

Idle Pursuits -

Celebrating the art of leisure

Days of Country Pleasure

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
ROCKWOOD & AREA

Norval resident Mary Elizabeth Maxwell has published an anecdotal volume on her life in a small rural town, which she has named *To Walk a Country Mile*. I spent many pleasant hours reading her work, and was completely engrossed in the fascinating lives of Norval's history and past residents.

The book is chock full of fascinating old photos, many taken by the author, and

excellent maps for the reader to easily identify placement of houses, businesses and the general lay of the land. It is a well written volume, organized in sections such as "Early Settling History" and "The Fabric of the Community." Special residents, those who had their own particular claim to fame (whether locally or internationally), are well documented with illustrations and biographical information. There is an interesting section on L.M. Montgomery, who resided in Norval from 1926 to

1935, when her husband Rev. Ewan Macdonald served the Presbyterian Church, and J.W.L. Forster, the famous portrait painter of many great Canadians. Maxwell also covers local businesses from their earliest history, such as the Norval Flour Mill and its owner, Robert Noble.

As with any history, the book is liberally sprinkled with tragedy, the loss of many lives most often due to farming accidents. Throughout the work, she discusses pioneer practices, such as lighting,

ploughing, milling, heating and attire.

My favorite section was the walk about Norval in the early 1920's, between the wonderful homes and shops in everyday life. She uses copies of old invoices, photos and advertisements as illustrations and they lend a rich flavor to the profile of the community. Maxwell is appreciative of her lovely surroundings in the pretty village, but laments that some of the historical significance of Norval is slipping away, and she

expresses her sorrow at the rush of development.

To Walk a Country Mile is written with warmth, attention to detail and a great passion. It makes a wonderful trip into history, either strictly for reading or as an actual jaunt to explore Norval's past.

To Walk a Country Mile
Mary Elizabeth Maxwell
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The Scent of Spring

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
ROCKWOOD & AREA

There is nothing like the muskiness of mud, the decay of last autumn's leaves and the perfume of burgeoning bulbs to let you know it's spring.

I think that's what I recall most about our old farm - the scent of spring. Wet, marshy areas were a symphony of song from red-winged blackbirds to the exuberant *caw* of crows. The sponginess of last summer's fallen grasses, goldenrod, asters, and lovely Queen Anne's Lace were their own tactile sensation under my rubber boots. On such walks, rare glimpses of wildflowers pushing their way up to the growing warmth were visual treasures over which I gloated. I loved to finger soft moss and lichen on trees, where they clung in pale

green splendor to rough damp bark.

But the cold tang of thawed creek bubbling and rushing with melt-off - that was heavenly! Even the organic smell of a neighboring farmer moving horse "fertilizer," or *eau de wet dog* after my black shepherd, Jet, had a ritual dip in the creek, were a welcome change from old man winter's bitterness that paralyzed odors.

Shortly after spring's first awakening came the blossoms of the apple trees, an ethereal thing to see and savor. The orchard became a glorious pathway of enchantment, like the "White Way of Delight" in *Anne of Green Gables*:

"Overhead was one long canopy of snowy fragrant blossom. Below the boughs the air was full of purple twilight and far ahead a glimpse of painted sunset sky shone like

a great rose window at the end of a cathedral aisle." (L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*, 1908).

The cherry tree by the corner of the cornfield was my favorite, with its rich, red wood and pale blossoms that were so irresistible I could never go home without a few cuttings to grace a vase. There were never any cherries to speak of in my lifetime, but the blossoms of spring are indelibly etched in my mind. I considered myself favored because I had the back bedroom, and a corner window from which I could see my most loved trees, including the cherry, and the rest of nature in her glory each season. And of course, I could open the window to let the perfume of them in.

There were smells so thick you could taste them on your tongue. Was that physi-

cally possible? It seemed like it. As the asparagus and rhubarb developed in the fields I could imagine their crunch just from one sniff, and they made my mouth water.

Although I miss the farm, I'm still able to hike other woods and grassy areas in search of unexpected spring treasure. It may be a tiny bud blossoming just for me, the sight of a hardy North American robin poke-poking at the earth for breakfast, or more often than not, an elusive tang of growth that whisks me back to glorious childhood explorations that led me to surprise discoveries. So if you catch me standing still on a trail, eyes closed and a look of rapture on my face, you'll know I'm reliving the scent of spring.

Murder, Mayhem and Mystery!

BY PAT ADAMS
SPECIAL TO THE COMPASS

Murder, mystery and mayhem are all ingredients of *The House on the Cliff*, the Milton Players' last play of the season being presented in six performances on May 1, 2, and 6, 7, 8, and 9 at the Seniors' Activity Centre.

The play, written by George Batson, promises to keep audiences glued to their seats as they experience the twists and turns of this exciting drama. A house overlooking the northern tip of one of the Great Lakes is rumored to be the last stop on the Civil War's Underground Railway. Years earlier, an excursion boat sunk nearby and locals believed that the lake was haunted by the souls of those who drowned. Residents of

the house are just as mysterious as the setting and nothing is what it appears to be.

Director Susan Cranford is well known to Milton. Her most recent directorial experience was *Anybody for Murder?* She portrayed Cillia Fraser in *Opening Night* and has numerous acting and directorial credits in ten years with the Milton Players.

Tim Beddoes plays Dr. Lane in the drama and makes his Canadian stage debut. His last stage credit was in the *Big Bad Mouse* in Britain. Ainsley Ford, who plays Eileen Clayton, makes her fourth appearance with the troop; other credits include *Move Over Mrs. Markham* and *Opening Night*. Sharon Beddoes (as Karen Clayton)

has past performances including *Boeing, Boeing* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Joan Clement (as Jenny) produced *Opening Night* and will be remembered for *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon*.

Donna White as Miss Pepper makes her stage debut with this production. David McPhail (portraying Corey Phillips) has been active behind the scenes with the Milton Players and has been involved in the Haunted Homestead Spirit Search. Brian Cranford is Stage Manager for this production.

Tickets can be purchased at Peggy's in Milton Mall and at Delacourt's on Main Street. The first Saturday night performance of *The House on the Cliff* is already sold out.

SUBMITTED BY THE VON CUBE BROTHERS
1ST LINE GARDENING GURUS

Lawn Chair Gardening

This tiny corner of Idle Pursuits was left this month for those of us who like working with Mother Nature to provide us with food for the body and the soul.

It's the time of year when those longer days still don't seem long enough to complete all our yard chores. There's a mad scramble for the rototiller to get our garden planted. Earlier, bigger, better, tomatoes...bragging rights for another year. In fact, wise old farmers say "slow down, take the time to do some fishin', the ground ain't ready

yet." We should learn not to till our gardens too early but rather leave the soil a week or so to warm up. Let those weed seeds germinate! Only when the soil temperatures reach 50F do we till those weeds under before planting. Very little activity takes place when soil temperatures are under 50F.

Mother Nature provides us with tell-tale signs when the ground is ready. When dandelions start to bloom, good gardeners know that last year's seeds have germinated, the ground is warm and it's

time to till the unwanted to make room for the wanted. The results will be better crop production with considerably less weed infestation. It only seems like a late garden will never catch up. While your early bird neighbor's hoeing his pesky weeds, grab a beverage, pull up a lawn chair and watch him work while you plan your next project.

Remember to apply Cygon 2E to Birch trees in the next week or two to avoid Birch leaf miner this summer. It's available at hardware stores.

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Three Great Mother's Day Ideas!

1 - Create your own gift certificate - make your own card with hand made paper, (can be picked up at most speciality stationary or gift shops), and pressed flowers. Glue or secure the flowers to the outside in a pretty pattern. You can also use a simple blank store bought card if pressed for time. Inside, write (in your best handwriting) what you promise to do for her. Some great ideas include a day in the her garden, cleaning out the garage or painting a room she has wanted done for a while.

2 - Put together a small indoor herb garden. Find a large shallow pot, a rectangular window box is perfect. Pick out your mother's favorite potted herbs at any local nursery, they can include basil, mint, chives, rosemary and thyme. A nice added touch is placing a border of edible flowers such as pansies or marigolds. This adds a little colour.

3 - An easy children's dessert for Mom! Ice Cream Crumble Pie

3/4 cup of melted butter
2 cups rolled oats
1 cup all purpose flour
1 cup of brown sugar

1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 jar of caramel
1/2 litre of French vanilla or
butterscotch ripple ice cream

Combine melted butter, rolled oats, flour, brown sugar, granulated sugar and crumble onto a baking sheet. Bake at 350 Fahrenheit until golden brown; approximately 10 - 15 minutes. Cool, take 1/2 cool mixture and crumble into a large glass pie plate. Pour caramel sauce until mixture is covered. Spread softened ice cream over caramel crumble mixture. Top with the remainder of the crumble mixture and drizzle caramel sauce on top. Place in freezer until 5 minutes before serving.

Have Fun & Enjoy!

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