

# Arts & Ideas

## Local love affair sparks gossip

Last week I wrote about Jack Ballantine who, at 20 years of age, eloped with 17-year-old Annie Wheeler, against the wishes of his family.

That shocking show of independence became the talk of the county. I have the suspicion that Mazo de la Roche, who was at that time a school girl in Acton, listened to the gossip about the mad young couple's elopement with fascination.

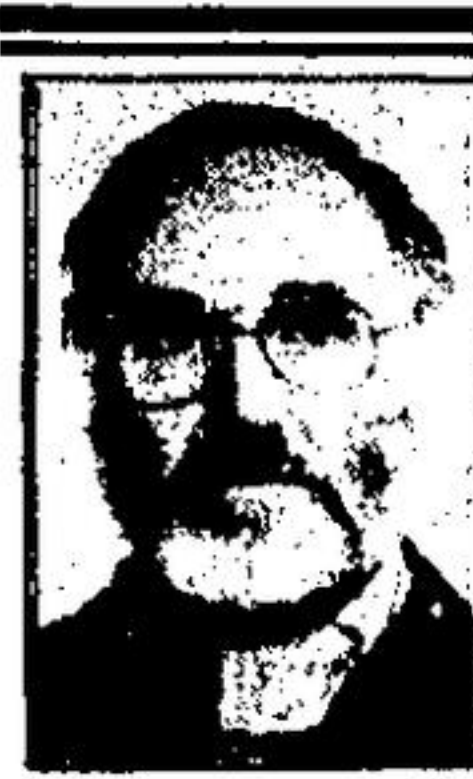
She tucked it away in her mind and used it 25 years later, when she wrote the novel "Jalna", that catapulted her to fame. In that novel, two young people, Piers and Pheasant, run away, get married and spend their wedding night in the "Queen's Hotel" in Toronto. When they return to their families, next day, they are received with outrage.

Jack and Annie became a happy couple for most of their married life, but the older Ballantines never forgave Annie for bewitching their son.

Jack and Annie Ballantine had four children. Albert was born in 1901, Marjorie in 1903, Jack in 1904, and Dorothy (later Mrs. Marshall) in 1908. Dorothy Marshall loves to talk about her childhood and she remembers those far-off years with great accuracy.

Life was very modest by today's inflated standards, but Annie Ballantine was more like an older sister to her children than a mother.

She played with them and covered up for them when they got in trouble with their father. Life with father was at times difficult. Jack new his own worth, but people compared him with his dashing brother Jim and found him wanting. Today men like



**Ideas and The Arts**  
by  
John Sommer

Jack might be appreciated more, but his contemporaries had rigid ideas about what a man was supposed to do and what not.

Jack Ballantine had an eye for beauty. Everything in the house, from chairs to lamps to wallpaper, had to pass muster, in order to be accepted by him. He loved order and elegance. The righteousness of his parents and the bleak, repressive mind-set of so many people in town, depressed him at times.

On his "blue" days he liked to join other young men at the bar of the McGibbon Hotel, which was, understandably enough, not to Annie's liking. On the whole, life was not bad.

Jack was too good-natured to resent his parents' infatuation with his brother Jim very deeply. His love for his wife was more important to Jack than anything else, even his children.

In 1914 the Great War started. Jim Ballantine went to France as an officer. He was severely wounded in 1915 and came home to Georgetown a war hero. There was an enthusiastic reception for Lt. Colonel Ballantine, and the newspaper "The Herald" printed glowing reports about the town's most celebrated citizen.

Jack Ballantine enlisted a year later. I have a notion that he did it because he wanted to shut people up once and for all. Mrs. Marshall told me that her father had drinks with a recruitment officer and before he knew what had happened, he had enlisted.

I rather suspect that Jack Ballantine had wanted to enlist ever since his brother Jim had come home a hero. This was a momentous decision for one with his family responsibilities, and he simply needed a few drinks before he jumped.

It took quite a few months for his unit to get ready to leave Canada for Europe. In the meantime the letters started to flow and there were still many opportunities for the family to get together.

Strikingly different from today are the trains that bring Jack to his family for a weekend, or his family to him. Milton, Erin, Camp Borden, Hamilton, all these places were within easy reach from Georgetown in those days. I wish it had stayed that way.

Mrs. Marshall remembers her mother and the children visiting father at Camp Borden and returning the same day! Finally the day of departure arrived. There was leave-taking in Hamilton when the whole battalion got on the train for Halifax, and the ship that took them to England.

From Witley Camp in Surrey, Jack Ballantine shipped rose bushes to his wife in Canada, in August 1917, with his note attached: "Dear Annie: These are rose bushes. Put them in cold water first. Maybe you had better plant them inside first, they are very beautiful. Have them blooming when Jack comes back."

Mrs. Marshall remembers the roses arriving and doing well in her mother's garden. But altogether 24 months would go by before Jack Ballantine would embrace his dear wife again. About Jack's time in England I will write in the next column.

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## A community-minded citizen

• Continued from Page 1

He taught painting in Bolton, Acton, Milton, and Georgetown,

and exhibited his work throughout Ontario. In 1958 he painted the portrait of Lt. Col.

Gordon Cousens for Branch 120 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Georgetown. He was a member of the Society of Painter, Etchers and Engravers, the Canadian Authors Association, and the Five Counties Art Association. He was asked to manage the reorganization of the Georgetown Branch of the Canadian Red Cross Society.

In 1962 he was appointed Director of the Halton County Museum at Kelso and transformed the old Alexander Farm into an imaginative regional museum. He retired in 1973 but became immediately engaged, on behalf of the Oakville Harbour Development Authority in the reconstruction of an old log cabin that had been removed from Trafalgar Road.



Walter Biehn, former owner and publisher of the Herald, helped open the special Harold J. Newman exhibit, "Paintings from Six Decades" last Wednesday at the Art Gallery located in the Halton Hills Cultural Centre on Church Street in Georgetown. The exhibit, which runs through July 6, has even more poignancy now, as Mr. Newman died in Toronto last Thursday, on his 92nd birthday. (Herald photo)

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