift from oral to written tradition, and the explosion of Island-based publishing.

This study has been necessarily limited. Many literary trends on Prince Edward Island merit a fuller historical

lilacs

for Vaughn

she brings me her poems
years of a woman's life
closed into files and drawers
she is hesitant nervous
to expose her secrets to me
(who is supposed to know
how words flow together)

she has moved and removed
words stanzas phrases
pared her poems into skeletons
to hide in her closet

when i ask how what really happened
here or here the whole story tumbles
from her lips filled with such love
and sorrow for her lovers friends
children and neighbours

write it that way i suggest
a slow shy grin covers her face
she jumps up from my kitchen table
returns with her arms full of the
season's
first lilacs 'here i almost forgot...
I brought you
these'

—Libby Oughton

from *Getting the Housework Done for
the Dance*

treatment. A researcher could easily write a history devoted entirely to Prince Edward Island women's life writing or their self-published writing or their songmaking and folk poetry or their writing for children

There is much to celebrate in Island women's writing. Unfortunately, much inequity remains. In some ways, women's writing on the Island still follows a trend

Carole Gerson saw in the period between the wars: many women continue to be less prolific than men and to publish later in their lives and, therefore, have less time to secure their careers and reputations as writers.

A quick count reveals that in 1999 and 2000 alone, Island male writers published at least seven books of poetry. Not one single, solitary book of poetry by an Island woman was published in the same period, despite ample evidence that the Island's women poets are active in writing groups, are publishing in journals, and are giving readings. Poet and publisher Laurie Brinklow's Acorn Press has so far published only one book by a woman. I asked her why we continue to see lower publishing rates among the Island's women writers. Her reply:

In recent years, few Island women seem to have had books published. I can count them on one hand. I'm one of those who hasn't. There are others. Dianne Morrow. Catherine Matthews. Shauna McCabe. Linda Wigmore. Ivy Wigmore. Laurel Smyth. Orysia Dawydiak. Margie Carmichael. Judy Gaudet. All are writing, but none seems to be publishing books. I can think of a few reasons for this. Or maybe I should just speak for myself. I'm a mother. I have a full-time job. I have a book publishing company and freelance editing business on the side, ostensibly to support my family. I have friends. I play music. I don't make publishing my own writing a priority because the business of living seems to get in the way. Eventually I'd like to devote, say, a month to writing a few more poems to put in my manuscript, then send it out. But I don't have a month right now. I barely have five minutes to scratch out a poem once in a blue moon.

Brinklow expressed some envy of women who seem to be able to organize their lives so they can write. She noted that in order to write, they have to put themselves first—something our culture teaches women they ought not do. "Well, I realize *that's* wrong," Brinklow says, "but it may take some time to overcome. . . ."

Women of the 21st century will continue to be challenged to overcome obstacles to their writing, to express their experiences and their culture in freeing verse and liberating stories.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to fellow researchers and writers Ann-Louise Beaumont, Anne Nicholson, Sandy Kowalik, Tiffany Sark, and Edie Zakem for encouragement and inspiration and to the women of the First Hand steering committee for the inspiration and the means to complete this research. Special thanks to Sasha Mullally, whose editorial comments, quick insights, and strong sense of historical context were invaluable; to Frank Ledwell and Laurie Brinklow for editorial assistance and input; to Simon Lloyd and Elizabeth Statts for assistance in the PEI Collection at Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island.

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first hand

**Rags and Bags: Functional
Art from Sacks and Worn
Clothing**

**Hooked Mats of Prince
Edward Island**

**Researcher/Writer:
Anne Nicholson**

Introduction

Ask Prince Edward Islanders about hooked mats, and they will rhyme off half a dozen women they know who make “the most beautiful mats on PEI.” Or they might pull you into the rooms of their homes to show you the many richly coloured mats they have collected over the years. Hooked mats are everywhere on PEI, but you could just as easily go for years without ever hearing any mention of them.

They are everywhere, yet still somewhat invisible. The libraries carry several books about hooked rugs by American authors, but sources specific to the Island are scarce. It is hard to believe that at the beginning of the 20th century almost every PEI woman, with the exception of the very wealthy, hooked mats for her home.

What is mat hooking?

The mat hooking of Atlantic Canada and New England is distinct from other rug hooking because the wool loops of the mats are not individually knotted with a hinged hook. Instead, the rug *pile* is formed by holding strips of

fabric approximately 1 cm wide under coarsely woven backing, usually burlap, and pulling it in loops through the weave at regular intervals with a small hook. Using the same basic method, mat hookers can also use yarn, and the loops may be clipped to create different textures. Most often, the pile is left in the loops, making the mats more durable.

To hook a mat, the backing was stretched over a simple wooden frame that could be rested between two chairs or saw horses. The first mat hookers fashioned their hooks by filing the end of a nail into a slight hook and embedding the nail into a small block of wood shaped to fit comfortably in the hand. The mat’s pattern was sketched onto the backing material with charcoal or, later, with coloured pencils or felt markers. Toward the end of the 19th century, pre-printed burlap was sold through Eaton’s Catalogue, and it became common to find mats from all over the Maritimes with exactly the same patterns, varying only in colour; geometric designs of this kind were particularly popular on Prince Edward Island. Today frames, hooks, and materials are specially designed for hooking and can be purchased “ready to hook” at supply stores.



3.1



3.2

3.1 & 3.2 Acadian hooked mat / Tapis crocheté Acadien



3.3 Hooked mat, Beaconsfield / Tapis
crocheté, Beaconsfield

The History of Mat Hooking

All evidence shows that rug hooking had its origin in eastern North America. Our study of the art of rug hooking is hampered because very little mention is made of rug hooking in historical accounts. Abigail Smith of New Maryland, near Fredericton, New Brunswick, made the oldest known hooked rug in Canada in 1860. Ms. Smith hooked her name and the date right into the rug, but this was not common practice. The Canadian Museum of Civilization's web page has diagrams of hooking and features photographs of Abigail Smith's mat and many others. See: <http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/arts/rugs/rugs02e.shtml>.

The women who hooked rugs to keep out the drafts in their homes probably didn't consider their work of much value artistically. Since making mats was a common activity, like making clothing, it was rare that names and dates were found on the finished product. More often, dates were included in the pattern of a rug to commemorate an event that may have occurred years before the rug was made.

Prince Edward Island mat hooking

On Prince Edward Island hooked rugs were always called mats. Mats were hooked by rural women out of the desire to bring comfort and beauty into their homes. Floor coverings had to be made from the materials at hand. Later, when it did become possible to buy manufactured flooring, women could not afford to spend what little money they might have for such a luxury. Still, mats were devalued by a culture that

took for granted things "handmade" because they were made out of old materials that had outlived their usefulness as clothing or sacks. A woman could make a mat without even leaving her home to find materials. The only cost to her was the many hours that it took to produce the mat. Many women remember their time hooking mats as a restful break from harder chores, a break that was justified by the useful products that resulted.

While the origin of the mats can be called lowly, this does not mean that the women who created them didn't take great pride in producing colourful and interesting decorations for the floors of their homes. The very fact that there was no cost involved in mat making and that the finished product was totally functional meant that some women could indulge their need for artistic expression. Each new mat was treasured until it absorbed enough soil to be relegated to the kitchen entrance, then to the porch, and, finally, before it completely disintegrated, it might be given to the dog to sleep on. This "life cycle of the rug" illustrates the way every item was used and reused with resourcefulness and creativity at a time when "new" things were very rare.

Women made rugs for use within their homes; they were not created for the wider market-place. This would change over the course of the 20th century when the beauty of these rugs brought them attention from peddlers who traded goods for the rugs as a market for them emerged in urban centres.

Collectors' Items

It was a sign of wealth and status on PEI to have imported carpets in one's home. Upper-class women who were very adept at other textile crafts such as lacework, embroidery, and quilting, didn't seem to have been interested in hooking mats. The creation of hooked mats for floor coverings in the late 1800s was an accepted part of life on PEI, but mats were more common in rural homes where there was less access to imported floor covering. As populations shifted from rural to urban, nostalgia for rustic homemade items increased. In the late 1800s and early 1900s upper-middle-class individuals longed for the homespun quality of these works of humble origin and began to collect them, often depleting the supply of rugs from the communities where they were made.



3.4 Hooked mat, Beaconsfield / Tapis
crocheté, Beaconsfield

During this period, many rugs left PEI and became part of households elsewhere. William Winthrop Kent, an architect from New England, wrote his book *The Hooked Rug* in 1930. In it, he refers to the makers of the rugs that he made a hobby of collecting. “The joy of creation is one of the most precious human attributes,” he writes, “and few of us realize how much the hard-worked farm dweller was rested and reinvigorated by turning to the work of finishing that beautiful hooked carpet of medallions and flowers to cover the floor of the ‘spare room.’” Mr. Kent makes little mention of the fact that these farm-dwellers were women with very few comforts.

Mr. Kent describes a trip that he and a friend took across the Canadian border into New Brunswick to search out rugs. One farmwoman gave him several of her rugs, clearly flattered that he wanted something she had made herself. She refused payment, so Mr. Kent made a donation of an unnamed amount to her church. He was touched that rural women were unconcerned about the market value of their work. His frame of reference for “value” was very different from that of the farmwomen he was dealing with.

The prominence of Prince Edward Island as a source for rugs is evident when he refers to Prince Edward Island rug makers specifically, noting that they often modelled the pile to give relief to flowers.

By some Prince Edward Island workers and others, the surface of a woolen rug is often modeled, or made high and low in relief to obtain realistic or modeled flower, foliage and border effects. These are not always objectionable when the rug is used for the hearth, but few are as beautiful as the tightly drawn, unclipped level surface rugs, and their general use as rugs soon proves the idea of a raised or modeled surface as illogical, unless made as curiosities. As rugs they have not as good an excuse for being as had Pinturicchio’s modeled frescoes in Siena and Rome.

It is interesting to note that he dismisses a feature of PEI mats that had been designed to make them more beautiful simply because the feature seemed less practical. Regional differences in technique and style can still be detected when travelling from community to community. While geometric patterns are preferred in one region, floral patterns may be more valued in another. The influence of criticism like Mr. Kent’s may have caused some shift in style as mat hookers sought to conform to outside aesthetics and decorative needs.

Lucy Maud Montgomery describes the technique of modelled flowers in her novel *Pat of Silver Bush*:

. . . she began to cut Winnie’s red crepe dress into strips suitable for “hooking.” . . . It was exactly the shade she wanted for the inner petals of the fat, “raised” roses in the fine new rug she was hooking . . . a rug with golden brown “scrolls” around the edges and, in the center, clusters of red and purple roses such as never grew on any earthly rose bush.

(The L. M. Montgomery Institute has a listing of all the handmade items that Montgomery enjoyed making, of which there are a great number. There are no hooked mats listed.)

The raised roses are more commonly referred to on the Island as “*riz roses*” (3.5) and some hookers are well known in the community for that technique. A mat with sculpted roses adorns one of the rooms of the Heritage Foundation on Kent Street in Charlottetown.

Even though mat hooking on PEI has not been widely written about, there are many seniors still living who remember when mat hooking was a common activity in most households and when friendly competition at



fairs and exhibitions was anticipated. PEI was widely recognized as a place where there were many skilled mat hookers. A letter from the Canadian Handicraft Guild in Montreal dated 1919 and addressed to Miss Hunt of the Prince County Branch of the Guild asks for consent to make the "valuable recipes and hints embodied in your Dye-Book available to as many people as possible." The writer later goes on to hope, "Now that the war is over, I presume your people will be able to resume some of their old-time activities along accustomed lines. How is rug making going on? We are going to issue circulars for another prize competition very shortly, and I will send you a supply as soon as they are ready." This outside interest illustrates how handcraft organizations supported and united communities across the country at a time when distance was a greater barrier than today.

Island women took pleasure and pride in creating their mats. Mat hooking was an activity of productive leisure, and mats were hooked in the winter and spring when snow or mud made it hard to get out of the house. Around the turn of the century "hooking parties" or "hooking frolics" were common events held so that the women of an area could share their individual talents and help each other get new mats started. The practice of holding quilting bees is well known all over North America, but, by comparison, the hooking party is not so often remembered, although it was common up to approximately 1930, when rug hooking began to lose popularity. Some women can still remember their mothers holding hooking parties and letting all other household duties go unattended while the party continued. Margaret Furness MacLeod, of Vernon

Bridge, described a hooking party in her booklet, "Four Scripts—Inspired by Childhood Memories in Prince Edward Island," prepared for Trans Canada Matinee on CBC. Ms. MacLeod's "Four Scripts" document, available at the PEI Archives, is undated but was probably written in the 1950s. In it, she writes,

The day my mother would say: "I think it's time we had a new rug," I knew we were in for the best kind of a party that ever was—A Hooking Party. You might not think that there was any connection between a new rug on the floor and a party, but when I was a small girl in Prince Edward Island, making a rug was an event. In fact, I never could decide whether my mother's announcement that it was time for a new rug came because the bag was full or because she felt like a party.

"The bag" Ms. MacLeod refers to is the rag bag. She lived most of her adult life away from the Island, which explains why she calls mats "rugs." Ms. MacLeod also goes into great descriptive detail about gathering plants to make dyes:

I have seen French marigolds, calendulas, hay clover, raspberry and rowanberry, to mention a few used to dye the stripes of a single skirt length or drapes. Even our meadow mushrooms gave a full range of shades from baby-pink to red. I have a theory that the pigment in these pink-lined caps was drawn from our brick coloured soil and might not be obtained in the same degree elsewhere.

Shirlee Hogan, in her paper "Traditional Hooked Mats of Southeastern Prince Edward Island," found that many Islanders remember their mothers and grandmothers packing up the mats they had made and sending them off with family visitors from the Boston area. So many Island mats ended up in New England that it can be surmised that their origins were probably forgotten, and they were assumed to have been made in the US. Since mat hookers rarely put identification on their mats, it is difficult to know which patterns originated on PEI.

This 1940s photo (3.6) from Shirlee's paper was borrowed from Annie Whiteway of Brooklyn. It shows a wartime hooking "Frolic." The women in this photograph are hooking a mat to be raffled off to raise funds. The women in back are holding up a quilt that seems to be of the same pattern. Annie Whiteway is seated centre right, facing the camera.



3.6 The Hooking Party / La corvée de crochetage

Shirlee Hogan also wrote about the “mat men” who traded oilcloth floor covering for hooked mats to be sold off Island. Many Islanders called the travelling peddlers “Jews” and some continue to do so today. The peddlers were actually merchants who emigrated from Lebanon at the beginning of the 20th century. David Weale’s book *A Stream out of Lebanon* describes the suspicion with which these hard-working people were greeted by Islanders in isolated communities who rarely saw anyone they didn’t know. “Islanders in rural PEI couldn’t understand where the Lebanese peddlers who looked so different came from. They usually referred to them as ‘Jews’ and even the peddlers grew tired of correcting them and explaining that they were Christians, sometimes identifying themselves to customers as the ‘Jew.’”

In the early- to mid-1900s, women longed for smooth-surface flooring that was easier to clean. The peddlers were very keen on the hooked mats and made tough bargains with women, trading one oilcloth for three or four mats that represented many weeks of work. Because the peddlers were treated as outsiders and, therefore, not part of the community, they had license to step into the character expected of them and drive hard bargains. By treating the peddlers as outsiders, the women could comfortably complain about having given their work away for so little. At the same time, the mats gave them buying power they would otherwise not have had.

The Hooking Renaissance on PEI

In 1973, Prince Edward Island celebrated its centennial year as part of Canada. As with anniversaries of this importance, nostalgia for traditions and anything old was very strong. There was a rebirth in interest in things “homemade.” Rural Islanders had seen many of their youth move away to cities. Now an influx of urban youth was discovering the rural lifestyle and everything associated with “back-to-the-land” living. The newly established Holland College School of Visual Arts offered courses in quilting, weaving, and pottery as well as other visual art forms. Mat hooking was also taught. Many of the women interested in taking up the craft remembered their grandmothers hooking mats but had never considered hooking mats themselves. A whole generation seemed to have lost the art form, but, in the 1970s, it was being rediscovered and renewed with enthusiasm.

As part of this renaissance of craft creation, the Confederation Centre Art Gallery held an exhibition in 1978 called “Hooked Mats of Prince Edward Island,” curated by Mark Holden. For the first time, mats were recognized as an important part of our heritage and were treated as the valuable artifacts that they are. The Artfactory in the West Royalty Industrial Park houses a collection of mats, many of which are featured in period displays in Island museums throughout the tourist season. *For a listing of the Island collection visit the Canadian Heritage Information Network’s web site at <http://www.chin.gc.ca> Look for Rugs under “Artefacts and Humanities in Prince Edward Island.”*

More recently, the Confederation Centre Art Gallery has hosted two shows featuring hooked rugs. The Textiles Show “Field and Flowers” at the Confederation Art Gallery in 1995 was curated by Mary Burnett. In the fall of 1999, the Gallery hosted a show entirely on hooked mats called “The Marrying of the Coats: **Anna MacLeod** and Traditional Rug Hooking on Prince Edward Island” that featured Anna MacLeod as well as several other Island Rug Hookers. Island poet Catherine Matthews was inspired by the show and wrote her poem “The Marrying of the Coats” to honour the women featured in the show. Quotations from Ms. Matthews’s poem and from Ann Mather’s historical work are interspersed in the following section.

Island Matters

There remain today many women who enjoy the art of creating hooked mats. Investigating the craft opens up a new world populated by women who take great joy in their art individually and in groups, who meet regularly and take advantage of every opportunity to study techniques and share expertise. While many still work largely by themselves, producing mats for friends and family, many others are actively recruiting new practitioners and teaching the craft to as many as they can.

Six Island mat hookers are profiled on the following pages. Some grew up on the Island and hooked all their lives. A couple moved to the Island and brought their enthusiasm for the craft with them. Some only discovered the art as adults and are busy making up for lost time.

Helen Johnston



3.7

*Wool strips are drawn up
through the earth two by two*

*Sun upon sun, patterns
old and true hooked
round the heart*

—Catherine Matthews

Helen Johnston was born in 1914 and has hooked mats for as long as she can remember. She learned to hook from her mother, Ella Reynolds, who lived just down the street from where Helen lives now in Murray River. Helen can also remember her grandmothers hooking rugs. In her grandmother Clow's house, mats covered every inch of the floor to keep out the cold. Helen's husband Reg would draw out the pattern on the burlap for Helen to hook. Helen's mother had also had her husband Benjamin draw out her patterns for her. They felt that the men were better at such things because they were accustomed to drawing out plans for buildings. This practice of men drawing the patterns and women doing the hooking appears to have been quite common. In fact, most mat hookers are happy to use patterns borrowed from other hookers or artists. The

tradition of deferring to the men's supposedly superior ability had the effect of involving the men in the process of mat making, since they and the children may well have been neglected while the mat was being hooked.

Although Helen never hosted hooking parties herself, she remembers well the parties that her mother held during the winter, after Christmas. At the beginning of the 20th century, everyone had hooking parties, she recalls. During these parties, the dishes would go unwashed and the children would come home from school to find nothing on the table for their supper. No one seemed to mind that regular chores were neglected because they enjoyed the event and looked forward to a new mat on the floor. Five or six women would be invited to the party, and there would always be sarsparilla wine and fruitcake. The host would cut the cloth and supervise while the guests did the hooking.

During the 1930s, hooking lost its popularity. Helen is not sure why this was the case. It either went out of fashion or cloth became so scarce that even worn cloths had to be mended and reused. Helen herself never stopped hooking.

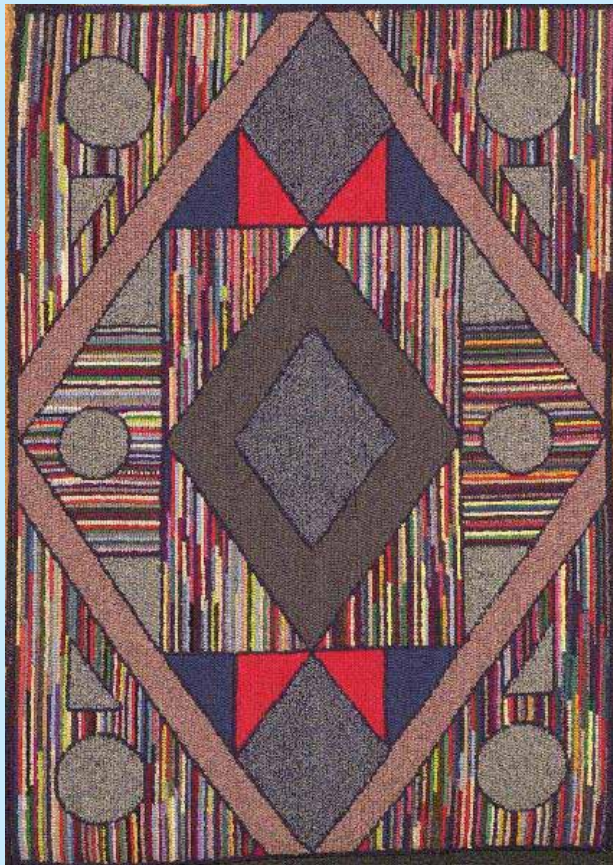
While the rest of the country suffered through the "Dirty Thirties," the rural PEI economy did not change much, perhaps because it was based more on basic needs than money; people helped each other when times were bad and workers were always needed on local farms or sawmills. Helen married Reg in 1933 and raised eight children. After Reg passed away in 1989, Helen filled many lonely hours hooking mats. With Reg gone, her daughter Edie, a well-known Island quilter, often provided the patterns for Helen's mats. She used to hook four or five mats every winter. The largest mat she remembers hooking was four by six feet. She hooked it the winter of 1950.

At age 86, Helen continues to hook at least two mats every year. She is proud of the fact that she has never purchased material for her mats; she uses cloth from old clothing her family is finished with, and friends and neighbours often bring her their worn clothing for her mats.

Helen does not dye her cloth. She works out her patterns using the colours of the cloth she has. Within the pattern of a mat that she hooked recently, she can pick out the green of an old sweater her husband wore.



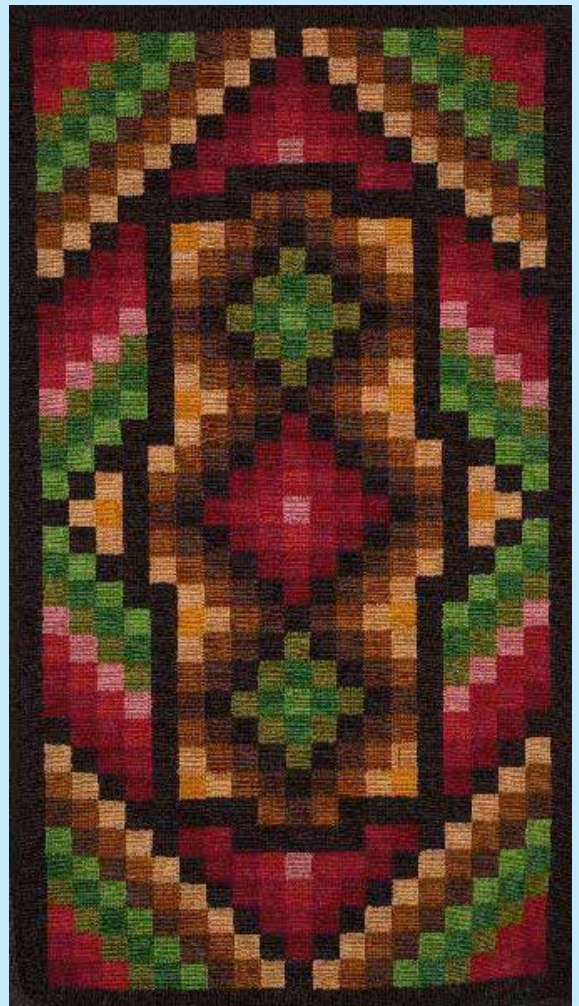
3.8



3.9

3.7 (left/à gauche) Helen Johnston

3.8, 3.9, 3.10 & 3.11 Mats hooked by
Helen Johnston / Des tapis crochetés par
Helen Johnston



3.10



3.11

Hélèn Gallant



3.12

*Women hook their pain,
Lifetimes of it;
Cancers, Alzheimer's,
strokes,
Deaths and divorces.
The burlap is their altar
cloth.
It absorbs, transmutes,
this pain.*

—Anne Mather

Hélèn Gallant is probably the most celebrated mat hooker on Prince Edward Island. Born in 1924 in Saint-Chrysostome, Prince Edward Island, Hélèn was the oldest girl of thirteen children. She now lives in Wellington with her husband, Joseph. At the age of 13, she left school to help her mother with her large family and, at about the same time, she discovered her love for the art of mat hooking. Hélèn describes how she went to a local exhibit of crafts and became fascinated with the mats. She got her brothers to make her a wood frame and a hook from a nail embedded in a piece of wood, and she taught herself to hook. Hélèn's mother did not hook mats, perhaps because she was so busy with her family, but also probably because many of her generation abandoned traditional handcrafts in favour of modern alternatives. There were, however, many other women in the community who practised the art and enjoyed some "friendly competition" among themselves.

Hélèn designs her own patterns using photographs of rugs she has seen on her travels or pictures of well-known Island scenes. When she began hooking as a child, Hélèn used the rags that were available in her home and had to make do with the colours as they were. As soon as she was able to afford it, Hélèn chose to hook exclusively with yarn purchased from Island mills. This yarn allows her to use the clear bright colours that she prefers for her designs. Hélèn is particularly skilled at creating striking geometric designs using vibrant colours that bring movement and depth to the work (3.13, 3.14).

Traditionally, geometric patterns are not as valued as pictorial or floral designs, yet they often permit the hooker to use colour more inspirationally, and they result in unique and individual mats. Hélèn has kept



3.13



3.14



3.15

3.12 (*left/à gauche*) Hélèn Gallant

3.13 & 3.14 Two examples of Hélèn Gallant's vibrant geometric patterns / Deux exemples des vibrants motifs géométriques d'Hélèn Gallant

3.15 The MV Abegweit, retired from service on the Northumberland Strait in 1982 - Hélèn Gallant / Le vieux traversier MV Abegweit, retiré de son service sur le détroit de Northumberland en 1982 - Hélèn Gallant

photographs of her mats over the years, and among them is a mat that looks somehow out of place: it is a rendition of one of Picasso's cubist paintings, drawn by Father Adrien Arsenault for her to hook. Hèlèn fondly remembers the late Father Arsenault as an enthusiastic promoter of the often forgotten art of hooking mats. Father Arsenault encouraged many Acadian women to try different patterns in their mats and often bought the finished products himself. A visit to the Acadian Museum in Miscouche uncovered a photograph of a mat by **Annie Arsenault Derasp** of a similarly cubist design; the designer is listed as Father Adrien Arsenault.

Hèlèn is particularly proud of her portrayal of the MV Abegweit ferryboat that she has hooked in great detail (3.15). This is one mat that she will not part with. Hèlèn does sell many of her mats, but she retains a sense of loss each time she lets one go. She speaks regretfully of the last mat that was sold before it was even off her frame. People are always dropping by looking for mats because she is well known as a prolific mat hooker, and it is getting more and more difficult to find hookers willing to part with their creations. Although it is possible to charge reasonable prices for mats today, it is hard to put a value on the hours of work that go into each one. Hèlèn sells her mats because she wants to share them and clearly can't resist the enthusiasm of those who seek her out and fall in love with her mats.

Florence Gallant



3.16

Hookers know the hypnotic luxury

Of repeated stitches

The slow, spreading warmth that happens

When beauty materializes

Where only wool and burlap existed moments before.

—Anne Mather



3.16 (*left/à gauche*) & 3.17 Florence Gallant demonstrates hooking / Florence Gallant démontre le crochetage

Florence Gallant lives near Hèlèn in Urbainville. She and Hèlèn are sisters-in-law. Florence began hooking as a child under the guidance of her two grandmothers who lived in the same house. As in Hèlèn's family, hooking skipped a generation in Florence's family; her mother didn't hook mats. Florence explains that with eight children, her mother was too busy to hook, but it is also likely that her mother was not interested in a craft that was so much a part of her parents' generation. No doubt there were enough mats for her home with her mother and mother-in-law living with them. Florence, who has twelve children herself, always loved to hook. She remembers that as a child, "We would run to do it!"

Hooking became Florence's specialty while another sister preferred quilting and became more proficient at that. Florence hooked after school and in the evenings. Every year the mat hookers of her family would trade four or five mats to the travelling peddler for an oilcloth that covered a larger area of the floor and was easier to sweep. The oilcloths only lasted about a year, so they were kept busy hooking rugs for the peddlers. The mats she hooked as a child were made from rags. Florence remembers her grandmothers teaching her how to use onion skins and other things to make dyes for the cloth: the same dyes that they used for socks and mittens.

Like Hèlèn, Florence now prefers to use wool yarn that can be purchased in any colour, saving a great deal of time in cutting and dyeing rags. The old feed sacks that they used as backing material when she was young were loosely woven and moved around when you worked; she finds the new burlap is much firmer and

easier to work with. Florence often uses stamped patterns that can be bought from craft supply stores. She also hooks geometric designs that she works out on graph paper then transfers to the burlap with a marker. In this photograph, Florence is working on a star pattern in three colours of yarn. She often hooks mats with children's characters to sell at the local Craft Co-op. A two foot by four foot mat may take her one-and-a-half weeks, working up to eight hours a day. The largest mat Florence has ever hooked was a beautiful floral pattern four by six feet. She gave this to a special granddaughter. Once again the craft may be skipping a generation in Florence's family. While none of her children are following in her footsteps, perhaps a granddaughter will. Florence sells or gives away almost all of the mats she hooks.

Shirley Hennessy



Shirley Hennessy was born in Nova Scotia and moved to PEI in 1945 when she married Raymond Hennessy. As a child, she was aware of the hooked rugs her grandmother made, but they appeared to her as unattractive, dark things that didn't hold a lot of appeal. It wasn't until she was in her early thirties that she herself developed an interest in hooking. She and Raymond, along with their four children, moved several times for his work, and she learned how to hook rugs by taking courses while they lived in Ottawa for three years. The revival of the interest in crafts was very strong in Ontario, and many courses were offered in technique and colour. By the time she settled back on PEI with her family, she was very skilled at the art.

It was around 1963 that Shirley was interviewed about mat hooking on Helen Herring's television show, "Today at Home." Ms. Herring was a prominent broadcaster on the Island who was active with the Women's Institute and many other Island organizations. She herself became "hooked" on the art and learned the craft from

Shirley. Helen also became very skilled and, through her involvement, helped to establish the renaissance in hooking that began in the late 1960s and continues today. Shirley offered her first course in hooking in the mid-1960s and found more women interested in taking up the craft of their mothers and grandmothers than she could accept in her classes. With the establishment of the Holland College School of Visual Arts soon after, she was able to teach many more Island women how to hook.

Shirley's rugs are classic and formal in their style. She has hooked elaborate floral and rural scenes as well as more simple designs for children. She has had a huge influence on the rebirth of mat hooking. She encouraged new interest in experimenting with colour and texture. When Shirley gives a course in mat hooking, she often spends many hours preparing for the students. Because a course may only be a few sessions long, Shirley will choose a pattern, cut and dye the materials, and assemble a package for each student so that their time together can be spent on technique and producing a finished product. Teachers like Shirley are much in demand, and she often travels to other provinces to encourage the art.

Shirley Hennessy stands by her rendition of the Tryon United Church reflected in the river (3.18, left). After completing this detailed work, Shirley discovered that the blue often fades.

This finely hooked bell pull has moulded flowers on an unhooked background (3.19, right).

For this circular floral mat (3.20), Shirley used a shading technique that involves holding the strips of fabric in the dye and lifting them out gradually to produce strips lightly coloured at one end, gradually darkening to a richer hue at the other end. The flower petals are hooked from the centre out.

Another popular style of pattern is the stained-glass pattern (3.21). Clear bright colours are needed to give the effect of glass in a hooked mat. This traditional pattern is hooked with great care to colour and shading (3.22).





3.20



3.21



3.22

(left/à gauche) 3.18 Shirley Hennessy & 3.19 Bell pull / Cordon de sonnette
3.20, 3.21 & 3.22 Mats hooked by Shirley Hennessy / Des tapis crochetés par Shirley Hennessy

Marjorie Judson



*The hook moves through
and through the canvas
skin of the field*

*Earthworm the invisible
thread that loops the
fibre of the land*

—Catherine Matthews

3.23

Marjorie Judson lived most of her life in Ontario but married into an Island family. She and her husband Walter raised their family in Ontario, spending many summers on their farm in Melville, PEI, finally moving to Vernon Bridge permanently in 1990. Growing up, Marjorie was influenced by her mother who hated old hooked rugs because it was her job to beat the dirt and grime out of them. While her mother never hooked rugs, Marjorie remembers that her grandmother diligently made one hooked mat and one patchwork quilt for each of her grandchildren. Unfortunately, she was not planning to give any of these pieces to her grandchildren until they were all completed, and a tragic fire destroyed her grandmother's house and none of the rugs or quilts were saved. Her grandmother died when Marjorie was just 10 years old, so she didn't have the opportunity to learn the craft from her.

Marjorie, who was always interested in textile art, discovered her interest in hooking when she went to Community School in Ontario at the age of 40. There were a great number of resources available for craft development and education during the Davis administration in Ontario, and it was possible to find many courses in hooking techniques. Marjorie enthusiastically immersed herself in every opportunity, sometimes finding that she was more skilled than the various teachers she studied with. Soon she was doing the teaching and becoming well known for her talent both in hooking and teaching. She has taught on the Island at Community Schools, Holland College School of Visual Arts, and the LeFurgey Centre in Summerside. Every year she participates in the Nova Scotia Rug Hooking School in Truro where people come from all over the world for a two-week program of advanced technique.

first hand

Marjorie usually draws her own patterns for hooking. She has only ever sold two of her mats and still regrets having parted with them. Hooking is a very personal expression for Marjorie, and she finds it difficult to put a price on her work.

Marjorie is pictured here (3.23, previous page) with a framed work showing relief fruit on an unhooked background.

This (3.24) is Marjorie's first large mat, measuring four feet by five feet. It is a landscape of her summer home in Melville that she hooked in 1975. The lobster in the foreground is hooked in red wool, though it should rightly be green to give it more prominence.

"There's more than one way to make a stew, Mother" (3.25): When Marjorie teaches a course, she likes to hook a commemorative mat featuring one item from each of her student's mats. Here each animal is taken from a different student's work.

Another composite mat of student work from 1985 (3.26) also features the names of students. Since there were three women named Betty, Marjorie hooked BETTYS 3.

This traditional floral mat (3.27) is tightly hooked in very finely cut material.

Marjorie purchases the occasional mat that shows unusual use of colour or pattern. She found this 12" round mat (3.28), artist unknown, at the Murray River Craft Co-op. It features an interesting example of the "Scrappie" or "Hit or Miss" style that uses small bits of cloth in a random pattern.

There is a tradition among hookers to trade coasters. This is Marjorie's collection (3.29), including representative pieces by many of her hooker friends.



3.24



3.25



3.26

3.23 (previous page/ page précédente)
Marjorie Judson is pictured with a framed work showing relief fruit on an unhooked background / On voit Marjorie avec un tapis encadré montrant des fruits en relief sur un fond non bouclé

3.24, 3.25 & 3.26 Mats hooked by Marjorie Judson / Des tapis crochetés par Marjorie Judson



3.27



3.28



3.29

3.27 A mat hooked by Marjorie Judson / Un tapis crocheté par Marjorie Judson

3.28 Artist unknown / Artiste inconnu

3.29 Marjorie Judson's collection of coasters / Voici la collection des dessous de verre de Marjorie Judson

Jackie O'Connell



3.30

Fallow earth is a burlap sack upon which women imprint antique patterns

Materials stolen from the earth are returned to earth in new incarnations.

—Catherine Matthews

Jackie O'Connell began hooking in the early 1980s and learned the craft from Shirley Hennessy among others. Jackie lives in Charlottetown where she cares for her mother who suffers from Parkinson's Disease. While her mother never took up hooking, she obviously enjoys the beautiful work that Jackie produces. As with many of the other hookers on PEI, hooking skipped a generation in Jackie's family, and she has reconnected with the tradition of her grandmothers.

Jackie very quickly became something of a fanatic about hooking. Her colleagues say she would rather hook than eat. She admits that she would hook 24 hours a day if she could get away with it. Unfortunately, the stress of her enthusiasm has taken its toll, and she suffers from painful carpal tunnel syndrome in her right wrist. To cope with this setback Jackie wears a brace on her hooking wrist and uses a special pencil hook that fits in the brace better than the traditional rounded wooden hook handle.

Jackie chooses patterns for her work that borrow from folk tradition, and she has a talent for combining colours to create rich effects. Often the background pattern of her mats attracts the eye almost as much as the foreground, giving the whole mat movement and interest that belies the simple nature of the design. There is a story behind many of the patterns Jackie has hooked into art.

The “Belted Hampshire Pig,” for instance, is a design based on a picture of an antique rug in a Vermont museum taken by hooking friend, Joan Stevenson. Joan also hooked this pattern, but the two finished mats are very different. Jackie feels that her talent is in the rendering of the pattern, and to be able to work her magic she prefers to have a pattern designed by someone skilled in drawing. Gail Snow, also a rug hooker and owner of a rug-hooking supply store in Charlottetown, provides many of the patterns Jackie uses. Hookers often share patterns among themselves because they know that each hooker will give it her own special quality. Sometimes, however, a favourite pattern is kept out of this communal sharing to keep it special.

(Previous page, 3.30) Jackie O’Connell in front of her favourite mat, “Primroses,” adapted from a greeting card.

“Tea Roses” (3.31) is hooked from a pre-printed, stamped pattern. The fabric for the roses was purchased ready to hook. The background is hooked from scrap material.

“Belted Hampshire Pig” (3.32) Jackie changed the position of the belt on her version of this pattern to reflect the pigs of this breed she has seen.

“Stained Glass Rooster” (3.33) from a pattern by Gail Snow.

Marilyn Matthews is the artist who hooked this wall hanging for Jackie (3.34). A student of Jackie’s, Marilyn has introduced a non-traditional materials to create a unique piece.

“Fall Cat” is part of a series Jackie is working on called “A Cat for All Seasons” (3.35).

Jackie’s nephew Ryan Oehlke drew “Harley” (3.36), and Gail Snow adapted it for hooking.

This stamped pattern (3.37) from the 1940s could be ordered through the Eatons Catalogue.



3.31



3.32



3.33

3.30 (previous page/ page précédente)
Jackie O’Connell is pictured with
“Primroses” / On voit Jackie O’Connell
avec “Primroses”

3.31, 3.32 & 3.33 Mats hooked by Jackie
O’Connell / Des tapis crochetés par
Jackie O’Connell



3.34



3.35



3.36

3.34 Mat hooked by Marilyn Matthews / Un tapis crocheté par Marilyn Matthews

3.35 & 3.36 Mats hooked by Jackie O'Connell / Des tapis crochetés par Jackie O'Connell



3.37 Stamped pattern from the 1940s / Carton préimprimé, datant des années 1940

Conclusion

Hooked mats could be called examples of ecological perfection. They are created entirely from natural materials that have already served a purpose and may otherwise be thrown out; the only energy they require is the creative energy and skill of the hooker; and they add warmth and beauty to the home simply by existing. The beautiful hooked mats that covered virtually all the floors in the homes of rural PEI were somewhat overlooked by the creators and their families as they absorbed the daily soil tracked in from mud roads and fields. Much more treasured were the patchwork quilts that could be kept clean and bright, up off the floor. Some Islanders disdained the usually dark mats and resented having to beat them regularly to remove the dust. The value of the mats was sometimes lost on a whole generation who rejected the traditions of their parents and wanted things new and modern. Fortunately, the passing of milestones and anniversaries often inspires the rebirth of interest in traditions, and, still more fortunately for us all, there were always women who simply loved to create mats out of the clothing their families could no longer use. Each mat hooker brings with her the wealth of her life experience and passes on the joy she found in working with her hands. Mat hookers have kept the art alive so that new generations can learn from them and introduce their own creative vision to hooked mats.

Acknowledgements

Resource People

- Shirlee Hogan, Millview
- Heather Tweedy, Vernon Bridge
- Nellie Patterson, Montague
- Hazel Grayham, Murray River
- Joan McGillivray, Summerside
- Mary Burnett, Charlottetown
- Mark Holden, Charlottetown
- Gail Snow, Charlottetown

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Images

3.1, 3.2

Courtesy of the Acadian Museum, Miscouche /
Courtoisie du Musée Acadien, Miscouche

3.3, 3.4

Courtesy the Prince Edward Island Artifactory and the
Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation
/ Courtoisie de l'Artifactory de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard
et Le Musée et la Fondation du patrimoine de l'Île-du-
Prince-Édouard

3.5

Photo by / photo par Anne Nicholson

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Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation
/ Courtoisie de l'Artifactory de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard
et Le Musée et la Fondation du patrimoine de l'Île-du-
Prince-Édouard

3.6

Courtesy of Heather Tweel / Courtoisie de Heather
Tweel

3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11

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3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15

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3.16, 3.17

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first hand

**Perspective Is
Everything: Women
Photographers of
20th-Century Prince
Edward Island**

**Researcher/Writer:
Sasha Mullally**

Introduction

Prince Edward Island women began creating art with photography almost as soon as photographic technology became available to middle-class incomes and patterns of leisure. This is remarkable, given that women stand in front of the camera as photographic subjects more often than they stand behind it as photographers themselves. Feminine faces and bodies have a common and intimate relationship with photography, while female minds and perspectives are less commonly recognized as the creative force behind photographic works of art. Yet photographers such as **Millie Gamble** of Tryon, **Margaret Mallett** of the Union Road, and **Edith Robinson** of Montrose have all made critical contributions to the development of photography in the province. All three have also had a strong impact on the development of how we photograph and thus represent Prince Edward Island in the 20th century. Through their work, they provide pictures that centre on a pastoral vision of our Island province.

PEI's women photographers were part of a broad, emerging enthusiasm for picture-taking. Photography is a quintessential 20th-century art form. "Shooting" images had just started to become a middle-class hobby by the early 20th century. By 1901, one could purchase a relatively inexpensive camera, such as Kodak-Eastman's "Brownie," for about \$1. This made photography accessible to North Americans of average income for the first time. However, in the days before Polaroids made instant photography commonplace and before commercial establishments offered inexpensive and quick photo development services, the photographer had to be familiar with darkrooms, chemicals, paper, and a multitude of development techniques as the technology became easier to replicate in home darkrooms. Picture-taking, therefore, was still time-consuming, requiring the acquisition of specific technical skills and a commitment of time and money. For these reasons, the art form was still not regularly and universally practised on Prince Edward Island until mid-century.*

* For a brief survey of the developments in amateur photography and a description of early 20th-century photographic technologies, see Lilly Koltrun, ed. *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839–1940* (New York and Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984). See also Scott Robson and Shelagh MacKenzie, *An Atlantic Album: Photographs of the Atlantic Provinces, Before 1920* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1985) for a selection of the photography of A. W. Mitchell, a photographer who recorded many scenes of turn-of-the-century Charlottetown.



4.1 Helen Bayfield

From the Duvernet Collection / De la collection Duvernet

Pictorialism and Professionalization

Earlier, in the 19th century, photography was mainly used to create portraits testifying to the status of the subject or the grandeur of monuments. Perhaps the labour-intensive production of the photographs when the technology was developing took away from its spontaneity, but in the medium's early years, it was used in much the same way as people had used paintings to render portraits.

For example, the Duvernet family of Charlottetown left an extensive family album that is housed in the provincial public archives. This album provides pictures of public buildings, farm property, and family members dressed and posed in ways that indicate their wealth and social status and depict traits such as studiousness or piety (4.1, 4.2, and 4.3).



4.2



4.3

4.2 Mary Dundas

4.3 Unidentified man, with his dogs / Homme non-identifié, avec des chiens

From the Duvernét Collection / De la collection Duvernét

In the first decade of the 20th century, the *photosecessionist* movement launched by photographic artist Alfred Steiglitz in New York City changed and expanded people's approach to photography. Stieglitz and other photosecessionists believed that the medium of photography had art potential specific to its own medium. In other words, they sought to use photography not only to record events as the Duvernets and other early photographers did, but also to evoke emotions and passions. The use of photography as a self-conscious art was born with this movement.

L. M. Montgomery as a photographer

The main difference between photography and painting is that photography is a more powerfully persuasive medium. Photos, more than other visual arts' renderings, are often taken as testaments to the "truth" of a person, place, or thing. Photographs are thought to capture something of someone on paper. We say someone "takes" a picture—as if she "takes" some of the person or scene away with her when she imprints an image on film. Photography's claim to show the "truth" unmediated by the hand of an artist—the photographer—proved to be the medium's greatest source of appeal to amateur photographers such as L. M. Montgomery. Shown here is a self-portrait, taken by Montgomery, in "her own dear room" at home in Cavendish.

As do her romantic children's novels, Montgomery's photographs record the beauty of her home province and the joys of the people and events in her life. This self-portrait (4.4) shows Montgomery in finery, posed in a whimsical fashion, as perhaps the writer would see herself. This photo is her showing of an essential "truth" of her personality, achieved through careful selection of costume and eclectic display of familiar and exotic objects behind her. This is a part, at least, of the person she conceived herself to be: a woman of taste, beautiful (perhaps a bit mysterious), well-travelled, and certainly well-read. It is probably no coincidence that Montgomery, the author, chose to background her self-portrait with a bookshelf.



4.4 L. M. Montgomery's posed photograph. / Photographie posée de L. M. Montgomery

Pictorialism and photography

We can see that the artistic uses of photography were consistently imbued with the perception that photography tells the truth. One finds women photographic artists on Prince Edward Island powerfully compelled to use this medium to render the “truths” of how their cultural, material, and natural worlds appeared to them. They took photographs to show their real lives, to record traditions and events, and to have the photos speak to their social environment, all given through the prism of their minds’ eye. Few of the women in this history created art with photography that was not linked to a representation of something real. In this way, their work is closely associated with the pictorial tradition in photography.

This pictorialism makes the study of the history of women and photography doubly interesting because each collection has the potential to tell us something personal about female experiences of Island life. This is the main appeal of the photographs taken by Millie Gamble of Tryon, a woman photographer who learned to take photographs on her own. Later, she and other women played a role in the professionalization of photography in the province under the auspices of local Camera Clubs; they likewise played a role as educators and purveyors of a new craft that had been largely invisible. The locally award-winning works of Margaret Mallett of the Charlottetown Camera Club, in all their pastoral beauty, remain largely uncollected and many have even been lost, although the photographs of buildings and monuments she took for hire and her renderings of indigenous flora of Prince Edward Island often appear on the pages of historical albums and nature publications. Interesting also is a profound shift in focus among women photographers in the later 20th century. The photographs of Edith Robinson are still focussed on local and particular subject matter, but they illuminate a regional identity, as opposed to the female community of Gamble’s work or the pastoral idealism of Mallett’s. Out of a huge and diverse body of photographs, many shown locally at a variety of galleries and exhibits, it is interesting to see which of Robinson’s photographs are selected for publication by national presses. Robinson’s private collection of photos is truly eclectic, and, at times, her photographs are wonderfully original in their representations of rural Prince Edward Island; the *corpus* of her published work seems, by contrast, surprisingly narrow and even traditional. It is

the recognizable “Islandness” of her photographs that made them valuable to a wider audience, and hence to national publishers.

Thus, professionalization of the art form and the economics that went with it exerted a guiding hand on the visions of Prince Edward Island attributed to Island women. This brief history is a first step in contextualizing the work of women photographers, showing change and continuity in photography over the course of the century; it is a first attempt to clean the collective lens of their work, which was broader and deeper and offered more interesting views and perspectives of Prince Edward Island than anyone might suspect.

Mildred (Millie) Gamble

Mildred (Millie) Gamble was born in 1887 in Cascumpec, Prince Edward Island. Her family moved to Tryon when she was young, and Millie subsequently spent most of her active life in that community. Gamble is part of a first generation of Islanders to engage in amateur photography. Why Gamble chose photography as a hobby is unclear, but it seems she made pictures to record events, people, and Island life—much as we take pictures for family albums today to help us remember occasions and people close to us—but it is also obvious she did it with the purpose of making art. Gamble pursued the avocation of photography as an artist would: creating beautiful and meaningful images that pleased her. The subjects of her photos are highly personal but indicate an artist’s eye for compositional balance and control of visual detail. Gamble’s photographs are also informed by the “pictorial tradition” that sought, above all else, to preserve an idealized record of a way of life.

Gamble began to take pictures in 1904, when she was given a camera by an uncle whom she visited one summer in Truro, Nova Scotia. The camera delighted Millie, and the gift began her lifelong love of photography. The Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown recently exhibited the Gamble collection, which comprises a large body of pictures showing a deep love of family and communal relations. During her own life, however, she never “showed” her photographs. Appreciation for her art is posthumous.

She did not make her living by photography. In 1904, when her photography began, Millie Gamble was also beginning her first teaching job. Gamble taught in

various one-room schoolhouses in her area of Prince Edward Island from 1904 to 1919.

Her favourite photographic subjects right from the beginning were children, including the children at Tryon school, shown below (4.5).

Gamble's pictures also celebrate female social relations, as in this photo where Millie and three of her friends are participating in the tradition of formally paying a call to a new bride (4.6).

In contrast to the 19th-century use of photography as a means to record progress and prosperity, Gamble's early 20th-century photographs attempt to represent a vision of rural family life, idealized childhood, and female communal relations. Whereas the 19th-century pictures of the Duvernet family were urban and formalized, Gamble's are rural and are posed informally. This is a critical change in the message of photographs: even though they do not represent the "everyday," the informality of Gamble's photos makes them seem more "real" than the pictures in the Duvernet album. Her photographs are her way of making her most positive experiences of Island life the most prominent part of her own and, perhaps, the collective memory: her happy school children eating ice cream at a local store; Millie and a group of friends going to call on a new bride, dressed in their best clothes. It is probably safe to say that her children were not always so well-behaved, nor did they normally go on ice-cream outings

with their teacher, nor did she and her friends have regular occasion to wear their best hats. But what she photographed is what will remain prominent in Gamble's memory of her time and place, and it will colour how we view her life and world from the other end of the 20th century.

Gamble's posed portraits

Her idealization is nowhere more prominent than in how she pictures her two nieces, Adelaide and Hope Ives. The two little girls feature in the majority of her works. These photos are more than posed pictures of two little girls by their proud aunt.

Gamble artfully situates her nieces in favourite or new costumes to mark the passing of the seasons of the year. These photographs also provide a record of their growth from little girls to bigger girls. The composition of this photograph is apparently off-centre, until one notices the "lost bear" caught in the trees to the viewer's left (4.7).

Again, we see how Gamble's photographs capture the ideal of little girlhood, and they mark the passing of time by marking how her nieces grow—the years of their lives through the seasons of the year (4.8).

We see Gamble's hand and artistic eye at work in this photograph where the little girls are arranged on top of haystacks, somewhere they would not normally have chosen to sit in their good dresses had their aunt not



4.5 *Lyman's Store*, n.d. / *Le magasin de Lyman*, non datée - Millie Gamble

4.6 *My favourite photo - Going to Call on the Bride*, n.d. / *Ma photo préférée - Visite chez la mariée*, non datée - Millie Gamble



4.6



4.7



4.8



4.9

4.7 *Fall Costume, c. 1912 / Costume d'automne, vers 1912* - Millie Gamble

4.8 *Hope and Adelaide Ives, c.1910 / Hope et Adelaide Ives, vers 1910* - Millie Gamble

4.9 *Thrashing. Fred Gamble, George Pratt, Adelaide and Hope Ives, c. 1910 / Battage du grain. Fred Gamble, George Pratt, Adelaide et Hope Ives, vers 1910* - Millie Gamble

wanted to take a picture. Again, the idea was to record a “typical” fall day and to situate her nieces against the backdrop of normal seasonal activity (4.9 and 4.10).

Although obviously staged, artistic works such as these have great emotional integrity. Even if they do not offer a picture of everyday life, as visions of ideals, they represent personal sentiment with absolute accuracy.

Rural PEI through Gamble’s lens



4.10 *The three girls / Les trois filles* - Millie Gamble

Gamble was also interested in “creating” ideal Island homes and lives in her photographs. Her works faithfully evoke her pride of place. Here, Gamble captures a summer view of a neighbour’s home in Tryon. The photo is taken from the side with the most trees (indicating how settled and prosperous the property is, signifying also its ability to offer shelter and comfort) (4.11).

Her uncle’s pride in a favourite young horse is central to this “brag” photograph. Both of them are groomed and ready for Millie’s camera to make them immortal (4.12).

Photos like the one below idealize “simple” pleasures like tea with neighbours that were a part of rural life on a family farm (4.13).

In 1919, Gamble trained to be a nurse at the Winnipeg General Hospital, graduating in 1922. She returned to her home in Tryon and worked at private and hospital nursing until she retired in 1949. Gamble is described as having had “a great sense of humour . . . a ‘joie de vivre’ that was infectious and that brightened the lives

of those she touched” (Obituary 24). She was an active member of the Tryon United Baptist Church, the local Women’s Institute, and a local missionary society.

Throughout her life, Gamble had the income and the wide social contacts that her profession provided her to allow her to pursue photography as a hobby. She cultivated an active life in her rural community and a pride of family and community that is celebrated in her work and that provided a touchstone for her daily activities. She died in March of 1986, just 10 months shy of her 100th birthday. But she lived to see her work shown, and then published, by the London Regional Art Gallery in Ontario, who showed her work in the spring of 1983 as part of an installation on *Rediscovering Canadian Women Photographers, 1841–1941* (see pages 5–6, 22–23).

The Camera Clubs

Professional photographers emerge

By the 1950s, the work of amateur photographers was formalized through the artistic companionship and artistic influence of local “Camera Clubs.” By mid-century, Prince Edward Island was home to three Camera Clubs, one each in Freetown-Bedeque, Summerside, and Charlottetown. From October to May, the 15 to 20 members of the Charlottetown Camera Club would meet at the local YMCA, or occasionally at the home of one of their members, to discuss photography. These creative groups formed a nexus of technical, artistic, and practical support for amateur and professional photographic work on the Island. The membership, of which one third were women, would select monthly themes for their photographic work, alternating between colour photography and black and white, action and still life, portrait and landscape, in their choice of themes. They would engage in competitions within the club, as well as with the other two Camera Clubs on Prince Edward Island. Occasionally, they would send off particularly good shots to competitions in other provinces. This gave photography an informal and friendly locus for development in the province in the days before advances in developing technology and marketing made photography commonplace and universally accessible.



4.11



4.12



4.13

4.11 *Jack Nelder's Farm*, c. 1912 / *Ferme de Jack Nelder*, vers 1912 - Millie Gamble

4.12 *Charlie Nelder and Darkie*, n.d. / *Charlie Nelder et Darkie*, non datée - Millie Gamble

4.13 *Tea with neighbours*, n.d. / *Prendre le thé avec des voisins*, non datée - Millie Gamble

Margaret Mallett

Perhaps because she took photographs of people for a living, Margaret Mallett’s artistic approach to photography focussed on nature. She favoured a black and white medium for her photography. Mallett was an expert in the use of light and shadow, and she could manipulate the colour and texture of photographs in the developing process. She often subtly hand-coloured her black and white prints (4.14).

The lighthouse below (4.15) is one of her later works, in which she was experimenting with stronger colours. The bright red cliffs of Prince Edward Island are stark subject matter for someone who favoured the more muted hues of green and brown of the woods.

Mallett delighted in nature and was a founding member of the Island Nature Trust. She is remembered by her family as a “conservationist before her time.” She was an active member of the Natural History Society. Some of her photographs were published in a book called *Wildflowers of Prince Edward Island*, published by Ragweed Press in the 1990s (4.16).

Mallett’s vision of rural PEI

The photos she did for hire—photographs of churches and other public monuments as well as photographs of flowers in the wild and in cultivation—constitute the largest part of her work still extant. The art photography taken in her private time is largely lost. These scenic, textured photos are highly personalized images of her vision of rural Island life. Unlike Gamble and Montgomery,

Mallett’s landscapes have no people in them. Instead, Mallett favoured pastoral scenes. However, while they are landscape photos, the presence of the family farm and of other people is understood to be near the brooks, lighthouses, and woodland roads that made her favourite compositions (4.17 and 4.18).

Mallett’s biography can offer insight on her attachment to rural life. Margaret Mallett was born in 1911 and grew up on the Union Road in rural PEI, where she is also buried. She was the youngest of four children, and it was Margaret who looked after her parents as they aged. The pastoral vision she rendered in her photographs grew out of memories from her own childhood, and, since much of her early adulthood was



4.14



4.15



4.16

4.14 *The Brook*, n.d. / *Le ruisseau*, non datée - Margaret Mallett

4.15 *Blockhouse Point*, n.d. / *Blockhouse Point*, non datée - Margaret Mallett

4.16 From/Extrait de *Wildflowers of Prince Edward Island*. Charlottetown: Ragweed - Margaret Mallett

also spent in rural PEI, it is no wonder that these scenes and this life would remain prominent in her works of photography. In 1947, upon the death of her father, she moved to Fitzroy Street in Charlottetown. She displayed an interest in photography in her early adult life and used to take baby pictures for neighbours and friends. From there, she progressed into scenery. It was after moving to Charlottetown that she began to photograph professionally. She is remembered by her family as a staunchly independent and “incredibly self-sufficient” woman, a creative person who painted and drew, and who enjoyed her family and large circle of friends as well as the quiet of the woods. She would take her nieces and nephews on long walks with photography breaks, fuelled by abundant lunches packed in her personally designed “picnic box.” Her particularist mind loved the exacting discipline of the perfectly framed and developed photograph. It also lent to a love of words, spelling, and grammar. She frequently quoted and made up humorous poems and limericks for her nieces and nephews.

Despite her gregariousness, Mallett did not often discuss her ideas and opinions about her art. Her friends included photographer Edith Robinson, also featured in this history. Robinson remembers many pieces of her work, such as a particularly poignant shot of a mother duck with her ducklings in a farmyard pond. “Some of these photographs she did, they made you feel warm,” Robinson remembered. “They pulled something out of you.” Like her views and opinions, much of Mallett’s work is lost, including a series of photographs of all the railroad stations on Prince Edward Island. But her pastoral legacy lives on in her cataloguing of faces at PWC, in her loving record of the flora of Prince Edward Island, and in all her photographs that depict her love of natural history, which she preserved for future generations of Islanders.

Edith Robinson

Edith Robinson remembers Margaret Mallett as an early mentor and close friend with whom she would occasionally go on photography excursions (4.19).

Robinson remembers that she was preparing to take a picture of this scene when Mallett jumped into the snow in front. “Not enough texture!” Mallett criticized, and proceeded to plow through the path in front of Robinson’s camera. Robinson crossly decided to include Mallett’s receding back in her “texturized” photograph



4.17



4.18

4.17 *The Woodland Lane*, n.d. / *Le chemin forestier*, non datée - Margaret Mallett

4.18 *Sheep*, detail, n.d. / *Moutons*, détail, non datée - Margaret Mallett

of PEI's snowy woods. Margaret Mallett was right about the texture, Robinson now fondly admits, and this photograph is one of her favourites, prominently displayed on the wall in her living room.

Robinson's life and work are better-remembered than Mallett's, probably due to timing and the professionalization of photography, which made greater success possible for Robinson as an "Island" photographer. Robinson was born Edith Hardy in Montrose in 1925. She is a self-taught photographer, pursuing it as a consuming hobby and art since her husband's death in 1961. Faced with the keep of her three children, Robinson thought she should choose an occupation that would allow her to stay home with them, as opposed to returning to her previous work as a hairdresser. She recalls the hours she spent learning about developing film by trial and error in a dusty, clay-floored basement jam closet her landlady had let her convert into a darkroom. Only a draped piece of fabric separated her work space from the coal bin, and she further recalls, "Film was developed and contact prints were made in the glow of the red-filtered light from a candle."

Robinson remembers the camaraderie of the Camera Club as an important part of her early experimentation with photography. One day, Robinson was hired to photograph a wedding, and there "was no looking back." Over the course of the rest of her career, she would combine occasional work as a photographer for various private functions and work for a variety of public

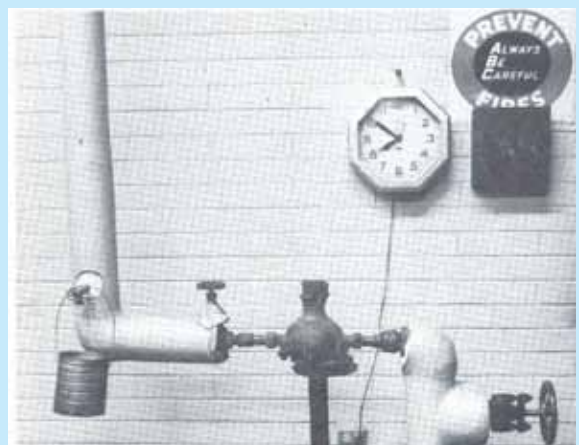
institutions with her pursuit of photography as an art in her spare time.

The pictorial tradition remains strong in Robinson's work. She maintains, "One of the things that I like about photography is the essence of truth I look for in a photograph. There is no razzle dazzle, just the plain truth" (4.20 and 4.21). She has a ready eye for compositional balance and took a course from painter Henry Purdy, RCA, at the PEI Vocational School in order to apply a painterly approach to the use of light and texture in her photographic work. While still in her formative years as a photographer, she also travelled to Indiana to take courses at the Winona School of Professional Photography. Throughout her career, she has maintained membership in the Maritime Professional Photographers Association as well as the Professional Photographers of America and Canada. Going to professional workshops, taking the time to perfect her craft, and learning new techniques with other visual artists meant Robinson achieved a professional approach that did not go unrecognized by her peers.

Some of her photographs were included in a folder presented to Queen Elizabeth II in 1973 to mark the centennial of Prince Edward Island's entry into Confederation with Canada. Robinson was on special assignment with the Charlottetown *Guardian* to cover the Royal Visit, and she remembers the Queen approaching her at an outdoor reception to chat about the fine day and the quality of the light for her photography.



4.19 Photo of Margaret Mallett in the woods, walking ahead of Robinson / Photo de Margaret Mallett en forêt, marchant devant Robinson



4.20 *Clock/Drip / Horloge/goutte* - Edith Robinson



4.21 *Switch / Interrupteur* - Edith Robinson



4.22



4.23



4.24

4.22, 4.23, 4.24 From / Extrait de *Prince Edward Island: Photographs by Wayne Barrett and Edith Robinson*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Robinson's Professional Career

Over the course of her career, Robinson has had shows at the Charlottetown Gallery-on-Demand and Phoenix Gallery (both one-woman shows); the University of Prince Edward Island (part of a four-person show); the Confederation Centre of the Arts (as part of their "Island Images" exhibit); and the 1983 PEI Acquisition Exhibition at the Holland College School of Visual Arts (see *Island Visual Artists* 63). She is also recognized as a teacher and instructor with much to offer. Edith Robinson has taught night classes on photography at Holland College and has given seminars on photography for Elderhostel International.

The photographic work that made her career and for which Edith Robinson is best known was a 1977 coffee table book designed for tourist consumption and featuring her photographs. Robinson had connections to the PEI Heritage Foundation (later known as the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation), and was referred by the Foundation to Oxford University Press when they expressed an interest in publishing a colour book of photographs about Prince Edward Island. Robinson then approached fellow photographer Wayne Barrett to collaborate on the project. In 1977, the book was published, the first of three publications that would carry her photographs to national audiences (4.22, 4.23, and 4.24).*

* All photographs attributed to Edith Robinson are from *Prince Edward Island: Photographs by Wayne Barrett and Edith Robinson* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977). According to Robinson, some of the photographs are misattributed, but a reader can compensate for this error because Robinson's compositions are identifiable as the more idiosyncratic, "local" shots.

This first book was to focus exclusively on representing Prince Edward Island. This meant the material the two photographers selected had to include pictures of landmark buildings, views of Cavendish Beach, and other notable “Island” scenes. This formed and moulded the creative theme of the book at the expense of some of the less identifiable but perhaps more interesting and unusual shots of Prince Edward Island.

Nonetheless, within these parameters and expectations, it is interesting the degree to which Robinson took what creative and interpretive license she did have and focussed it on the local and the particular. Whereas some artists would have represented PEI through pictures of sweeping dunes, crashing waves, and rolling hills of potatoes,

Robinson chose photographs of everyday people, places, and things whose beauty is all around us but that we often overlook. Robinson’s interest in the “mundane” beauty of Prince Edward Island stands out amid the requisite photos of Province House, Cavendish Beach, Elephant Rock, and other well-known sites one would expect to be a part of any pictorial representation of the Island.

Robinson’s representation of Island life

Robinson once said, “I try to take photographs of things that people don’t really look at. The details can be extremely exciting” (see *Island Visual Artists* 63). Her eye for details in Island scenery meant that she made the only contributions to the book that were not strictly scenic.

There is a communal air to how she represents these Rustico fishermen as they fillet mackerel on the wharfside (4.25). Likewise, her representation of Irish moss gathering on the North Shore chooses to depict Islanders engaged in productive roles and highlights the operative nature of traditional work.

This photograph of Irish moss gathering (4.26) had a particular resonance with the publishers of a subsequent book of photographs showcasing Canada, in which this photo stands as the single representative photograph for Prince Edward Island.

Robinson has been described as “a woman in love with her surroundings,” and her first exhibit, at the



4.25



4.26

4.25, 4.26 From / Extrait de *Prince Edward Island: Photographs by Wayne Barrett and Edith Robinson*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Gallery-on-Demand in 1979, showcased a body of work that has a “real feel for the Island way of life” (see “Edith Robinson” n.p.) What gave her this “feel”; what accounted for her particular eye for detail?

Robinson has written, “Looking back at my work I feel my environment of those days influenced me to want to understand visually the quiet moments of the landscape, the unit of a family, highlighting details often overlooked as commonplace” (see *Twelve Photographers* 7). She grew up in western Prince Edward Island, in the community of Montrose, and so the scenes of the fishermen and the Irish moss-gatherers resonated with her memories of childhood. They kept her in touch with her beginnings. She particularly liked the picture of the Irish moss-gathering because it showed the entire process behind Irish moss harvesting. It shows a man picking through the moss, a horse in the background hauling seaweed out of the water, and other men forking loads of moss into piles.

It shows the complete action of the harvest, the miracle of a traditional industry alive and thriving in a modern world. It was brilliant in its conception and rendering, and it teased out and showed in the best light the most deeply entrenched idea of Prince Edward Island held by audiences elsewhere in Canada.

And therein lies the struggle of the Island photographer, regardless of gender, in the late 20th century of tourism and the selling of scenery. It is remarkable how, out of her broad and diverse photographic works, it is only photographs of Islanders in traditional industries—men at work on wharfs or labouring alongside horses on the beach, gathering moss—that reach the most widespread publication. Despite how many more visions and particularly local views there are to appreciate about her photographic perspective, her published work has this foregrounded “Island” character in all photography books for a national audience. Ironically, this includes a high-profile book of Canadian women photographers. Published in 1975 by the National Film Board of Canada, this book of still photography, which was making a political statement in the International Women’s Year, chose a compositionally excellent but subjectively conservative photograph of a man on a tractor plowing a potato field (4.27).

This photograph stands in stark contrast alongside pages of edgy photographs of women’s bodies and urban scenes which sought to challenge gender politics. It is clear that Robinson’s work was selected on the value of its “Islandness,” and the publishers chose not to engage with the diversity of perspective represented in the deep drawers of her unpublished portfolio.

But throughout the 1970s, Robinson’s work in all its diversity was shown locally—in galleries and exhibits, alone and with colleagues—here on Prince Edward Island. Like the work of Mallett and Gamble, her photographs are an idealistic tribute to the place and people of our province.



4.27 From / Extrait de *Prince Edward Island: Photographs* by Wayne Barrett and Edith Robinson. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Conclusion

Photographers such as L. M. Montgomery, Millie Gamble, Margaret Mallett, and Edith Robinson are four very different women; together, their works and days spanned most of the 20th century. All four favoured and are generally remembered for their interest in the particular and the local. Their art tends to strongly and regularly engage with places and people on PEI familiar to them, shooting their photographs from the perspectives of the early century, like Montgomery and Gamble; the mid century, like Mallett; and the late century, like Robinson.

Often, people make allegorical reference to Prince Edward Island as a “garden.” All four women were able to capture the uniqueness of individual communities in ways which helped form the perception of self that Islanders project to the rest of the nation and beyond. But they also were able to show the diversity within and hidden beauties of our “garden.” More than anything else, their work across the century shows that the obscure, the local, the mundane, and the everyday aspects of life in our garden are important and beautiful and should be remembered.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Harry Holman for his excellent leads and interpretive insight on the history of photography on Prince Edward Island. Most of the information on the Millie Gamble and Charlottetown Camera Club was taken from the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island. Jill MacMicken-Wilson was extremely helpful in helping me find this material. I am indebted also to Ann and Deryk Mallett for the photographs taken by Margaret Mallett, as well as Jean MacGuey, Cathy Parkman, and Doug Parkman for their help piecing together her biography and helping me understand the meaning photography had in her life. I would also like to thank Edith Robinson for her memories and the use of her photographs in this history.

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Rosenblum, Naomi. *A History of Women Photographers*. Paris and New York: Abbeville Press, 1994.

Gover, C. Jane. *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.

For analyses and history of local studies of women and photography (in America), see:

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Garner, Gretchen. *Reclaiming Paradise: American Women Photograph the Land*. Duluth, MN: Tweed Museum of Art, 1987.

Advanced readers may wish to read more on the cultural contexts of photography to gain greater insight into the photographic art and cultural meaning of “taking pictures.” I suggest:

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger. London: British Broadcasting Corporation; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. [also available as a video-recording]

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977.

first hand

**And an interesting new book on representations
of women in photographs by a famous woman
photographer:**

Liebovitz, Annie [with Susan Sontag]. *Women*. New York:
Random House, 1999.

Images

4.1, 4.2, 4.3

Courtesy of the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island,
Duvernet Collection, ACC 3466 / Courtoisie du Bureau
des archives et des documents publics de l'Île-du-
Prince-Édouard, Collection Duvernet, ACC 346677

4.4

Photo by / Photo par L. M. Montgomery
University of Guelph Collection

4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13

Courtesy of the Public Archives of Prince Edward Island,
Millie Gamble Collection, ACC 2667 / Courtoisie du
Bureau des archives et des documents publics de l'Île-
du-Prince-Édouard, Collection Millie Gamble, ACC 2667

4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18

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4.19, 4.20, 4.21, 4.22, 4.23, 4.24, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27

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first hand

**Pieces of History:
20th-Century Quilting
in Prince Edward Island**

**Researchers/Writers:
Ann-Louise Beaumont and
Edie Zakem**

Introduction

Quilts, like many items in the home that are often taken for granted, are the artistic expression of their creators. Women have always used imagination and the materials at hand to create beauty. While men have quilted or collaborated with women, quilting is overwhelmingly an art practised by women.

The quilting world spans many interests, and there are many meanings of quilting. The quilt historian and quilt restorer treasure continuity and communion of thought with previous generations of women. Whether a quilter is a traditionalist who speaks through the graphic qualities and colours of a *geometric* design or an innovator dealing with form and colour relationships, the quilter's personality shines through. Each aspect of the art form reveals the maker's spirit. From Edith (Edie) Zakem's perspective as a quilter, the real value of a quilt is that it is the visible expression of the quiltmaker's soul: this is the intangible of a quilt. The visual and practical appeal are important but almost secondary.

Generally, a *quilt* consists of *batting* (a filling) sandwiched between a *fabric top* and a *backing*. The stitching that holds together top, batting, and backing is actually what is referred to as "*quilting*." At the two ends of the spectrum of quilt use, the *utility bed-quilt*, made quickly, has warmth as its major purpose, while the *art quilt* wall-hanging is made to exhibit. Other quilts combine both functionality and beauty. There are many books and teachers available to teach the beginner how to quilt. A good general reference on quilting is *Quilter's Complete Guide* by Marianne Fons and Liz Porter (1993).

Virtually every fabric has been used in quilts at one time or another, including wools, silks, polyester-cotton blends, and polyester knits. As one extreme example of use of varied fabrics, the Victorian *crazy quilt* popular from 1875 to 1925 used irregular pieces of wool, silks, velvets, and other types of fabric all in the same quilt, then covered the edges of the pieces with elaborate embroidery. Today, 100 per cent cotton is a preferred quilt top fabric among quilters because it is easy to work with, it launders easily, and it is available in many colours and prints. The fabric used for the backing of quilts has generally been considered less important, since it would not be seen. On the back of old quilts can be found pieces of cloth that were originally flour, sugar, or feed sacks.

A quilt's batting can be wool, cotton, polyester, polyester-cotton combinations, or—if necessity dictated—old clothes and rags. Edna MacKinnon of the Museum of Acadian Life in Miscouche recalled to Sherri Davidson that her mother would use underwear or old shirts as batting, too: "They would take the good parts of shirts and discard the bad parts like the elbows. They used anything for warmth." Women all over the world have used discarded clothes as batting. In Australia, quilts filled with rags and old clothes are called "waggas." Wool blankets, flannel sheets, and even old quilts may be used in the centre of a quilt's fabric sandwich.

The quilting, a running stitch joining the three layers, is responsible for the 3-dimensional texture of a quilt. Quilting can be done by hand or by machine. Quilts may also be quickly tied at intervals across the quilt. While the controversy of machine versus hand quilting is a late 20th-century debate, with some quilters insisting that quilting must be done by hand and others admitting machine-quilting, evidence shows that women who had early sewing machines quilted with them as well as using them to assemble the quilt tops.

The perimeter of a quilt is generally covered with *binding*, fabric to cover the edges of the quilt sandwich.

A quilt's visual interest is usually in its top, which can be created using several different styles and methods. Four of the most recognizable types of quilt top are *wholecloth*, *pieced*, *appliqué*, and *embroidered*. On the quilt top, additional visual interest is created by the quilting, the patterns and designs stitched through the fabric. A *wholecloth* quilt is a plain piece of fabric with the design in the quilting only. A *pieced* quilt top is made by sewing together squares, triangles, diamonds, hexagons, or other geometric forms; some pieced quilts even include curved pieces. The general appearance of a pieced quilt is geometric and usually symmetrical. To *piece* means to sew the geometric shapes together. The pieced quilt may feature an *all-over pattern* that repeats itself all over the surface of the quilt top, or its pattern may be divided into *blocks*, which are usually square. Compared to the pieced quilt, an *appliqué* quilt presents an entirely different appearance, because literally any shape of fabric can be cut out and applied to the quilt top as a patch. First, the raw cut edges of the patch are turned under so that they do not show, and then the patch is stitched on top of a background fabric.

Often flowers are depicted on appliqué quilts—some stylized, others botanically accurate. *Embroidered* quilts are yet another variation. Their basic top may be wholecloth or pieced in blocks, but their design is in embroidered pictures stitched onto the surface.

Common quilt patterns are often given descriptive names such as Nine Patch (describing a square composed of nine small squares) or log cabin (describing a central square framed by rectangular strips in a pattern built up like a log cabin would be). A common pattern often has more than one name, varying depending on the region or the creator.

The embellishment of quilts, in addition to the colour design and quilting, is a significant method of artistic expression. Quilts have been decorated with embroidery, painting, beads, metallic threads, silk ribbon embroidery, stencils (originally in the 1820s to the 1840s but also a 20th-century method), fabric dyes to create original fabric designs, photo transfer, computer printing on fabric, and permanent inks (used first in the 1840s and still popular today).

Quilting in the 20th Century

For ease of discussion, quilt historians often divide a century into quarters, and while a style may be popular in a particular quarter, quilters may continue to make it in later quarters, since good design never dies. PEI quilters followed the general North American trends. There are many excellent quilt history books available. *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* by Barbara Brackman (1989) and *300 Years of Canada's Quilts* by Mary Conroy (1976) are particularly good.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, styles including wool utility quilts and comforters, silk or wool show quilts, crazy quilts, and foundation patchwork such as the log cabin, red and white quilts, blue and white quilts, and dark (black, blue, burgundy) cotton quilts were carried over from the last quarter of the 19th century. The patterns chosen were generally pieced. An effect of the First World War can be seen in the poor, thin quality of many fabrics pieced into quilts of this period.

During the second quarter of the century, colours lightened due to developments in dye technology. Pastels (pink, blue, peach, and lilac) became popular,



5.1 Quilt back, made by Mrs. Shrieve Millar (1878–1965) / Doublure de courtepointe fabriquée par Mme Shrieve Millar (1878–1965)



5.2 Rotary cutter / Coupeuse rotative

as did bright colours such as yellow. Nile green, a dull blue green, is a characteristic colour of this quarter. Quilt designers produced sophisticated floral appliqué quilts, available in patterns and quilt kits. Patterns such as Dresden Plate, Grandmother's Flower Garden, Dutch Girl and Boy (also known as Sunbonnet Sue and Overall Bill) were popular.

The hardships of the 1930s' Depression can be seen in quilts made from scraps with backings of flour, sugar, and feed sacks. A photograph provided by Mary Burnett shows a quilt back made from a flour sack, which reads "Lakeside Milling Co. Limited, Toronto—Canada 98 lbs when packed. This flour contains improvers." It was made by Mrs. Shrieve Millar, circa 1965.

In her book, *The Home Place: Life in Rural Prince Edward Island in the 1920s and 30s*, Jean Halliday MacKay, recalling Depression days, remembers the recycling necessary during hard times:

Discarded items were made into quilt squares,

or used for hooking or braiding mats in families where these skills were practiced, and badly worn garments became scrubbing cloths. Today quilts and mats are made with new fabric and yarn and are almost an art form. In my childhood, they were necessary for warmth; many of them were very attractive and lasted for years.

During the Second World War, many Red Cross quilts went abroad. In fact, according to Sherri Davidson's research, the PEI Women's Institutes gathered or made 9,260 quilts for delivery overseas.

After the Second World War, people enjoyed the expanding domestic economy and wanted new machine-made items. Consequently, the interest in quilting declined, but it did not die out. Printed fabrics of the late 1940s and the 1950s had larger motifs than those of the first quarter century, and these distinguished the quilts of the period. The 1970s brought a revival of interest in quilting, and the *art quilt*, intended for the wall, was born during this decade. The art inherent in quilts—art that is especially noticeable when the quilt is hung on the wall—was finally recognized.

The last quarter of the 20th century saw an explosion in interest in quilting. The art quilt movement developed. Pieced, appliquéd, and quilted garments were produced as wearable art. Modern art quilts distinguished themselves from the Victorian show quilts of the previous century with the appearance in some quilts of philosophical statements, ideas, or messages in their images, rather than strictly decorative or commemorative symbolism. Other art quilts became *pictorial*, depicting landscapes, people, and animals. The Baltimore album-style appliqué revival brought new interest in appliqué. What is more, in the last quarter of the last century, quilt history became a legitimate field of inquiry.

Simultaneously in the final quarter of the century, there was a significant revolution in the technology and tools that support quilting. Rotary cutters (5.2), transparent rulers with grids, and self-healing mats eliminated scissors and changed the way the geometric shapes for pieced quilts are cut out.

The use of a paper foundation when piecing was modernized. Iron-on fusible web containing a heat-sensitive glue simplified appliqué. Sewing machines

with special free-motion features facilitated machine-quilting, as did invisible plastic thread. Embellishment techniques such as metallic thread and beads (throwbacks to Victorian quilts) were used in innovative ways. Quilting software such as QuiltPro and Electric Quilt became useful aids in quilt design. Computerized sewing machines also appeared. Methods were developed to transfer photographs, computer images, and text to fabrics.

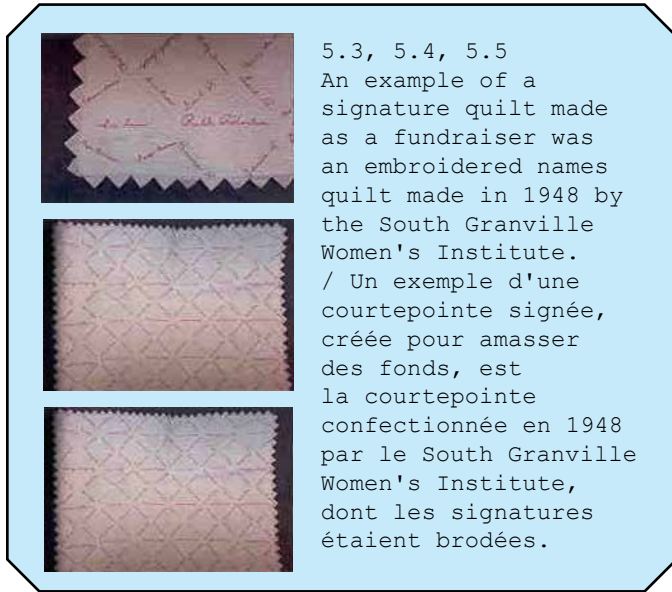
At a recent round table discussion at the Preconference QuiltCanada 2000, Valerie Header reported that in the United States, \$1.5 billion US was spent annually on quilting. The figure was based on results of a mid-1990s *Quilters Newsletter Magazine* survey. In Canada, where our population is approximately ten per cent that of the United States, it would be reasonable to guess that quilters spend about \$1.5 million annually, if interest in quilting in Canada is comparable.

Depending on one's viewpoint, the developments in the last quarter of the century can be considered either revolutionary or excessive. If a quilter were tool-oriented, the technological developments were exciting. Others certainly felt, with good reason, that it was an age of excess. Women had considerable disposable income and spent lavishly on tools, materials, training classes, and, especially, books. The proliferation of quilting books was remarkable. Books were written on every conceivable aspect and technique, and for every opinion, technical or otherwise, there was a contrary view. Far more than one could ever use or need was readily available.

It is still too early to be able to definitively assess the last quarter of the 20th century; more time needs to pass for quilters and quilt historians to pass objective judgement on the late 1900s.

Women's role in quilting

Home sewing has traditionally been women's work, and few men have participated in the craft. In the 19th century, recuperating soldiers made quilts, often from military uniform fabric. From time to time, husbands collaborated with their wives on quilts, sometimes becoming quilters themselves. Michael James, an important American quilt artist, is responsible, with many others, for the art quilt. However, these men have been the exceptions. In researching this project,



5.3, 5.4, 5.5
An example of a signature quilt made as a fundraiser was an embroidered names quilt made in 1948 by the South Granville Women's Institute.
/ Un exemple d'une courtepointe signée, créée pour amasser des fonds, est la courtepointe confectionnée en 1948 par le South Granville Women's Institute, dont les signatures étaient brodées.

we did not learn of any men involved in quilting in PEI. For the most part, women made bed-quilts for their families and, for many women, quilting was a way to make money, either privately or on behalf of community organizations or institutions.

Women have produced quilts for homes, and artists have created art quilts for commerce and commission. Gift and craft shops on PEI frequently offer quilted articles by individual quilters for sale on consignment. To create quilts for home and for sale, women have always quilted individually in the home; they have also come together in informal groups for quilting bees with friends or, more formally, in women's organizations.

Church groups such as St. Mark's Anglican Church Guild in Kensington hold quilt shows offering quilts for sale. The majority of the quilts at a recent May 2000 show were hand-quilted full bed-quilts in traditional patterns. Quilts were also for sale at the quilt show held in June 2000 by the Milton Community Hall to raise money for a new roof. Again, the majority were full bed-quilts in traditional patterns. There were approximately 100 items in each show, proving that the rural communities are doing an excellent job both preserving traditional quilting and using quilting to sustain the community.

Fundraising with quilts has been accomplished in several ways, including quilt raffles, sponsored "signature quilts" (also called "names quilts"), and quilt auctions.

Quilt raffles were often an effective way to raise money, since it is easier to sell many tickets to many people

than to find a single buyer prepared to spend the same sum collected through multiple ticket sales. Raffles, however, were frowned on as a form of gambling by some churches and groups; in fact, many organizations, forbade them.

Even to this day, the attitude against raffles continues in some communities. Some contemporary clergy argue that it is unjust for a raffle winner to acquire a quilt after the expenditure of only \$1 or \$2 for a ticket; they argue that raffles devalue the labour of the quilters. In any case, there are now many more sophisticated opportunities for gambling, and most raffle-ticket buyers consider buying tickets a donation to the fundraiser's cause, rather than actual gambling.

As an alternative to quilt raffles, some communities created signature quilts for fundraisers.

A contributor would pay to have his or her name either embroidered or written in ink on the quilt. Later, the quilt could be auctioned to complete the fundraiser. An example of a signature quilt made as a fundraiser was an embroidered names quilt made in 1948 by the South Granville Women's Institute. The PEI Artifactory records tell the story:

South Granville Women's Institute members decided to make a quilt. Each member was going to making a certain number of squares embroidered with names. The names were bought [sponsored] at ten cents each or three for a quarter. At that time ten cents was a lot of money. After they had enough names the ladies took their square in and sewed them together to form a quilt. They sold the quilt to Lillian Morrison MacMillan for \$25.00. The quilt was passed on to her niece, Mary Elmira Morrison Somers. Because Mrs. Somers had seven children and could not decide to which child she should give the quilt, she decided to donate it to the Museum. (Artifactory records HF.97.30.1)

In all, the women collected 217 names. If all the names went for the minimum price of "three for a quarter" (with the one name left over bought for ten cents), then the name-selling alone raised at least \$18.10; added to the final quilt price of \$25.00, the South Granville Women's Institute raised a minimum of \$43.10 with their quilt. A successful fundraiser indeed!

Quilt auctions of donated or specially made non-signature quilts were another form of fundraising.

The spirit of quilting for fundraising continues to live in PEI communities. Seniors' groups such as the 50+ Club in Montague quilt on demand and make quilts from purchased tops to be raffled as fundraisers.

It is ironic that while quilt raffles and auctions are reliable ways to raise funds for an organization, it is very difficult to make a living as a quilter. This is due to the high cost of materials, the amount of time required to produce a quilt, and competition from imported quilts from India and China. Asian imports are certainly less expensive, but the quality of the fabric, the piecing, and, especially, the quilting is inferior. Further, the quilters who produce the Asian quilts are frequently paid wages well below North American standards. A North American quilter could not survive on the same wages, and even if she could, the total cost of an imported quilt can equal the cost of just the materials for a quilt in North America.

The craft nonetheless continues to flourish. On PEI, quilt guilds such as the Northern Lights Quilt Guild in O'Leary and the Kindred Spirits Quilt Guild in Charlottetown promote the craft. The Kindred Spirits Quilt Guild (KSQG) was founded in 1990. Edie Zakem is the current president and is a charter member. The Guild meets monthly and is a place for the sharing of and growth of quilting.

The Guild's activities include a bi-annual quilt show that is visited by many Islanders and tourists. At this event, quilters are able to show what they do and how they do it. Another activity of the KSQG is an annual Jamboree where members are involved in a two-day funfest of teaching and learning. The more experienced quilters act as instructors, and many happy hours are spent sharing and learning.

These quilting guilds and individual guild members are part of the Canadian Quilter's Association/Association canadienne de la courtepointe (CQA/ACC), and in 1999 the CQA/ACC National Juried Show and its annual general meeting and workshops were held in PEI. At that time, **Barbara Grimster** was the PEI regional representative.

Community Schools teach and promote quilting, too. In addition to the social aspect of the classes, many enjoy



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5.6 The 50+ Club. Montague, PEI: Sybil Kemp and Catherine (Kay) Hughes / Le 50+ Club de Montague (Î.-P.-É.) : Sybil Kemp et Catherine (Kay) Hughes

5.7 The Quilt PEI 99 Committee / Le comité Quilt PEI 1999

5.8 Instructors Margaret Doiron, Mary Hebert, and Shirley Bonner (quilts by Flo Macinnis) / Les instructrices Margaret Doiron, Mary Hebert et Shirley Bonner (courtepointes par Flo MacInnis)

the challenge of learning a new skill. Beverly Roach, journalist, reported on a group of New Zealand (PEI) Quilters in *The Eastern Graphic*:

The three instructors, Margaret Doiron, Mary Hebert and Shirley Bonner have many years of quilting experience between them and are always willing to share their talent with the other women. The New Zealand Quilters began as part of the New Zealand Community School about a dozen years ago. "We wanted a way of getting seniors out of the house in the afternoons," Mary Hebert said. "Of course you don't have to be a senior to be a New Zealand Quilter, but that was the reason for having the class in the afternoon. It worked too. We have a lively bunch every fall and keep going until everyone is happy with their winter's work. Some people make two or three quilts every year.

Such "lively bunches" continue to exist in a number of PEI communities.

Quilting on PEI

Regardless of the purpose of the quilt, be it a warm and cosy bedcovering for loved ones or a profitable fundraiser for a worthy cause, women have used quilt design, even of the most humble utility quilt, to create beauty and express themselves artistically.

Quilters in PEI followed the general trends in North America as outlined in the general history section. However, there are some aspects that are especially notable in PEI. For example, red and white quilts were extremely popular in the late 19th/early 20th century in PEI. Bright Turkey red dye was quite stable, particularly when compared to the green dyes available at the time, and red made a strong contrast with white. The red and white style arrived later in PEI than in the rest of North America, and there was a lot of excitement about it when it did become available.

Acadian Quilting

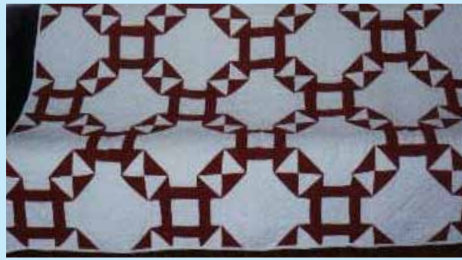
PEI's Acadian community has produced excellent quilters. *Les Arts Populaires Acadiens de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard/Acadian Folk Art of Prince Edward Island* noted that most of the Acadian quilt patterns were geometric designs such as "*enchainé*" (Irish Chain), "*couverture en brique*" (a brick design), "*cabane de rondon*" (log

cabin), a combination of squares and triangles, or simply different-sized squares. The archives at the Acadian Museum in Miscouche contain a photographic documentation of Acadian quilts. These quilts show similar trends to those in the rest of PEI and North America. For example, from 1915 to 1920, Marie Arsenault of Abrams Village made this hand-pieced and hand-quilted red and white cotton quilt (5.9). The strong graphic quality of this red and white quilt explains PEI quilters' fascination with them. Marie died in 1969 at the age of 82. She was the daughter of Fidèle and Maurice Arsenault and the sister of Philibert Arsenault.

A full range of quilt styles was used. There were utility quilts (made by Mme Victoire Richard in Mont Carmel, 1905–1910) (5.10); log cabins (made by Mme Annie Arsenault-Derasp in Mont-Carmel in 1935) (5.11); fans (made by Mlle Céline Arsenault in Abrams Village 1915–20) (5.12); Dresden plates (made by Emilie DesRoches in Miscouche 1953–1957) (5.13); embroidered quilt (made by the boarders of the convent of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Tignish in 1909) (5.14); embroidered quilt (made by the boarders of the convent of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Tignish in 1909) (5.15); "*concombre*" or "*cucumber*," usually called "*pineapple*" quilt in English (made by Odilienne Arsenault in St-Timothée in 1907) (5.16); vivid cotton crazy or string quilts (made by Emilia Arsenault in Abrams Village in 1935–1940) (5.17); and the "*étoile du nord*" (North Star), a show quilt made on a background of black velvet in 1932 by Mme Elisabeth Bernard in St-Louis (5.18). The backing of this last quilt is from Mme Bernard's sister's wedding dress.

Louise Comeau is an Acadian quilter and businesswoman. After earning a BA in French and an MA in psychology, having worked in nursing, with the CBC, and with the Secretary of State, she bought a fabric and dry goods shop in Abrams Village in 1983. Between 1993 and 1996, Louise sold finished quilts, quilt kits, and patchwork duvet covers wholesale to shops across Canada through the Atlantic Crafts Trade show. Her quilts are usually made in traditional patterns, though she also designed a unique "*Anne of Green Gables*" quilt for beds and cushions. In 1997, she opened her quilt shop in a charming building in Wellington. The shop was constructed as a project of the Baie Acadienne Development Corporation.

Before long, "*Les Créations Louise Comeau*" became part



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5.19 Louise Comeau

5.20 Stella Gallant at work at the Economuseum "Les Créations Louise Comeau" / Stella Gallant au travail à l'Économusée « Les Créations Louise Comeau »

of a network of "Économusées" or "Economuseums": businesses that specialize in traditional trades and that offer museum-type interpretation as well as products. La Société internationale des entreprises ÉCONOMUSÉE® was created in 1992 by Cyril Simard, an architect and ethnologist. The mission of the economuseums is to showcase traditional trades and skills, such as cheesemaking, bookbinding, glassmaking, and the like. All of the Economuseum businesses use traditional techniques and *savoir faire* for production—traditional quilting methods, in the case of Louise Comeau. They also welcome the public into their businesses to *demonstrate* the craftspeople's production. Every Economuseum includes a designated "museum" area for animation and interpretation of production. Membership in the Economuseum network

* Sharon O'Brien of the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre inquired about quilting in the Mi'kmaq community, approaching Lennox Island, the Native Council, and the Family Resource Centre, but she did not find anyone who knew of Mi'kmaq quilters. Christine Bernard's grandmother, Dorothy, did make quilts for her family.

of 26 businesses in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces assists Louise with marketing and sales. Canada Post produced stamps featuring the Economuseums, and the "Piquage de courtepointhe/Quilting" stamp shows the hands of Stella Gallant, a quilter at Louise's shop.

Louise thinks that women have success in business because they nurture their businesses just as they nurture their children, their friendships, and their families. She feels that women go into business to create an outlet for themselves beyond family life. Many women start home-based businesses to earn money of their own and to be validated for what they are doing.

Mi'kmaq Community

Wearable art is a strong First Nation tradition.* For example, the Seminole Indians of the Florida Everglades originated a special technique of piecing complicated linear patterns to embellish their clothing. Linear embellishment appears in Mi'kmaq garments also. *Old Nova Scotian Quilts* by Scott Robson and Sharon MacDonald shows a 1905 picture of Catherine Maloney of Shubenacadie wearing a Mi'kmaq skirt of ribbon appliqué and a dark-coloured peaked hat covered with light curvilinear motifs. A second picture shows the detail of ribbon appliqué with beads on a Mi'kmaq skirt made by Mary Morris Thomas, about 1845.

Prince Edward Island's Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre in Lennox Island has pictures from the early 20th century showing similar garments. One shows Sarah Mitchell of Lennox Island (*Kikjisipayik* in Mi'kmaq) wearing a similar dark peaked hat with light appliqué curvilinear motif (5.21).

John T. Sark, the last hereditary chief, wore a dark jacket with light appliqué embellishment. (In the early 1900s photograph, below, he is holding the watch given him by Queen Victoria) (5.22).

Although the garments in the photographs do not appear to be quilted, the use of appliqué on wearable art makes their link to quilting, since appliqué has long been used on quilts. During the 1970s, the Mountain Artisans, a co-operative in West Virginia, were pioneers in creating patchwork and appliqué garments that were marketed in upscale shops in New York City. For at least



5.21 Sarah Mitchell



5.22 Chief John T. Sark / Chef John T. Sark

a decade to 1999, the Fairfield Processing Corporation, which produces quilt batting, sponsored an annual fashion collection, and their show was a highlight of many North American quilting events. Most quilt shows include a garment or wearable art category for exhibition or competition.

Christine Bernard of Lennox Island is a contemporary creator of wearable art. Her garments are worn by the Lone Wolf Singers who sing, drum, and dance throughout the Maritimes and PEI at pow-wows. Christine explained that the materials used for the garments have changed in recent years. Ribbons now replace beading, and dresses originally created in soft deerskin are now made of polyester knits and cottons, fabrics that are much cooler to dance in on hot days. Nevertheless, the form and style of the dresses remain the same.

Christine Bernard's granddaughter, Paige Bernard wears a Shawl Dress when she dances in Shawl Dance competitions (5.23 and 5.24). Her navy and yellow shawl dress is embellished with appliquéd navy and yellow ribbons that fan out in beautiful patterns with her movements.

Paige was also chosen to be a Jingle Dancer. Few are capable of performing the difficult Jingle Dance, which is a powerful prayer dance used especially to pray for the healing of the sick. The Jingles of the dance are



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5.23 & 5.24 Shawl dress / Robe avec châle

5.25 Jingle dress / Robe à clochettes

5.26 Alyssa Bernard and her jingle dress / Alyssa Bernard et sa robe à clochettes

5.27 White traditional dress / Robe blanche traditionnelle

circular pieces of silver, curved into a cone shape. They are strung on ribbons and sewn to the ribbon appliqué on the dress (5.25). The Jingles make the dress both very heavy and very costly.

Christine thinks that there will be another Jingle Dancer in the family. A second granddaughter, Alyssa, at age one shows a strong preference for her Jingle Dress (5.26).

A traditional white dress, fringed and embellished with beads and metallic ribbon (5.27), is used for a dance in which the women dance outside the circle and pray for the young and all inside the circle.**

The black cotton ribbon shirt of Christine's husband (5.28 and 5.29) is embellished with the four traditional colours of red, yellow, white, and black (each of which has its own meaning).

Christine emphasized that each garment is unique and the colour choices and designs reflect the individual's personality. In addition to the garments, she creates jewellery and head-dresses, some of which she sells at pow-wows. She hopes to pass her knowledge on to others in Lennox Island. In preparation for the celebration of St. Ann's Day (the day celebrating the patron Saint of the Lennox Island Mi'kmaq), other members of the community prepared their own traditional dresses, preserving this traditional form of wearable art.



5.28 & 5.29 Cotton ribbon shirt / Chemise de coton rubanée

Shore Quilts

Edie Zakem, née Johnston, was raised in Murray River and recalls "shore quilts":

The shore quilts were utility quilts which my father used when lobster fishing. In the mid 1980s, I pieced a denim/flannel "quilt" and *tied* it as opposed to quilting it. (In other words, I held together the layers of the quilt with ties of knotted string at regular intervals instead of sewing the layers together with a running stitch.) My father, who was a lobster fisherman, saw it and remarked, "It's really nice, but isn't it more like a shore quilt?"

Shore quilts were made by fishers' wives during the winter. These quilts were taken to the shore during the fishing season and were a source of warmth in the bitterly cold PEI spring. The memory of a shore quilt evokes the smell of the salt water and a quilt slightly stiffened as a result of the salt sea air. Shore quilts were always made from heavier fabrics than bed quilts, and the layers were tied together in a grid pattern.

From Mayme Champion, Sherri Davidson collected this information on the shore quilts that were made for the lobster cannery. In Mayme Champion's own words:

They operated a lobster cannery and they kept the help there and they had to provide the bedding. We made rough quilts all winter long to have quilts for the people when they came. There'd be 12 boys and 12 girls. How many beds would there be? Twelve of each. For two months in the spring they'd come in, move there, and that would be it. . . . Then, when the two months was up you spent days and days washing the quilts and packing them up for the next year. After the war, they used army blankets which were sold cheap. We made the quilts of the backs of aprons, and backs of the men's shirts would be good.

** Prayer is an important part of Mi'kmaq dancing. Dances are also a way to pay homage to someone or to a family. When an Honour Song is requested for a family or the departed in a family, people show respect by gathering in the circle for the dance. At the end of the dance, the family stands in a row and shakes hands with the other dancers.



5.30 Edie Zakem and her prize-winning quilt, "Maud's Album" / Edie Zakem avec sa courtepointe primée, « Maud's Album »

Quilts associated with L. M. Montgomery

Some quilts are recognizably associated with Prince Edward Island because they are associated with the Island's most famous writer, Lucy Maud Montgomery.

L. M. Montgomery was a quilter herself. Between the ages of 12 and 16, she worked on a crazy quilt that, later, she pondered in her diary. With hindsight, on Monday, April 4, 1910, she decidedly wrote:

The result is a very nightmare of jumbled hues and patterns. And once I thought it beautiful! Well, after all, it gave me pleasure in the making and so what matters if the result was not worthwhile? I had "the joy of the working" and that was the essence of heaven. (From *The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery*, Volume II, 5)

Not only did L. M. Montgomery write about quilts and make quilts, she also inspired other quilters to create quilts based on her life. Sherry Davidson interviewed Ruth Paynter while documenting her quilts for the Prince Edward Island Heirloom Quilt Survey. Davidson reports:

Lying over the sofa in the Paynter's living room was the quilt called, "Sunny Scenes of PEI" and another called "The Times and Places of Lucy

Maud Montgomery." We looked over the blocks. Typically, she had done a great deal of research to record the information in fabric.

There were representations of Montgomery's gravestone, the schools where she taught, the places she lived, the languages that *Anne of Green Gables* has been translated into, Montgomery's Birthplace, and even the census land divisions at the time that the author lived in Cavendish.

Nor is Ruth Paynter's quilt the only tribute to Montgomery ever to be stitched. Edie Zakem designed and executed a quilt entitled "Maud's Album," depicting in appliqué various scenes and events in Montgomery's life. It was accepted into the CQA/ACC National Juried Show in Quilt Canada 2000 in Toronto, where it was awarded a Judge's Choice Award.

In 2000, Edie presented a paper on her quilt at *L. M. Montgomery and Popular Culture*, the fourth biennial international conference devoted to Lucy Maud Montgomery, hosted by the L. M. Montgomery Institute at the University of Prince Edward Island.

The story of Edie's quilt and her quilting is similar to that of many quilters. At the outset, only she, as the maker, was interested in the quilt she was creating. After she completed it, it attracted some outside interest from other people—but quilts don't garner fame unless they are specially promoted or unless, like Edie's quilt, they take on a life of their own.

In response to questions about how "Maud's Album" came about, Edie told her story:

Several years ago, I received *The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery* as a gift, and as I read them and other related Montgomery writings, I came across a poem which Montgomery loved, part of which reads:

"How I may reach that far-off goal
Of true and honored fame
And write upon its shining scroll
A woman's humble name."

The sentiment drew me into Montgomery's life. After many workshops and much research, I completed work on my quilt.

When I took on the project, no one except my

first hand

family was aware of what I was attempting. When it was finished, it astonished even me.

“Maud’s Album” will be travelling to Kobe, Japan, in 2001 for a celebration of the re-opening of the city after the earthquake that devastated it several years ago.

L. M. Montgomery-themed quilts could not have been produced anywhere else than Prince Edward Island.

International interest in PEI quilting

Because of the love of L. M. Montgomery’s books in Japan, PEI is visited frequently by Japanese tourists. The contact with PEI has also stimulated a great interest in PEI quilting among some Japanese travellers. The interest has led to cultural exchange. Carol Boyles travelled to Japan to do a quilt show a few years ago, and more than one Japanese magazine has interviewed PEI quilters. Minnie Langille, Dorothy MacLure, and Shirley Moase were featured in the *Country Home* magazine). Recently Naomi Ichikawa, a representative from *Patchwork Quilt Tsushin*, interviewed Louise Comeau and Edie Zakem. The cover of the magazine featured a detail from L. M. Montgomery’s crazy quilt (5.31). The international interest in Prince Edward Island quilters demonstrates that PEI quilters are truly world class.



Exchanges with the USA

Prince Edward Island quilters have more immediate and direct historical ties and exchanges with the United States. Through much of the 20th century, it was quite common for Islanders to go to the United States to find employment; as a result, many Islanders have family ties with the USA, particularly with New England. Occasionally, American quilts were brought here to PEI; likewise, sometimes PEI quilts are found in the USA.

An example of a PEI quilt with an American theme can be found here in the PEI Artfactory (5.32 and 5.33). It is a quilt top made in the last quarter of the 19th century and is remarkable for the printed panel commemorating the 1776–1876 American Centennial whose festivities were held in Philadelphia.

The panel is surrounded by double pink sashing and nine patch blocks in fabrics typical of the era.

In Belchertown, Massachusetts, Jane Crutchfield located a late 1930–40s quilt made by **Nellie Hart Pridham** (1890–1949) who is thought to come from Tignish or Montrose. She is the sister-in-law of the owner’s husband’s great-grandmother. Nellie Hart Pridham’s signature is embroidered on the back of the quilt; she was exceptional in that she signed her work.

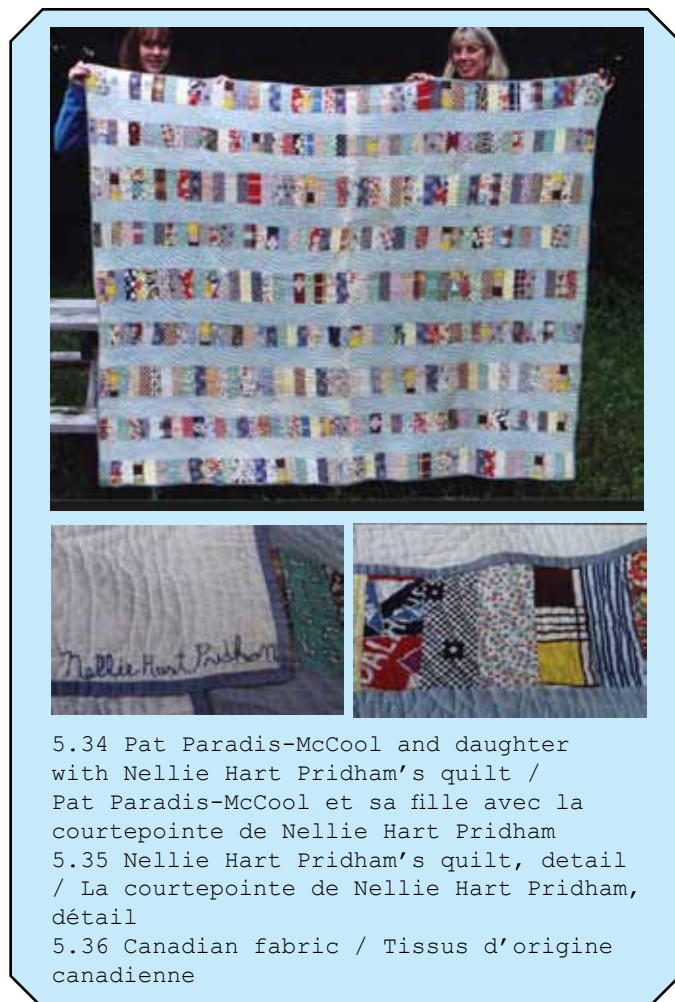
On the quilt top, long, soft blue strips are alternately

set with pieced strips of rectangles, in the strip quilt style that was popular in PEI. (Numerous examples of the style can be seen in antique shops west of Charlottetown.) The quilt's lining is made of six pieces that look like bleached sugar and flour sacks. The quilting design is an overall fan pattern.

The most exciting discovery in this quilt is the presence of truly Canadian fabric (5.34, 5.35, and 5.36). Pennants from Dalhousie, Ottawa, and Saskatoon or Saskatchewan are printed on several of the rectangular blocks. While there are many recognizably American fabrics, such as the 1776–1876 panel in the previous quilt, there are very few recognizably Canadian fabrics. The history of this particular fabric—where and when it was produced—is unknown at this time. The owner is planning to have the quilt documented with the Massachusetts Quilt Project, the state documentation project.

PEI Women's Institute and quilting

From its start in 1911, the Women's Institute (WI) in PEI has involved itself in worthwhile projects that are literally too numerous to mention here. *Their Dreams, Never Ending* by Laura Pottie relates the accomplishments of the Island's WI. Quilts were made to donate to fire and flood victims, to orphanages, to the Prince Country Hospital (including baby quilts), to the needy, to Community Hospital, to a local family



5.34 Pat Paradis-McCool and daughter with Nellie Hart Pridham's quilt / Pat Paradis-McCool et sa fille avec la courtepointe de Nellie Hart Pridham
 5.35 Nellie Hart Pridham's quilt, detail / La courtepointe de Nellie Hart Pridham, détail
 5.36 Canadian fabric / Tissus d'origine canadienne



5.37 Quilted banner of the PEI Women's Institute / La bannière piquée du Women's Institute de l'Î.-P.-É.

adopted through the Salvation Army program, to the Unitarian Service, and in one community, to all brides. During the First World War, the Ray of Hope (Murray River) branch made two quilts—one for France in 1916 and one for a Canadian hospital in England in 1917. As previously mentioned, the Second World War produced a massive quilting effort by the WI with 9,260 quilts donated to the Red Cross, for soldiers and refugees and air-raid victims.

The WI is justly famous for sponsoring the Handcrafts and Arts Division of the Provincial Exhibition held in Charlottetown, PEI. "Some of the best quilts to be found anywhere" are exhibited in this friendly competition. In summary, the WI is seen as the force which gave validation to women and their expression of the various art forms. By its quilting, the WI continues its charitable mission and raised countless dollars for valuable community projects.

Creating and Preserving the Art Form

Women played an important role in creating and preserving the art form of quilting in the 20th century. The following sections will look at their contributions in the four quarters of the century: 1900–1925, 1925–1950, 1950–1975, and 1975–2000.

1900–1925

During the first quarter of the 20th century, Lucy Maud Montgomery wrote of the fashion for red and white quilts on PEI in *Anne of Green Gables*. Anne, however, was not convinced of the joys of quilting:

“I do not like patchwork,” said Anne dolefully, hunting out her work basket and sitting down before a little heap of red and white diamonds with a sigh. “I think some kinds of sewing would be nice; but there’s no scope for imagination in patchwork.”

Sherri Davidson conducted the Prince Edward Island Heirloom Quilt Survey between 1991 and 1994, and she noted that Anne was not alone in her dislike:

While the rage may have been red and white, with popular patterns including *Sawtooth* and *Irish Chain* the tedium of piecing those endless tiny squares and diamonds led some to purchase their red and white checks printed by the yard, and simply quilt around them.

The Garden of the Gulf Museum in Montague displays a Nine Patch quilt (5.38) made probably in this first quarter.

It is a quilt within a quilt, having as batting an earlier quilt of red and white checkerboard cheater cloth with black stars on the squares (5.39).

Millie Gamble, the photographer discussed in another section of this history, photographed the Tryon Baptist Church Mission Band. In the photo (5.40), circa 1913, Mildred Laird, an unidentified person, Bea MacPhee, and Rita MacInnis sit outdoors on a porch, working on their different projects. Rita MacInnis is working on what appears to be an appliquéd quilt top featuring a naturalistic maple leaf design. This Mission Band was one of the many sewing groups making quilts and other needlework for missions.



5.38 First quarter quilt-in-a-quilt, Garden of the Gulf Museum / Courtepointe dans une courtepointe, premier quart du siècle, Garden of the Gulf Museum

5.39 Detail of quilt-in-a-quilt / Détail de la courtepointe dans une courtepointe



5.40 From the Provincial Archives, 2667/136 / Des archives provinciales, 2667/136



5.41 Photograph by Millie Gamble / Photographie par Millie Gamble

Missing from the Public Archives, but published in *An Island Past* by Harry Holman, is another picture taken by Millie Gamble, circa 1911, of Adelaide and Hope Ives playing with dolls (5.41). The dolls in the cradle are half-covered by a checkerboard quilt. This photograph invokes many quilters' childhood memories. Playing with dolls and doll quilts has moved many people to make their own quilts.

1925–1950

The Museum and Heritage Foundation's Artifactory has approximately 36 20th-century quilts in its collection. Eight quilts, all from approximately the second quarter of the 20th century, are attributed to one woman—Ida Meggison. The Artifactory also has three quilts attributed to Ida McGregor, her maiden name. Meggison was evidently a versatile quilter, working in all different styles of quilt—wholecloth, pieced, and appliqué; hand-quilted and tied (5.42 to 5.47).

Ida McGregor was born in 1873. When she grew up, she became the hired girl for the William P. Meggison family, who had three boys and two girls. The first Mrs. Meggison died, and Mr. W. P. Meggison married Ida on October 11, 1915.

William P. Meggison was a carpenter, and, after the wedding, the family emigrated to New Jersey, where he worked in a shipyard. In 1924, the family returned to PEI with a boxcar full of household goods. They bought a 50-acre farm in Knutsford. In 1929, the family returned to New Jersey, but in 1932 came back yet again to the farm.

Ida, the second of William P. Meggison's three wives, had no children of her own, but was a good stepmother to his children. She is remembered with affection by her step-grandson,

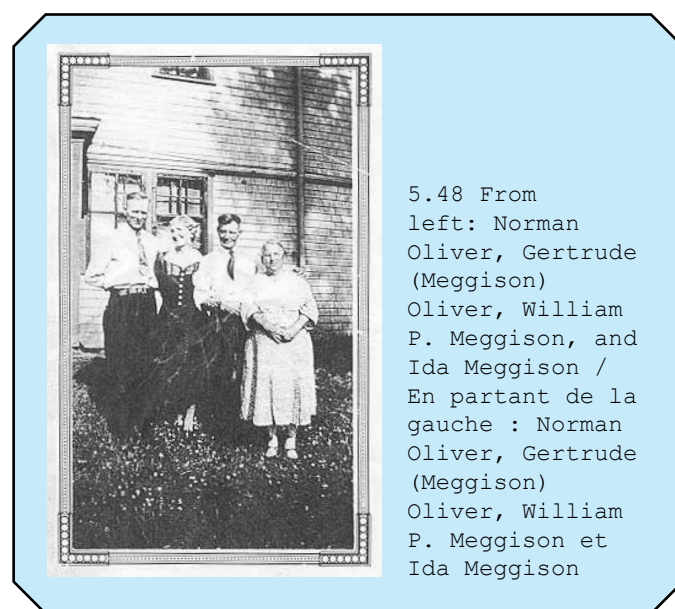
William L. Meggison, who now lives in the beautifully restored family home in Knutsford with his wife, Jean. They both share a love of history, and, as a result, he and his wife donated his step-grandmother's quilts to the Artifactory.

Ida Meggison's quilts are representative of the homey quilts produced with love for family. Her life is also representative of that of many Island women at the time, even including the migrations to and from the United States.



The photo 5.48 shows Ida Meggison on the right.

The other woman is W. P. Meggison's niece, Gertrude Oliver (née Meggison), an artist in watercolour and oils who also had a greeting card business and even quilted, too. As Mr. W. L. Meggison stated, "Pretty well everyone did quilts in the wintertime."





5.49 & 5.50 Pleasant Valley United Church Missionary Society quilt / Courtepointe de la Pleasant Valley United Church Missionary Society

Later in this quarter, in 1940, the Pleasant Valley United Church Missionary Society made this quilt (5.49 and 5.50) as a fundraiser.

According to Artifactory records, "Each female member of the church had a square on which she embroidered her family's names; she paid \$.18 per name. The quilt was later assembled by a group of church women. It was auctioned off for \$6.00 to Mrs. Cutcliffe.

1950–1975

Fewer quilts were made during the third quarter of the 20th century, but quilting did not die out. Its decline in popularity is attributed to the desire to forget the Depression. The rising standard of living meant that people could afford to buy new things. The recycling that had partially fuelled quilt-making was not as necessary, though it was still a part of the household economy, particularly in rural areas.

A Nine Patch quilt (5.51, circa 1950) is a good example of an everyday, Island farm quilt. It was made by **Lottie Mae (Burns) Cairns**, of Freetown (1893–1984). Lottie arrived at the Cairns farm in Lower Freetown from "up the road" when a girl of 17 years, and she married John Elton Cairns on November 22, 1910. Elton was 26 years old. This simple farm quilt was made by Lottie, quite likely assisted by her daughter in law, Doris (Campbell) Cairns. Lottie lived with her son, Howard, and her daughter-in-law on the Cairns farm until her death in 1984.

The peach-coloured fabric used in the alternate blocks is similar to fabric used in corsets and bras and the like in this era. Possibly the fabric came from factory ends that were often ordered by mail through the Family Herald magazine. Fabric came in one-pound lots and was fairly inexpensive. Orders often came from factories in Montreal.

The alternating white squares would be made of any leftover available fabric around the house. The aqua-coloured 100 per cent cotton is used in sashing around each nine-patch block, as a narrow border around the quilt edge and the backing. A cotton batt is used for filler. All piecing is done by hand, and the quilt is hand-quilted (with large stitches).

Many everyday Island farm quilts did not survive the "test of time," but this one was stored in the "quilt box" to be given to Lottie's first-born grandson, Lorne Robert Moase, when he married in 1969. His wife, Shirley, is now the proud owner of this heirloom piece.



5.51 Shirley Moase and the corset quilt / Shirley Moase et la courtepointe faite de tissu à corset

1975–2000

Most significantly, traditional quilts were joined by innovative art quilts in the last quarter of the 20th century. During this time, the art community was beginning to accept art quilts as fine art. A wonderful record of the state of PEI quilting during this quarter can be seen in the video *Prince Edward Island Textile Show*. The exhibit was mounted in 1995 and showcases more than 30 quilters whose works range from the beautiful traditional to cutting-edge. Three artists also exhibit wearable art. The raffle quilt for the exhibit, shown below (5.52), is a good example of the art quilt. The imaginative use of colour, hand-dyed fabrics, and hand-stitching and machine embroidery, as well as other embellishment techniques transform the traditional blocks, while the original designs of other blocks make a contemporary statement. **Julie Bernotas**, **Iris Etheridge***, **Jeanne Long**, **Heather Hay**, **Roberta Campbell**, and **Carol Boyles** are the artists who created this wallhanging.

* *Iris Etheridge* was the PEI quilter featured in *Quiltworks Across Canada* (Hunt 1996).



5.52 PEI Textile Show 1995 Raffle Quilt / Courte-pointe tirée au sort, Textile Show de l'Î.-P.-É., 1995

5.53 Carol Boyles



5.54 *Circle of Life* - Carol Boyles

The central block was created by Carol Boyles (5.53), a professional in fabric arts who designs and produces clothes, needlework, and quilts—especially art quilts. She was a co-ordinator for the 1997 Textile Show in Charlottetown and was responsible for the organization of the show which ran for the month of August. Carol graduated with her certificate in Fashion and Design Technology from Olds College, Calgary, Alberta, and from the Fabric Arts programme at Holland College, Charlottetown, PEI. She is also a Dispensing Optician. As owner of “The Vintage Needle,” Carol produces home decor and clothing and does alterations and wedding garments with her home-based business. She has contributed to PEI through many volunteer projects and has served on the Board of Directors of the Arts Guild for three years. She is a founding member and past

president of the Kindred Spirits Quilt Guild. A few years ago, Carol travelled to Japan to do a quilt show and was warmly received by the local people. Carol’s quilting began because of her interest in texture.

Her piece, “Circle of Life” (5.54), draws on a traditional block designed in an original way. The piece represents the different stages in a woman’s lifetime. The 1950s and 1960s fabrics represent birth. White wedding dress fabrics symbolize marriage, and bright colours of children’s fabrics represent children. A woman’s working experience is expressed with suiting fabric, plaids, and ties, and soft colors suggest the older woman. The bright light at the end represents the end of life and the mystery of afterlife. “Circle of Life” was auctioned as a fundraiser for Anderson House, a shelter for women and children (from notes courtesy of Carol Boyles).

Carol also is involved with a group called the Needlers, which originated with ladies who attended Holland College. Carol Boyles, **Sally Coles**, **Louise Lowther**, **Harriet Meacher**, **Ina Reed**, **Joan Cobb**, **Florence Deacon**, **Audry MacKay**, and **Donna Meincke** are currently working on a lighthouse quilt that accurately depicts all the lighthouses around PEI. The Needlers make a quilt every two or three years and sell or donate it when it is complete. However, it is important to the Needlers that their creations stay on the Island as part of its heritage.

Shirley Moase is another PEI quilter who has made significant contributions to quilting on PEI. As a small child Shirley quilted and hooked mats with her mother, grandmother, and aunts. Her love of fabrics and sewing continued through high school and university, where she concentrated in the professional area of Home Economics, earning a Diploma in Household Science at the Nova Scotia Teachers’ College, a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics at Mount Allison University, and a Master of Science in Textiles and Clothing at Iowa State University. She taught Home Economics in high schools in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island as well as cookery and needlework in England before teaching Textiles and Clothing at the University of Prince Edward Island. Shirley’s interest in quilting was rekindled when she became a “stay-at-home mom” with two small sons. Throughout the past 25 years, Shirley has taught quilting workshops across Prince Edward Island and recently in Nova Scotia. She has judged quilts on a provincial level and has developed a scorecard for judging quilts that also provides constructive feedback. Shirley has stated,

“Over the years, we’ve had many very beautiful quilts in the provincial exhibition. The fabrics today are better, and the spirit of friendly competition in itself is an advantage and causes improvement.”

Shirley is interested in quilt history, particularly Maritime heritage quilting, and has lectured on the topic. She owns and restores vintage quilts, including a crazy quilt whose silks had shattered and needed replacing.

Her own work includes a traditional Churn Dash Quilt, and she is currently hand-quilting a wholecloth white-on-white bed-quilt. In 1997 she was inspired by a lecture series presented by Valerie Hearder, a Newfoundland quilter with a special interest in landscapes. Shirley spent the next winter developing her own style of PEI landscapes, and she gave a landscape workshop at the Kindred Spirits Quilt Guild Jamboree in 1998. Shirley does composites of the PEI coastline (5.55), especially of the North Shore, working from photo and memory. She relies on her good memory for colour, then searches everywhere for fabric, which she uses to great effect, particularly with respect to pattern and texture, in her landscapes. She recently travelled extensively in Europe as a delegate for Inner Wheel (a service organization that is the women’s independent arm of Rotary International), and presented her landscapes as personal gifts from PEI.

Conclusion

In the 20th century, the women of Prince Edward Island continued the traditions of making bed-quilts for family use and for sale. Women’s organizations used quilts for fundraisers by sales, auctions, and raffles. Quilts were



5.55 PEI landscape by Shirley Moase /
Paysage de l'Î.-P.-É. par Shirley Moase

also created as charitable donations to people in the community and as overseas aid. Quilting provided social benefits for women in that their working together gave them the opportunity to socialize and alleviate their loneliness. The intellectual stimulation of the design process and the opportunity for personal growth in organizing and completing quilts provided ample room for personal, individual, and communal growth. The spirit of the individual creator is in each quilt.

Quilting in the 20th century in PEI followed the general trends in North America. However, some aspects are specific to PEI. The Acadian community produced quilts in many different styles, evidenced in the photographic archives in the Acadian Museum in Miscouche. Louise Comeau has displayed entrepreneurial energy with her business “Les Créations Louise Comeau,” offering quality items for sale and insight into the history of quilting. While quilting is less evident in the Mi’kmaq community, the related category of wearable art is alive in the garments produced in the past and currently by Christine Bernard and other women on Lennox Island. Also distinctive to the Island were the utility quilts called “Shore quilts” made for fishermen and those who worked in the lobster canneries. Other distinctive Island quilts are ones based on L. M. Montgomery’s life and writings.

Japanese tourism resulting from interest in Montgomery and her “Anne” books exposed the Japanese to PEI quilts and quilters, leading to exchanges and exhibits. International exchanges also occurred with the United States, as Islanders and Americans moved back and forth between the Island and the “Boston States,” particularly in the first half of the century.

The Women’s Institute on PEI provided quilts for overseas during the Second World War and currently continues to sponsor the quilt exhibit and competition at the Provincial Exhibition that signals the importance of quilting in Prince Edward Island society.

Representative individual women in the four quarter centuries were discussed: L. M. Montgomery and her crazy quilt, from the first quarter; Ida Meggison and her wide range of styles from the second; Lottie Mae Cairns and her corset quilt from the third; and Carol Boyles with her art quilts and Shirley Moase with her landscapes, bed-quilts, and interest in quilt history and restoration from the fourth.

We have tried to offer a broad representative sample of the quilters of Prince Edward Island and of their quilts. Unfortunately, we could not feature all PEI quilters in this work, and there will inevitably be quilters or trends that we have not had the opportunity to discuss. We hope further research will bring even more PEI quilters to light.

Quilting in PEI has been, is, and will continue to be an art form through which Island women produce beautiful quilts with intelligence and imagination. Island women are involved in every aspect of the art—the traditional, the innovative, and the historical—and Prince Edward Island is enriched by its quilters of national and international stature.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank for their help:

- Marilyn Thomsen and Boyde Beck, Prince Edward Island Artfactory
- Mary Burnett, Charlottetown
- Sharon O'Brien, Mi'kmaq Family Resource Center
- Christine Bernard, Lennox Island
- Tiffany Sark, Lennox Island
- Louise Comeau and Stella Gallant, "Les Créations Louise Comeau," Wellington
- Cécile Gallant and Dominic Langlois, Le Musée Acadien/The Acadian Museum, Miscouche
- William Lewis Meggison and Jean Meggison, Knutsford
- Carol Boyles and Catherine Miller, Charlottetown
- Shirley Moase, Charlottetown
- The Prince Edward Island Women's Institute
- Jane Crutchfield, Belchertown, Massachusetts
- Pat Paradis-McCool, Belchertown, Massachusetts
- Sherri Davidson, who so generously allowed us to use her unpublished manuscript
- George Campbell, for the use of the L. M. Montgomery quilt
- The Prince Edward Island Public Archives
- Barbara MacCormac and Chandra Gordon, Garden of the Gulf Museum, Montague
- The Fifty+ Club, Montague
- Beverly Roach and the *Eastern Graphic*
- Kathleen Bissett, Waterloo, Ontario
- Brian Simpson, provincial photographer
- Kay Maclean, PEI Library, Murray Harbour
- Sasha Mullally and Jane Ledwell

Photographs

We thank the following people for the use of their photographs:

- Mary Burnett
- Beverly Roach and the *Eastern Graphic*
- Cécile Gallant and Le Musée Acadien/The Acadian Museum, Miscouche
- Louise Comeau of "Les Créations Louise Comeau"
- Jane Crutchfield and Pat Paradis-McCool of Belchertown, Massachusetts
- Women's Institute of PEI, for permission to photograph their quilted banner
- William Lewis Meggison and Jean Meggison
- Barbara MacCormac and Chandra Gordon for permission to photograph the quilt-in-a-quilt in the Garden of the Gulf Museum, Montague, PEI
- Carol Boyles
- Shirley Moase
- Edie Zakem

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Images

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- 5.8
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Bernard

5.31
Patchwork Quilt Tsushin

5.32, 5.33
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Photo par / Photo by Jane Crutchfield
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From / An Island Past by /par Harry Holman
Charlottetown: Square Deal, 1978.

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Édouard, HF.91.26.1, HF.91.26.2, HF.96.26.4

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first hand

Home Is Where the Art Is:
20th-Century Women
Visual Artists of
Prince Edward Island

Researcher/Writer:
Sandy Kowalik

Introduction

They studied and practised. They travelled far and wide, seeking like minds. They passed on their knowledge. Some married and some divorced. Some didn't. Some raised children and some nursed dying partners and parents. They made love and money and endless meals. And, through it all, they made art.

The 20th-century history of the visual arts on PEI is full of women making art, teaching art, and building organizations in support of art, despite firm gender restrictions. For most of the century, marriage and motherhood were society's expectations of women, and enormous pressure was placed on women to fulfill those roles. While art as a hobby was seen as a respectable pastime for early 20th-century women, art as a career was not. If, by extraordinary circumstances, a young woman had her father's financial and moral support to pursue a formal arts education, the doors were closed to her full participation. Women were prohibited from drawing from the nude, an essential part of classical arts training. If their self-confidence survived the sexism of their male college or university teachers and they became practising artists, they found themselves blocked from full membership in professional organizations. For instance, the rules of the Royal Canadian Academy stipulated that "women shall be eligible for membership in the Royal Canadian Academy but shall not be required to attend business meetings, nor will their names be placed upon the list of rotation for council" (see Farr and Luckyj). Thus, women could only be elected to the lesser rank of associate with the resultant loss of power, administrative voice, and money, commissions being most often awarded to full members.

However, Island women did become professional artists. Focussing on the work, life, and times of eleven women artists born in the first half of the 20th century, this history shows, both figuratively and culturally, the influence the Island landscape had on them, and how, in turn, they influenced the evolution of Island art.

During the 19th century, formally educated, predominately English-born immigrants of the middle and upper classes brought their western tradition of landscape and portrait painting to Prince Edward Island. (The centuries-old Mi'kmaq cultural traditions had no apparent influence on the art of these newcomers). The first art school in PEI was established in Charlottetown

in 1829 by George Thresher. Portraitist Robert Harris (1849–1919), perhaps the best known of all Island artists, received national attention for his 1884 painting *Fathers of Confederation*. Fanny Bayfield (1814–1891), trained in her native England, settled on the Island in 1841. Like many women of her day, she became quite skilled in botanical illustration. An album of her watercolours, *Canadian Wild Flowers* is held in the National Public Archives. She also taught women's art classes, beginning a practice common on the Island of women teaching women art, that stretched right through the century. (See 6.1 and 6.2.)

In 1907, Pablo Picasso, inspired by native African art, painted "*Demoiselles d'Avignon*," marking the birth of *modern art*. The tradition of Western *illusionistic art* was forever altered.

A veritable explosion of scientific and technological discoveries ushered in the new century. The telegraph was invented, airplanes were making their first successful flights, Albert Einstein was formulating his theory of relativity, and Sigmund Freud had just published *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There was a questioning of all traditional values and beliefs, including the role and rights of women. It was in this climate that PEI's first professional women artists emerged.



6.1



6.2

6.1 & 6.2 *View from Warblington*
(*Vue à partir de Warblington*),
Fanny Amelia Bayfield, oil on
canvas / huile sur toile

The Sojourners

Mary Allison Doull (1866–1953), **Alma Buote** (1894–1966), **Helen Marguerite Haszard** (1890–1970), and **Georgie Read Barton** (1902–1995) were all born into families that valued ideas and education, regardless of gender. Early exposure to art lessons led to more formal training, and all four became competent, self-supporting artists and teachers. Although the marketplace dictated to a great extent their creative output (none could be classed as avant-garde or cutting edge), they were aware of new movements and throughout their long, productive years, individual styles emerged.

The new ideas in art rippled through many teachers before reaching the shores of Prince Edward Island. But reach them they did, through the teaching of Doull, Buote, Haszard, and Barton. These four sojourners journeyed to many places but always came home to the Island.

Mary Allison Doull

Mary Allison Doull broke trail for the 20th century's Island women artists. Her ambition led her beyond the well-tread matrimonial path of her time to the art circles of New York and Paris. Mary was born in Wilmot Valley, the thirteenth of cabinet-maker George Doull and Hannah Butcher's 14 children. Mary's uncle, Mark Butcher, was PEI's most famous cabinet maker. Her later art was grounded in this family tradition of good design and excellence in craft.

Mary attended Mount Allison Wesleyan Ladies College and Conservatory of Music in 1888, and, after teaching back on the Island for three years, returned to study under John Hammond, RCA. In 1894, she headed to the National Academy of Design in New York, with sister Maria Patience, to study painting and pottery. It was here she was exposed to the *miniature revival*, and, in time, became well known in New York as an accomplished miniaturist. Doull's most subtle and sensitive works were her portraits and still lifes painted on small pieces of ivory (6.3 and 6.4).

In 1894, Doull set up a Fifth Avenue painting/teaching studio and immersed herself in the New York art world. As a member of the Catharine Loriland Wolfe Art Students League and The New York Pen and Brush Club, she had contact with most rising artists of her day. But Mary always retained her ties to the Island,

coming back "home" most summers to work and teach. She influenced many girls and women, some of whom, most notably Georgie Read Barton, went on to become professional artists and teachers in their own right.

Mary Allison Doull was one of the 200 or more Canadian artists, including Emily Carr and James Wilson Morrice, who made the trip to Paris before the First World War. At the age of 44 she studied at the Academie Julien and travelled to Italy. Her paintings were shown at the Expositions Annuelles des Beaux Art in 1910, 1911, and 1912.

Doull was also active in the United States, showing with New York Watercolour Club in 1911 and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in 1912. She was perhaps the only Islander ever to become a member of the Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC), the oldest organization of its kind in the world.

The WAAC was established in 1897 to "develop the art and crafts, primarily for the building of the nation; and then for the benefit of the corporation and the community, which endeavours, in turn, to benefit the individual members of the association, through its efforts to help others" (see Harper). This idea of service to others is a theme common to most women artists throughout the century. Not only did they create their own art, but through teaching and building organizations, they nurtured the growth of art in their communities.

In 1920, Doull set up a home and studio in Cape Traverse, PEI, permanently retiring here in 1928. She began experimenting with hand-building pottery, tiles, and sculpture made from Island clay (6.5). Arthritis in later years forced her to give up painting altogether, and clay became her primary medium. It is interesting to note that at the same time, on the other side of Canada, Emily Carr was also creating small clay items for the tourist market.

Mary Allison Doull, PEI's first professional woman artist, died in 1953 at the age of 87.



6.3



6.4



6.5

6.3 *Portrait*, Mary Allison Doull, oil on ivory / huile sur ivoire

6.4 *Still Life (Nature morte)*, Mary Allison Doull, oil on ivory / huile sur ivoire

6.5 *Gargoyle (Gargouille)*, Mary Allison Doull, fired clay / argile cuite

Alma Buote

Alma Buote also made the journey from PEI to a New York painting/teaching studio. Born in Tignish in 1894 to Francois-Joseph Buote (founder of *L'Impartial*, PEI's first French-language newspaper) and Anne Duguay (one of the first Acadian women to obtain a New Brunswick teacher's diploma), Alma had family and community support for her art from the beginning. She received her early art training and much encouragement from Sister Marie de Lorette, CND, and won first prize for an oil painting at a Charlottetown exhibition at the age of 14. The *Impartial* office, which sold art supplies and printed cards and calendars, provided the budding artist with ready access to materials and a venue for her work.

Buote painted large-scale, figurative oils during her teens and mounted, with her family's financial support, her first exhibit in Halifax at the age of 20. She went on to study at the Art Association of Montreal in 1916, showing her work that same year. Alma's early work was portraiture in the traditional, *romantic* style of the period.

Driven by financial need, Alma Buote became a commercial artist and savvy entrepreneur. She produced a number of greeting cards, in French and English, copyrighting each design. In 1920, when the Buote family moved to Trois-Rivières, Quebec, to manage a fox farm, she began to paint and sell silk scarves. After her father's death, she helped manage the farm until the Depression brought on the collapse of the fox industry in 1929. Alma and her mother set off for New York.

In New York, Alma took classes at the Fashion Academy, designed orthopaedic prostheses, and opened her studio. She offered classes in "Fashion illustrating, Fashion designing, Children's fashions, advertising art, elementary painting and drawing, Greeting card and other commercial designing, Handicrafts, Interior decorating, outdoor sketching and French lessons" (see Buote).

It is in her fashion illustrations (6.6 and 6.7) that Alma reveals her love of the human form and decoration. She had a special interest in children's fashions, illustrating and writing young people's books. Perhaps, never having been a mother herself, it was a way to be closer to children.

In 1958, Alma Buote retired to her girlhood home in Tignish. Like Doull, Buote never stopped working to advance the cause of art. She taught painting in Summerside, and, later, in Tignish under the auspices of the Tignish Arts Foundation of which she was a founding member. Buote, a staunch supporter of Acadian culture and the French language, believed that cultural expression was important for all people (6.8). Art did not belong exclusively to large centres, and, with support, it could flourish anywhere. Although she seems to have produced no artwork after her retirement, she wrote regularly for the *Évangéline* and the *Journal-Pioneer*. Alma Buote died in 1966.

Helen Marguerite Haszard

Like Alma Buote, Helen Marguerite Haszard was from a publishing family. She also received her first art lessons from the Catholic sisters and grew up to be an independent, self-supporting artist. Haszard was born in Charlottetown in 1890 to Edith Stowe Moore and G. Herbert Haszard, son of the founder of the Charlottetown *Patriot*. At the age of 12, while convalescing from pneumonia, she began studying art at Notre Dame Convent. Her passion for painting and outdoor sketching became the driving force of her life.

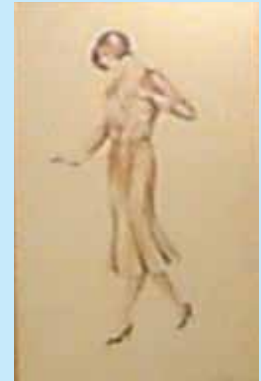
She studied art in Boston from 1912 to 1913 and later, in Ontario, under a renowned art teacher named J. W. Beatty. Beatty shared a studio with Tom Thomson and Group of Seven painters J. E. MacDonald, A. Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris. As a teacher at the Ontario College of Art, he greatly influenced the direction of Canadian art. During the 1920s and 1930s, Haszard kept a studio and taught painting in Toronto. But from June to September she returned to Cavendish to paint, sell her work, and gather a winter's worth of commissions. Her watercolour scenes of Prince Edward Island were sought after by both Islanders and tourists. Helen Haszard died in 1970 at the age of 80.

The influence of the Group of Seven and J. W. Beatty can be seen in Haszard's strong sense of composition and design and the vivid use of colour. This use of colour, in fact, lost her the job of illustrator for her friend Lucy Maud Montgomery's books. The publishers charged that her sunsets were unreal and the colour of the Island soil untrue (6.9 and 6.10).

Helen Haszard's work marks a move away from the



6.6



6.7



6.8

6.6 *Head of a Woman (Tête d'une femme)*, Alma Buote, watercolour / aquarelle

6.7 *Fashion illustration (Illustration du mode)*, Alma Buote, watercolour / aquarelle

6.8 *L'Acadienne*, Alma Buote, oil on canvas / huile sur toile

European tradition of landscape painting and reflects the search for a distinct Canadian identity. Like Emily Carr and the Group of Seven, she sought to express, in paint, a feeling of place that was uniquely Canadian. Where Doull and Buote held to New York and European influences, Haszard's life in Toronto exposed her to the growth of nationalism and its expression through art.



6.9



6.10

6.9 *Green Gables (Pignons verts)*, Helen Haszard, watercolour / aquarelle

6.10 *Green Gables Golf Course (Terrain de golf Green Gables)*, Helen Haszard, watercolour / aquarelle

Georgie Read Barton

Georgie Read Barton, a student of Mary Allison Doull, achieved international acclaim in a career that spanned over 75 years. Her list of credits is impressive. She was one of the first women ever to be admitted into the Salmagundi Club, the oldest existing art club in the world. She was listed in the *Who's Who in American Art*, *The World Who's Who of Women*, and *The Dictionary of International Biographies*, and was winner of many awards including a citation from The American Artists Professional League "for effective action and sustained devotion in the cause of fine art" (see Ogle).

During the 20th century, one art movement followed close on the heels of the last: *Cubism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Conceptualism, Photo Realism*, and *Post Modernism*. In this century of "isms," Barton consistently painted realistic landscapes in oil.

Avant-garde attitudes almost caused Georgie Read to give up painting altogether. There was disdain from the art elite toward those who "painted like a camera" (see Canady). There was a belief that copying from nature showed a lack of artistic imagination. Yet Barton found an endless source of inspiration in rendering scenes as she saw them and had the self-confidence to follow her heart. She credited her sea-faring father, Captain John Read, with helping to shape her drive and determination. And like Doull, Buote, and Haszard, Barton had a father who financially supported a daughter's education.

Georgie Read attended Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, from 1924 to 1927, coming back to the Island to teach at Edgehill School. In 1930, "scared to death" (Ogle), she set out for New York, where she studied at the Art Students League. She was Director of Art at the Ottawa Ladies College from 1932 to 1940 and later taught at St. Agnes School in Albany, New York. In 1942, at the age of 40, she married fellow painter George Barton and had a son. Throughout it all Barton continued to paint.

Georgie Read Barton had a lifelong fascination with capturing atmospheric change through colour and tone, light and shadow. She spent many years in Westchester County, near the Hudson River in New York and was instrumental in the development of the Hudson Valley



6.11 *Sand Dunes (Dunes de sable)*
Georgie Read Barton
oil on canvas / huile sur toile
59.5cm x 75cm / 59,5 cm x 75 cm
circa 1965 / vers 1965

Art Association. On PEI, The Barton Art Club introduced many to the techniques of outdoor landscape painting (6.11). Continuing the tradition, Barton's students are now teaching a new generation of artists.

Barton painted into her nineties, often going back to the same location. Her paintings have become an historical record of the changes on the Island during the 20th century: the haystacks of yesterday are the rolled bales of today. Farms active in the 1940s are now abandoned ruins. Georgie Read Barton died in 1995.

The Transplants

Frieda Creighton Creelman (1900–1967), Elaine Russell Harrison (1915–), Gwen Johnston Fichaud (1915–1988), and Daphne Butler Irving, RCA (1931–) represent a move to the Island rather than away. Transplanted to PEI, following the job transfers of the men in their lives, they put down roots and flourished.

Nova Scotians by birth, Frieda Creelman from Halifax and Elaine Harrison from Petite Riviere both arrived on the Island in the 1930s. Both girls grew up in homes where education was of vital importance. And both women grew to realize that creativity is essential to true education and that self-expression leads to self-knowledge.

Gwen Johnston Fichaud and Daphne Butler Irving, RCA, came to the Island with their husbands and reclaimed

their artistic selves after years of mothering. Both felt the strong societal pressure, especially prevalent after the Second World War, to place family before self. It was only after their children were somewhat independent that they could devote themselves to their own art.

Frieda Creighton Creelman

Frieda Creighton's mother was a teacher, her father a Halifax School Inspector. She was home-schooled much of the time by her mother, being a self-described "peaked" child, made wan and ill as a result of illness (see Epperly). Saturday morning art lessons at the Victoria School of Art (now the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design) were part of her education and she had the good fortune to have Group of Seven artist Arthur Lismer as a teacher. She won many prizes for her early artistic efforts, including a silver watch from the Montreal *Star* in the children's drawing competition.

Creelman's early Charlottetown paintings show the strong influence of Lismer, her teacher. In 1940, while she was trying to start a children's art centre, she carried on a written correspondence with him. Being a great believer in the importance of early arts education, he visited her on the Island in support of her efforts.

She graduated from Dalhousie in 1921 and in 1922 earned her teacher's diploma in Fine Art from the Victoria School of Art and Design. She married Dr. Prescott Creelman, and in 1926 they travelled to a Newfoundland outpost. While Prescott practised medicine, Frieda taught reading and writing to the local teenagers. They lived in the United States and New Brunswick before settling permanently in Charlottetown, where Prescott was hired as the public health officer. Frieda raised her three children, painted, and helped form the Art Society of PEI, serving as its president in the 1930s and again in the 1950s.

The predominantly female PEI Art Society encouraged the growth of art in PEI through exhibitions, classes, landscape painting groups, and visiting lecturers (6.12). During the 1950s, they brought in the work of painters of international repute to Charlottetown. A British watercolour show in March 1955, for example, featured such artists as Sir Jacob Epstein, Barbara Hepworth, Vanessa Bell, Wyndham Lewis, William Holgate, and John Nash. The Art Society volunteered countless hours in community service, using their talents to



6.12 Art Society of PEI, Landscape group / Groupe de paysagistes, 1954

paint backdrops for the orphanage and for plays, and fundraising to bring art to the Island. The members of the group were instrumental in the establishment of the Confederation Centre of the Arts and the formation of the docent program to guide visitors through the gallery. As well, together they eased the isolation that many artists felt working in small centres and encouraged the development of each other's talents.

The human presence is never far from Creelman's work, whether she was painting gardens, plowed fields, or, most often, homey buildings (6.13). "In general, women painters have tended to choose psychological and narrative themes, rather than action subjects, or the 'empty landscape tradition,'" it was noted in a 1975 show of Canadian women painters. "A striking number of their pictures depict people populated environments, houses, gardens, interiors, etc., or personal relationships and emotions" (see Farr and Luckyj). Creelman's work certainly follows that pattern.

Creelman painted from nature consistently throughout her life, in watercolours or oils. She experimented with the intensity and emotional impact of colour, pushing the naturally occurring complementary colours of the Island to their height. At the age of 62, Creelman and two artist friends made a trip to Europe to study and paint. She returned a more mature artist with a freer brush stroke and more subtle palette (6.14 and 6.15).

Marriage to a doctor gave Creelman the financial security to develop without the dictates of the marketplace. Unlike Buote and Doull, she did not have



6.13 *Untitled (Charlottetown rooftops) / Sans titre (toits de Charlottetown)*, c. 1930 / vers 1930

6.14 *Untitled (PEI landscape) / Sans titre (paysage de l'Î.-P.-É.)*

6.15 *Untitled (Spain) / Sans titre (Espagne)*

Frieda Creighton Creelman, oil on canvas / huile sur toile

first hand

to earn a living through her art; she could paint for her own pleasure.

Frieda Creighton Creelman died of cancer in 1967. Soon after, the Charlottetown chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women named a scholarship in her honour, recognizing her contribution to the arts.

Elaine Russell Harrison

Elaine Harrison also attended Dalhousie University, graduating in 1937 with a Bachelor of Arts with distinction in Latin and English. She moved to the Island with her family that same year, when her father, the late Archdeacon G. R. Harrison, became Rector of St. Mary's Anglican Church in Summerside and St. John's Church in St. Eleanor's. She began her 30-year teaching career in Summerside in 1939. She spent many years teaching English and Latin at Summerside High School and, for a few years, taught geometry, German, and art.

Carrying on the tradition of women artists throughout the century, Harrison was an inspired teacher, believing that education was not a means to an end but a way of life. Education was not simply about facts and figures but also included nurturing the creative mind. She was a self-taught artist, "reading all kinds of books about art and studying the works of all kinds of artists" (see Harrison). She was drawn to the work of the modern masters: Van Gogh, Picasso, Kandinsky, Rouault, Tom Thomson, and Emily Carr, to name a few. Expressionistic artists who seek an emotional or spiritual truth, something beyond straight realism, touch her poet's soul.

Harrison paints the wonder of her world: the sea and sky, trees and flowers, children at play, portraits of people and cats (6.16). Her work is deeply textured, and, often, one image is painted over another, with a loose, thickly loaded paint knife.

Throughout her teaching career, Harrison painted and was an active member of the PEI Art Society and the Great George Street Gallery. Since her retirement from teaching in 1968, Harrison has devoted her extraordinary energy to painting, writing, and environmental activism.

Harrison's influential work as a teacher has been publicly acknowledged by a scholarship set up in her name in 1981 by former student George Rankin



6.16 *Fernwood in Winter (Fernwood en hiver)*
Elaine Harrison
acrylic on canvas / acrylique sur toile
75.7cm x 104cm / 75,7 cm x 104 cm
1984

Schurman and with a medal for Meritorious Service to the education of the province's youth from the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). In 1997, she received an honorary degree from UPEI. She continues to live and create in Fernwood, PEI.

Gwen Johnston Fichaud

Gwen Johnston was born in Montreal and although she had a strong desire to study art, her optician father believed that "fine arts was too much education for a girl and that art was the ultimate impracticality" (see MacAndrew). She did manage to study art privately for a year, while living in her father's house, under Wilfred Baren, RCA, before taking her training as a nurse at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Her desire to put pencil to paper found its outlet in the hospital morgue, in anatomical drawings. Her talent was encouraged with an opportunity to study a year at the University of Rochester, New York. She returned to work at the Royal Victoria for two years as an anatomical artist before going overseas as a Nursing Sister.

She passed 20 years in creating a home for her husband and son. After her husband's transfer to the Island in 1964, she began painting full time, every day, developing large canvases in oil-based inks and felt pens. Even during hospitalization for her diabetes she worked, keeping her materials under the bed. She painted Brueghel-like scenes, crowded with people,

recording bits of Island history. Images of opening day at the Charlottetown Driving Park (her first commissioned work), skaters on a moonlit pond, country auctions, and a tobacco factory were all researched and carefully rendered.

As in the work of Harrison and Creelman, there is in Fichaud's work a feeling of a peopled landscape, of homes, gardens, and tended fields: of an Island way of life (6.17 and 6.18). Home is an important theme in the work of many women artists. Art comes from what is closest to the heart.

Gwen Johnston Fichaud was actively involved in the arts community as a tireless organizer and volunteer until her death in 1988.



6.17



6.18

6.17 *Auction at Dundas (Vente aux enchères à Dundas)*, Gwen Fichaud

6.18 *April (Avril)*, Gwen Fichaud, oil based ink on canvas / encre à base d'huile sur toile

Daphne Butler Irving, ARC

After years of fulfilling the post-war societal expectations of motherhood, Daphne Butler Irving found her way back to painting in 1972. Born in New Jersey to Canadian parents, her research chemist father soon moved the family to Boston, where Daphne studied drawing at the Boston Museum School. She did a BFA at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, graduating in 1954. Alex Colville, perhaps Atlantic Canada's best-known artist, was her teacher and mentor, providing a strong technical grounding in the craft of her art. While at Mount Allison, she met her husband, Ron, and after graduation and marriage they ran a private art school, The Moncton School of Fine Arts, for three years. Her babies were soon born and her energies went into their care.

The family moved to Boston, where Ron pursued his Master's degree. In 1972, he was hired by the PEI Department of Education, and the Island became home. Gradually, as her children grew more independent, Daphne began to paint again.

Daphne Irving's early realistic and highly skilled landscape watercolour painting gave way to a more intuitive approach in her forties. Influenced by *abstract impressionists* such as Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler, she began to respond to the movement of washes of colour, to identify and bring out forms, to allow the subconscious expression.

Irving's work has gradually moved a step back to realism, yet she retains the spontaneity that allows paintings to set their own direction. Since the mid-1980s, Irving's work has been strongly Bible-based and figurative, focussing on prophecy and the Revelations of John (6.19 and 6.20).

Irving has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows and in 1978 was admitted to the Royal Canadian Academy.



6.19



6.20

6.19 *Child's Play (Jeu d'enfant)*, Daphne Irving, oil on canvas / huile sur toile, 4'x5'

6.20 *Moses and Aaron Meet (Moïse et Aaron se rencontrent)*, Daphne Irving, watercolour / aquarelle, 1990

The Back-to-the-Landers

There are artists who live extraordinary lives whose art rarely rises above ordinary. Other artists live quiet, unassuming lives yet create extraordinary art. And then there are the few whose lives match their art, who live art-fully and create art that lives and breathes. **Erica Rutherford**, RCA (1923–), **Hilda Woolnough**, RCA (1934–), and **Terry Dunton Stevenson** (1949–) are three such artists. They have all made a substantial contribution to the professionalism of Island art, both through a personal commitment to their own art and strong community involvement.

All three “came from away,” arriving on PEI with the 1970s wave of newcomers. Drawn by the Island’s beauty, the slower pace of life, and the inexpensive land, creative people of all disciplines chose the Island as home. This “back-to-the-land” phenomenon brought new ideas and worldly experience to the Island. The artists taught from their diverse art educations, established arts organizations, and encouraged professional development.

Woolnough and Rutherford (and Irving before them) moved Island art away from the representational landscape work common on the Island. Dreams, visions, and imaginative forms are allowed expression. Over the century, as more women artists grew confident in their art and dared to reveal themselves, society has slowly accepted their unique vision. Still, for many Islanders, this work is unsettling and not easily appreciated.

Erica Rutherford, ARC

“Most of all we responded to Prince Edward Island,” Erica Rutherford wrote in her autobiography, *Nine Lives*, of a trip that included her first visit to the Island in 1970. “I felt home there for the first time since I had come to North America” (see Rutherford). Erica Rutherford summered on the Island for many years, moving permanently “home” in 1985. Her work changed at this time, becoming “more decorative and richer in detail” (see Rutherford).

Rutherford’s travels have taken her from Edinburgh, Scotland, where she was born in 1923, to England, France, South Africa, Spain, Italy, and many parts of North America. Throughout her remarkable, multidisciplinary career, she has been an actor, filmmaker, farmer, teacher, writer, and, always, an artist.

Although Rutherford is primarily a self-taught artist, she did study drawing, sculpture, and theatre design at the Slade School of Fine Art; historical design at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, both in London; and drawing and painting at L’Academie Julien, Paris. She has taught at several universities and colleges, including West Surrey College of Art in England, the University of Missouri, USA, and the University of Guelph, Canada.

In a career that spans over half a century, she has exhibited in hundreds of group and solo shows and is represented in major public and corporate collections including New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the Arts

Council of Great Britain, and the Canada Council Art Bank.

Born male, Erica Rutherford grappled with gender identity conflicts throughout her life, leading ultimately to gender reassignment surgery. Her experience of living in society as both man and woman offers rare insight into the way gender affects judgement of art. She writes:

I can testify that going from the role of a man to that of a woman is unquestionably a loss of privilege. The woman's movement has made us all more aware of all the preferential treatment given to men, but we are a long way from altering attitudes. The experience of changing from a man to a woman brings me face to face with the humiliations of being treated daily as an inferior. These attitudes are often ingrained, even among men who are consciously trying to avoid them. The expectations from men of a woman's achievement are higher than that for another man and I have experienced increased criticism of my work.

Rutherford has worked and excelled at a number of different media. Her early hard-edge geometric abstracts of the 1950s moved into torn paper, layered collages in the 1960s. Her painting became more figurative in the 1970s and she carried the simple, colourful shapes into screen printing of domestic still lifes and landscapes in the 1980s (6.21). Her 1998 Confederation Centre of the Arts exhibition, *The Human Comedy*, is a further evolution in style and content (6.22).

Eric[a] Rutherford, who has come from away, and immediately caught the mood of the land. Perhaps Rutherford has been the most successful to date because [her] controlled abstract design interpretation reveals the true colour intensity to be found in Island space (see Williamson).

Rutherford has made a huge contribution to the development of the arts on PEI. She was instrumental in the formation of the alternative Great George Street Gallery in Charlottetown, providing local artists with a venue to show their work and view the work of other non-mainstream Canadian artists. Throughout the 1990s, she organized printmaking workshops at her studio with nationally known artists, leading to the formation of the PEI Printmakers Council. In 1999, Erica Rutherford was admitted to the Royal Canadian Academy.



6.21



6.22

6.21 *Earnscliff*, Erica Rutherford, screenprint / sérigraphie, 23"x30", circa 1970 / vers 1970

6.22 *Which Way (Quelle direction)*, Erica Rutherford, oil on canvas / huile sur toile, 44"x54"

Hilda Woolnough

Hilda Woolnough has left her mark on Island art like no other. During her 30 years on the Island, Woolnough has been a teacher and tireless champion of artist's rights and opportunities, serving on the boards of many professional provincial and federal arts organizations. She was a driving force behind The Phoenix Gallery, The Gallery-On-Demand, the Great George Street Gallery, The Arts Guild, and the Printmakers Council.

Woolnough has pursued her own work with equal vigour, constantly exploring new media. Her passion is for expressive line in drawing and printmaking but she has also created jewellery, weavings, and quilts. During the North American craft revival of the 1970s, she worked with traditional Island quilters, helping them to develop original, more contemporary designs.

This renewed interest in craft, brought about by the baby-boom generation's reaction against the mass-production of the post-war period, found support on PEI. Craftspeople from far and wide were among the back-to-the-landers, and their wares found a ready market with the Island's growing tourist trade. A handicraft school opened, later becoming Holland College's School of Visual Art.

Hilda Woolnough was born into a creative family in 1934, in Northampton, England. Her mother, uncle, and brother were all painters; her father built and restored houses. In 1952 she began traditional training at the Chelsea School of Art in London, drawing from plaster casts and still life, developing strong discipline and technique. It was here that she first experimented with printmaking, a medium she has passionately pursued throughout her career. But it was with a specialty in painting that she graduated in 1955.

Woolnough immigrated to Canada in 1957, settling in Hamilton, Ontario. In 1965 she headed to the San Miguel de Allende Instituto in Mexico, where she studied experimental etching for two years, graduating with a Master's of Fine Art degree in graphics. Back in London, she did post-graduate work at the Central School of Art and Design in metal techniques. After designing the etching and lithography departments at the Jamaica School of Art in Kingston, Jamaica, Woolnough found her way to PEI. Together with her husband, UPEI professor, writer and publisher, Reshard



6.23 *Rock Series*, Hilda Woolnough, ink / encre, 50.8cmx66.2cm / 50,8 cm x 66,2 cm



6.24 *Disappearing Woman (Femme en train de disparaître)*, Hilda Woolnough, polished graphite and mixed media / graphite poli et techniques mixtes, 45"x30", 1994

Gool, she formed part of the nucleus for a vibrant arts community.

In 1999 Hilda Woolnough received the Adrien Arsenault Senior Arts Award for "contribution to the arts in Prince Edward Island" and was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy. Her work is in many public and private collections including the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Canada Council Art Bank.

Woolnough most often works in series, exploring an idea fully, guided by both intellect and intuition. Nature and the human form provide a starting point, but she moves beyond the representational to a deeper, more universal expression (6.23).

"I'm interested in evolution of plants, land, the world,"

Woolnough once said in a 1989 interview. “There are stages in the growth of the brain that are reptilian or flower-like. They’re proof that we are all the sum of our parts, like the land or sea” (see Rowat).

This interest in evolution embraces the development of myth and human culture and the process of transformation, themes she has explored throughout her career (6.24).

Terry Dunton Stevenson

At the beginning of the 20th century, Alma Buote and Mary Allison Doull had felt compelled to leave their small, isolated Island homes and make their art in New York. Terry Dunton Stevenson left New York to make her art on the Island. Times had changed. Stevenson first felt the “strong, visual impact of the Island landscape” (Stevenson) at the age of 13, on a visit to her Springfield West relatives. Drawn “back to the land,” in 1975, she found her home on PEI and put down roots, bringing this history full circle.

Born in Manhattan in 1949, Dunton Stevenson had early exposure to the artwork of both old and modern masters. She briefly considered social work as a career but soon realized that the greatest human potential lay in the ability to think creatively, and she knew that as an artist and teacher, she could serve this purpose. She graduated from the State University of New York, New Platz, in 1972 with a Bachelor of Science in Art Education and taught for three years in New York.

Throughout the century, generations of women artists have not only created their own art but have generously given of their time and talents to build the arts on the Island. Dunton Stevenson came to the Island and threw her energy into developing children’s arts education, first as a teacher at Callaghan Merritt Junior High School and later as an art consultant with the Department of Education. Her enduring interest in the importance of early art education has expressed itself in a variety of ways, throughout the years—as artist-in-residence in the schools, as a member on many committees, and as a curator of children’s art exhibits.

Terry left full-time teaching in 1977 to focus on her own work. She began the first of many public commissions, creating exhibits for the Alberton Museum, the Fox Museum in O’Leary, and the Eptek Centre in Summerside. The painting methods she developed led

to the creation of a series of large landscape murals and a major exhibition at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in 1987.

Dunton Stevenson’s paintings are often impressionistic renderings of PEI shorelines and horizons (6.25). Working in pastels or using thin washes of acrylics, she slowly builds colour, creating a subtle, somewhat ambiguous image. The viewer is physically engaged: as the eye perceives the individual layers of colour, the mind works to visually process and understand.

Teaching and museum work gave Dunton Stevenson a grounding in many different media. The idea of creating environmental installations grew from her early exposure to New York’s conceptual artists of the 1960s and a growing sense that art can be instrumental in healing mind and spirit of both artist and viewer.

In 1990, she stretched the standard museum format of labelled artifacts behind glass showcases by creating *Somethin’ Fishy*, an underwater environment installation, in Morell, PEI.

In her most ambitious project to date, *Our Island Home*, Gateway Village, Borden-Carleton, she brought artists and artisans together to create a visual history of Prince Edward Island. Not only was she involved in all aspects of the design of this 1997 interpretive centre, but she also created a life-size sculpture of Lucy Maud Montgomery (6.26 and 6.27).

Frequent travels to New York and Italy refresh and stimulate her creative mind. She continues to explore the healing power of art through drawing, painting, and printmaking.



6.25 *Moonlight Dune (Dune au clair de lune)*, Terry Dunton Stevenson, acrylic on masonite / acrylique sur masonite, 4'x8', 1986



6.26 & 6.27
Lucy Maud
Montgomery,
Terry Dunton
Stevenson,
cast resin,
life size /
résine moulée,
grandeur
nature,
1997

Conclusion

The 20th century challenged the who, what, where, and why of art making. The generation of women artists born on the Island during the baby boom were raised in the changing climate of feminism, and they have grown to expect equality in education and career opportunity and to value their own truth.

The art of PEI at the end of the 20th century constitutes a mini-cosmology of the art world at large. While most artists work in a traditional, representational style and depend on tourist dollars for their livelihood, many others are experimenting with new materials and technologies. In the last decade, senior artists have developed a strong printmaking presence, with workshops and exchanges. Many are working in sculpture. Women artists of all ages are exploring personal, psychological, and spiritual connections to gender and this place called home.

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Images

6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.16, 6.17, 6.23
Permanent collection of / Collection permanente du
Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum

6.4, 6.5
Collection of the Prince Edward Island Museum
and Heritage Foundation Artfactory / Collection de
l'Artfactory du Musée et de la Fondation du patrimoine
de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard

6.6, 6.7
Collection of / Collection J.-Henri Gaudet

6.8
Collection of the Acadian Museum, Miscouche /
Collection du Musée Acadien, Miscouche
Donor / Bienfaiteur: J.-Henri Gaudet

6.13, 6.14, 6.15
Collection of / Collection Sylvia Creelman

6.18
Collection of / Collection du Prince Edward Island Farm
Centre

6.19
University of New Brunswick Collection / Collection de
l'Université du Nouveau-Brunswick

6.20
Collection of the artist (Daphne Irving) / Collection de
l'artiste (Daphne Irving)

6.21, 6.22
Collection of the artist (Erica Rutherford) / Collection
de l'artiste (Erica Rutherford)

6.24
Collection of the artist (Hilda Woolnough) / Collection
de l'artiste (Hilda Woolnough)

6.25
Collection of / Collection Northern Telecom

6.26, 6.27
Gateway Village Interpretive Centre

first hand



first hand collage created by Sandy Kowalik