At Springbrook: Searching for Frederica Campbell and Maud Montgomery

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Poet's Preamble: During the winter of 2023, my partner, Stephen MacInnis, began reading the *Complete Journals of L.M. Montgomery* and was moved by Maud's entries after the loss of her cousin and beloved friend Frederica Campbell. I have had a long and close association with Montgomery's life and writing, but I was drawn in anew by what he found in the journals. Later that summer, Stephen and I and our teenagers played tourist in our home province of Prince Edward Island, and Stephen led us on an excursion to visit sites he was curious about, including Frede's grave.

When I wanted to turn my hand to writing something for Maud's 150th birthday and to collaborate with my daughter on a creative project, I considered this collection's theme of commemoration. I thought back to our cemetery visit and decided to see if I had anything poetic to say about it. One winter evening, I began to take notes to draft a poem. The date was 25 January 2024—which turned out to be the 105th anniversary of Frede's death. Spooky! I took it as a sign to continue.

—Jane Ledwell

Artist's Preamble: Growing up in PEI, we sometimes take L.M. Montgomery for granted. I am always jealous of tourists, in a way, because they find it so exciting to be here, where so many of her books are set. Visiting L.M. Montgomery sites and looking for Frederica's grave was an adventure, because we got to play the role of discovering something we had read about but had never seen before. In the cemetery, I was the one in my family who found the grave, and that was very satisfying. I always like collaborating with my artist parents to do creative things, so I enjoyed making a painting inspired by my memory of that day and my mother's poem.

—AnnaSophia Ledwell MacInnis



“Finding Frede,” by AnnaSophia Ledwell MacInnis, watercolour and gouache on paper, 2024.

At Springbrook

—for Maud Montgomery’s 150th birthday

Rain, scotch mist compressed and falling
now, squelching our sandals across cemetery grass.

A graveyard is not an encyclopedia,
not alphabetical—not chronological,

even. Stones arise asymmetrical—surprising
as the living.

“She went away from me,”
her best friend remembered. This
is our map.

We read the stones for signs. We know
a pandemic took her, viral letters and numbers
inscribed into lungs: the lethal variant carried away
this friend, this nurse, this particular.

This vital Frede.

*

Shy strangers, we search for the stone’s formal
“Frederica Campbell MacFarlane.”
She is not, after all, our friend or familiar.
Fully, “Frederica *Elmanstine*,” an old-fashioned
(almost secret) name, of the kind that only occurs
on gravestones, another failed experiment
in language to bind a soul to the world.
(Even granite cannot hold a name forever, beneath
persistence of moss, lichen, time.)

We are in no hurry but not patient,
weaving through clans known and unknown,
reading the rows of those lost to war, disease—
past markers for migrants, frail children, saved souls.

So hard to find, the dead, even under these labels.
Our feet are wet here in the world—in the weather.
The rain is slant, now. Is death also? A break
from war and famine—the demands of
character—the relentlessness of duty—the lure
of attachment—the atonements of storytelling.

*

The author sits sculpted in ease a few miles downcoast—
across the road from her own grave, a monument
where people seek a fiction that was hers (is hers).
Her gaze lifts as theirs casts down to flowers and a few facts:
a changed name, a husband, a typo.

At her side, a bronze cat, looking upward, asks attention.

Maud does not look to the sea here, though you can almost see it, or
to the woods (not forest, but fields gone spruce a spruce’s lifetime ago),

or to the absence of the house where she grew.
Does her body shift toward that other grave,
that holds half her heart?

Maud and Frede promised to look
for each other, from the other side,
close cousins, who, when they came home
from other lives, could not come back
but to each other.

*

Blackbirds chide in the shadow
of Geddie Memorial, the church an austere memorial
to a mission lost to language, a man serving
fictions, revealing the truth
that he was appalled by culture, even his own.
In Oceanic fever dreams, he slept to imagine
things as they are not—awakened
to reimagine things as they are—misunderstanding
the project of stories—a pressing need
for the word—relict in far places.

(New Hebrides, New London: you don't name something *new*
if you got it right the first time.)

Settler certainties washed up here, too,
Some ships stranded on black banks near
Kejipukwek, "the place where one
is knowledgeable about the many shoals."
Knowing was lost in the prose of come-ashores:
the wrecked memory of shoals became "Bayview"—
the severe pages of the white church fall
open at "Springbrook," named with blunt causality.
(Where do brooks come from except springs?)

*

We find Frede, of course, her name
carved in hard rock bought and brought
from somewhere more durable—
than this fragile island of sand
pressed to insubstantial stone by a god's
desperate praying hands, this island
set in saltwater as if to preserve—but abandoned,
anyway, to memory that
erodes, tears, drowns.

Her monument covers buried ash—burned
and not scattered, a hygienic modernism, still

bound to this place—
fire not enough to loosen her to lightness
from the earth, where so much is pressed
upon you, unbearable.

(When I leave only ashes, will I still have bound my love,
my kin, to this soil in unalterable ways—unscatterable
from their stories? They move so freely through the stones.)

We find Maud, still looking, her gaze cast
permanently, toward and toward. She realized too late,
ashes not enough to resolve her longing
for the weight of bones, of body,
a skeleton to carry her solid grief.

Their cemetery names are etched with tools, by human
hands—men's hands, probably—
not bored softly into sandstone by the rasps of clams,
like hollowed rocks that occur here sometimes,
on the shore where, after the mussel's insistent cling,
husks remain while the meat returns
to the sea.

We find them here, apart—
Maud and Frede—
beside that sea, untransformed
by our efforts, joined at both
its surface and its edge
to the vast
no oneness
of past and future.

Bios:

A poet, writer, and editor from Epekwitk/Prince Edward Island, Jane Ledwell has published three books of poetry. Her first, *Last Tomato*, encompasses themes of natural and personal growth, landscape, and connection to place; two others, *Bird Calls* and *Return of the Wild Goose*, take as their inspiration the lives and works of historical women connected to Prince Edward Island. She has also co-written a book on PEI artist, writer, and publisher Elaine Harrison and co-edited two books of academic writing on L.M. Montgomery's life and works. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies*. She works as executive director of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

An art student from Epekwitk/Prince Edward Island, AnnaSophia Ledwell MacInnis works in various art and craft media including acrylic, watercolour, pencil, etching, and felt. She has exhibited works in exhibitions at the Hilda Woolnough Gallery at the Guild and participated in community art events including the River Clyde Pageant and the Art in the Open March of the Crows. She is studying fundamental arts at Holland College in Charlottetown, where she lives with her family, including four cats and a dog.

Banner Image: Painting by AnnaSophia Ledwell MacInnis.

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