

Arts and Ideas

World War I letters a virtual treasure-trove

By JOHN SOMMER

A Georgetown lady, Mrs. Dorothy Marshall, gave me, earlier this year, a huge collection of letters to read. Letters her father, Jack Ballantine, had written to her mother when he was with the Canadian forces in England, during World War I.

There are about 500 letters in the collection, written over a period of two years. Some of the letters are very long, a letter of six or even 10 pages is no rarity, and no letter is shorter than two.

From these letters the portrait of a young man appears that has come to haunt me. Jack Ballantine joined the army in 1916 in a reckless moment. He was a shoemaker by trade, and the army took him and his business and transferred him to Milton, from there to Camp Borden, and eventually to Hamilton.

He was given the rank of Sergeant and his task was to keep the boots of the soldiers in good repair.

On April 11, 1917, he left Canada, together with his unit on board the "Carpathia" bound for England. In England he was stationed at Witley Camp near Witley in Surrey for most of the next two years. In 1918 he hoped

to be sent to France but that never happened. The war ended in November 1918, and Jack Ballantine returned to Georgetown in April, 1919.

These are the bare facts that brought the letters into existence. But underneath these facts a personal sub-text runs through them that made me want to find out ore about the man who wrote them.

I had the strong feeling that his enlisting was an act of rebellion against his family and hometown and the role he was forced to play in it. England opened his heart to the beauty of an older and more tolerant culture.

Soon, however, he realized that without his beloved wife Annie, his life had no focus. The writing of letters (and the receiving of letters from her) became his sole obsession, and a counterbalance to the slaughter nearby.

It is unfortunate that the letters of Mrs. Marshall's mother do not exist anymore. Much that is mentioned and hinted at in Jack Ballantine's letters remains obscure to the outsider because of the missing voice of his wife. To bring light into the darkness I have asked Mrs. Marshall about her parents and what she told me is the stuff of which great novels are made.



Ideas and The Arts by John Sommer

There lived, 100 years ago, a stern, Victorian couple in Georgetown: John A. and Margaret Ballantine. Mr. Ballantine was a wealthy dealer in coal, cement, and wood. He was also a builder of houses. Quite a few of the stately houses in the area near the railway station originated with him.

His office was in the little building that is now 39 King Street. Margaret Ballantine was the proud and possessive mother of seven children: Jim, Cathrin, Florence, Harriet, Jack, Pauline, and Norman. Jim, her first born, was the apple of her eye.

He was a real boy, clever and ambitious, and he could do no wrong, as far as his parents were

concerned. All the Ballentine girls were very beautiful, and of the three boys the most handsome was Jack. But Jack was dreamy and self-absorbed and not the best pupil in school.

Nothing could prevent Jim from doing what he wanted to do. In his teens he left Georgetown for an adventurous life. Eventually he became an officer in the armed forces. But Jack got stuck in this little town. He did not finish school and he became a shoemaker.

When Jack was 19 years old he fell passionately in love with 16-year-old Annie Wheeler and she with him. Annie Wheeler also came from a well-off family.

Her family owned a store in Glen Williams. Her father and young Timothy Eaton had been friends long before Timothy started his later, so famous, store in Toronto.

Annie Wheeler was a lovely and

well-brought up young woman, but John and Margaret Ballantine did not want her as a daughter-in-law. The Wheelers of Glen Williams voted for the Liberal Party, whereas the Ballantines of Georgetown voted for the Conservatives. In those days that created a gulf that could not be bridged.

The opposition of his parents made the romantic Jack even more eager to devote himself to his beloved Annie, and, one day in the year 1900 (Jack was 20 and Annie 17-years-old), the two went by train to Toronto and got married.

The story I have started to tell you is a long one, much too long for one column. When you tell a story by installments you are wise to break off at a high point and that is what I am going to do now.

The story is to be continued next week.

Newman exhibition underway

By BETTYANNE WELLSTEAD
Herald Special

One of Halton County's elder statesmen will be honored in June with a retrospective of his work, Paintings From Six Decades, at the Halton Hills Cultural Centre gallery in Georgetown.

A former resident of Ballinacree, Harold J. "Hal" Newman is well known throughout the area. A veteran of two wars, he taught painting in several area communities. He was Director of Recreation in Georgetown in the 1950s, curator of the Halton County Museum, Milton from 1962 to 1973, worked with the Canadian Red Cross Society an d later, the Oakville Harbor Development Authority.

The exhibition of 60 years of work will hang in the gallery

from June 5th to July 6th with various dignitaries from throughout Halton County expected to attend the Opening Gala, sponsored by the Friends of the Halton Hills Libraries.

The artist painted scenes throughout the Milton-Georgetown area, Toronto, Holland Marsh and Georgian Bay. Many familiar landscapes will be featured in the retrospective and will be offered for sale, with several portraits included from his private collection, various drawings, wood cuts, and photographs from his long career and world travels.

Now 92 years of age, the artist presently resides with his step-daughter, Rosemary Campbell, in Toronto. A former Georgetown librarian, Mrs. Campbell will at-

tend the opening in the gallery on June 5th, being held from 7 to 9 p.m. Mayor Russ Miller will officially open the exhibition with other local residents and friends of the artist taking part.

Serving in two World Wars, Hal Newman attained the rank of major. He was discharged in 1944 with a war injury. In 1958 he painted the portrait of Lt. Col. Gordon Cousens for Branch 120 of the Canadian Legion in Georgetown. Members of the various branches of the Legion have been invited to attend the Opening Gala.

Major Newman was born in Montreal in 1899. He travelled throughout the world as an artist, archeologist and historical researcher. He lived in Toronto during the 1920s, studying and painting with various artists.

Short story competition

Writers of humour, sharpen your wit and your pencils: The Leacock Heritage Festival announces the third annual Humorous Short Story Competition for writers of original, unpublished short works of humour. Sponsored by Huronia Sunday, the short story competition is one of several literary events presented by Orillia's Leacock Heritage Festival in 1991.

A grand prize of \$500 and honourable mentions will be awarded by the judging committee, and a selection of stories will be published in Huronia Sunday. The stories must be 1,000 words or less. Writers' entries must be in the mail and postmarked no later than midnight, the 17th of July, 1991. A fee of \$5.00 per submission must also be in the envelope, along with each story.

In 1990, in its second year, the Humorous Short Story Competition attracted double the number of local and national entries even though it was only promoted on a

regional basis. This year, with national promotion, the Leacock Heritage Festival committee expects increased participation.

The winner of the 1990 competition and the \$500 prize was Winifred R. Addison of Orillia for Acquaintances and Other People.

The Leacock Heritage Festival is 13-days of "Good Old-Fashioned Fun Celebrating Leacock's Orillia." This year's Festival runs from July 24 to August 5, 1991. Other Leacock Festival literary activities include four nights of humorous readings by acclaimed Canadian authors, Children's Storytelling as part of the Old-Fashioned Children's Festival and the Leacock Limerick Awards, an international limerick writing competition.


Entries in the Leacock Humorous Short Story Competition should be sent, along with a cheque or money order for \$5.00 per entry to the Leacock Heritage Festival, P.O. Box 2305, Orillia, Ontario L3V 6S3.

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ENERGY HINTS

How to Keep Your Cool

Put Shades on Your Windows!
Keep the hot summer sun out by closing your drapes and blinds. Awnings or wooden louvers will provide further shading.

Insulate Your Attic!
The sun beating down on a roof during a summer day can heat the attic to an overwhelming 54°C (130°F). This heat is then radiated down into your home. A well insulated attic helps keep the heat in during winter and the heat out during summer.

Install Ceiling Fans!
Ceiling fans can make you more comfortable by circulating air. They are becoming popular as an efficient and relatively inexpensive way to make homes more comfortable.

For more free energy tips on heating, cooling, appliances, lighting and much, much more, just drop by our office today. Ask for your FREE Energy Tips Package!

HANDLING A 30-FOOT TELEVISION ANTENNA CAN BE A BIGGER ADVENTURE THAN ANYTHING ON TV.

Every year people install or take down television antennas. And while this can be a do-it-yourself job, it's something that should be done with caution. One of the potential dangers of this job is accidental contact with a hydro line. So before you attempt to install or remove an antennae, check the location of lines around your property. Because holding on to an antenna that touches or even comes close to an overhead wire could severely hurt or even kill you. Don't let a do-it-yourself job turn into an adventure story. Work safely.