

Artist dies

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In 1939, she and new husband Allan Cameron moved to Point Anne east of Belleville. Allan was a foreman with Canada Cement (now Lafarge) and a talented portrait painter. They'd met in an art class and later helped found the Belleville Art Association.

In 1949, they moved to a Rednersville farm to raise their four daughters: Jean Wiinblad of Kitchener, Mairi Redner of Ottawa, Anne Rathwell of Rednersville and Donnah Bojanowski of Newmarket, who paints as Donnah Cameron II.

"She was a wonderful mother," Wiinblad said Thursday evening in a telephone interview from her mother's home.

"She taught us many wonderful things ... everything from how to keep a house (and) making preserves to art. There's lots of people in the family with the talent.

"She could do anything, she really could. Even as a teenager she did watercolours. She went around and took orders, and on beautiful rag paper did watercolour Christmas cards and sold them."

Cameron was a hairdresser — a skill she'd studied before marriage — and clothier, sometimes to the Allan's frustration.

"My husband used to say, 'Donnah, no more people comin' here tryin' on clothes at supper time,'" she said in 2004.

Wiinblad said her mother was a hard worker, and had little patience for those who weren't.

"She grew up in a time when idle hands were the devil's work."

In 1967, Loyalist College began offering continuing education (non-credit) courses. Cameron began teaching art at the campus in the southern Pioneer building and Kente Public School.

"She was a good teacher," said Florence Lennox, one of Cameron's first Loyalist students and now a well-established Belleville painter and member of Gallery 121.

"She was thoughtful and she loved all her students," said Lennox. "She was a good, kind lady, and was most anxious for everyone to succeed."

The pair developed a long friendship that extended beyond their times spent painting together.

"She was always a good friend. It wasn't just a teacher pushing a student. We worked together very well."

Barbara Whelan also painted with Cameron and remembered her as being "so generous of spirit."

"She was always enthusiastic with her painting," said Whelan.

Cameron retired four years ago from

The Artist in Her Own Words

Donnah Cameron gave a lengthy interview to The Intelligencer in November 2004. Here's how she saw herself and her art.

On her art: "I've been an artist forever ... It's fun, but it's part of my life."

On drawing: "It's the basis of everything. You've got to be able to draw what you see — even a cup and saucer."

On cutting hair in her farm days: "Some people'd come off the tractor and get it done, then get back on the tractor and get it dry."

On making clothes for others: "I have people in Belleville today say, 'Don't forget, you made my wedding suit. My husband used to say, 'Donnah, no more people comin' here tryin' on clothes at supper time.'"

teaching courses, but Sharon Campbell, Loyalist's continuing education program co-ordinator, continued to visit her.

"It was a highlight to go to her home and have a cup of tea with her," said Campbell. "She always wanted to show me the latest paintings she had done or the latest quilt she was working on.

"We don't really appreciate right now the hundreds and hundreds who have taken watercolour classes with Donnah, and so many of them starting on watercolour paintings and going on themselves to being really well-known. It's because of her. She was such a wonderful teacher."

"First of all, people had a great admiration for Donnah's paintings, and so they wanted to be able to paint like the way she did," said Campbell. "They came to her with a real respect for her work, and ... she gave everyone lots of attention. She was really clear in the way she did demonstrations.

"She would do it step by step and just make it really easy for everybody. I just loved her."

Campbell noted Cameron was also well-known for her quilting, which was very similar to her watercolour work: instead of boxy designs, Cameron quilted flowers and flowing designs.

Cameron sometimes seemed not to value her work as much as her fans, Campbell said, but she delighted in telling stories.

"It wasn't just a painting — there was some reason that made her paint it," said Campbell.

In 1978, Lennox said, Cameron

co-ordinated the centennial calendar Belleville Today, a collection of 19 ink drawings by local artists, including one by her. The originals still hang at the downtown Scotiabank.

Wiinblad said Cameron was still painting — and won an award — last year, and even went on a family trip to Newfoundland.

"She was right out there with everybody else painting," Wiinblad said. "When she came home, she had 15 big paintings."

The arts council's Feeney laughed as she said Cameron was still feisty at the 2005 Artevino exhibition, exchanging smart remarks with a well-known auctioneer.

"She was giving Boyd Sullivan a run for his money," Feeney said. "She was a good heckler."

It was only in the last year that her mother started truly showing her age, she said. She is survived by dozens of family members, including more than 20 great-grandchildren.

Those who were taught by Cameron will never forget her. Lennox said the artist has left a lasting impression.

"We all advanced, but it was our early training with her that has meant so much to us, that brought us to where we are today."

A reception for Cameron will be held Saturday at the Steele Funeral Home, 30 Moira St. W., from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Funeral to follow. Cremation has occurred and interment will be at Carrying Place Annex Cemetery. The family appreciates donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundation.