

(*Jeanne Minhinnick* continued from page 1)

Jeanne continued to comb antique stores and collect books – amassing a library of around 3000 volumes on Canadian history and 19th century social life. Still at Britnell’s, she also began writing on houses and furnishings for magazines including *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. Eventually, as her reputation and income from



L-R Jeanne, Charlie Emlaw, Ann, Alix, Joan Emlaw, Floyd Fudge, George Emlaw at Bay House after a swim

writing and lecturing grew, she was able to join Ann on the farm full time in 1950.

The two threw themselves into rural life. With husbandry books and the patient advice and support of neighbours – Colliers, Emlaws, Fudges and Gydes – they raised sheep. And, as if that weren’t enough, in 1951, they founded the Milford Public Library – using their own books and donations from friends and contacts across Canada. They also started a painting group taught by professional artists, and organized a horticultural society, beautifying the township with crab-apple trees for local farms.

In 1958, Jeanne was offered work on a grand restoration, Upper Canada Village, and made the wrenching decision to leave farming. Still friends, Ann kept the farm, and Jeanne, Bay House. At “The Village,” Jeanne researched, selected and acquired furnishings for

forty buildings, overseeing every interior detail. And her literary mind was hard at work. She and her colleagues invented every individual who lived or worked in each building. Rooms had to look, sound and even smell authentic – right down to the “slightly dusty curtains in the parlors.” As a novel creates a world where its characters breathe and live, so too did Jeanne’s houses.



Jeanne & Ann at Forest Hill



Jeanne at her desk at Britnell’s

In 1961, The Village opened to rave reviews. And soon, other opportunities beckoned. Jeanne wrote and lectured widely and planned and executed furnishings for numerous historical restorations – several had been home to famous individuals and all presented new research and imaginative challenges.

Throughout, Jeanne remained active in the County, spearheading and supporting heritage projects, from opening museums to protecting Loyalist graveyards. She entered flower arrangements at the Milford Fair, occasionally winning. I remember her at Bay House, weeding on summer mornings and clacking away on the little red typewriter in her library. Her beautifully written, meticulously researched book, *At Home in Upper Canada*, was published in 1970 and became a definitive reference on its subject.

In 1973, my grandparents “retired” to Picton. But Jeanne kept working, donating her expertise to the restoration of Macaulay House in Picton, and consulting on restoration of historic rooms in the Parliament Buildings. In 1978, she was awarded the Order of Canada, and in 1979, the Gabrielle Leger Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Heritage Conservation. Also in 1979, Prince Edward County hosted a lavish dinner in her honour – a tribute that moved her more than the medals ever could.

Jeanne sought out – and usually found – the magic and the possibilities in things. *And* she would find a way to make *you* see them too. (Although, unfortunately, my poor mother sometimes felt like another of Jeanne’s projects!) Jeanne’s clothes, like her furniture, were often second hand, but she made them elegant. A school friend of my mother’s once asked, “Is your mummy a movie actress?” In her later years – with her aquiline nose and high cheekbones – Jeanne conveyed the very image of aristocratic “authoress.” And whether lecturing to museum curators, telling you over sandwiches about her lunch with the scandalous Broadway star Tallulah Bankhead, or describing shopping at Giant Tiger, Jeanne’s stories were as deftly composed as an article for *Antiques* or a mantelpiece tableau – and twinkling with magic.