



Silhouettes

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VIOLA'S TALE

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V I O L A ' S T A L E

Half a century ago I helped my father clear out cousin Viola Bell's farmhouse as she moved from Oakville to Woodstock.¹ Among myriad items she would have us toss into the Meduxnekeag was a carton of what I saw were diaries. It was no day for chatting, so I said simply that they were too important to be lost. In hindsight, I surmise that most of her early diaries did go into the creek that day. Yet about 90 remain — some running upwards of a hundred pages — spanning most years between 1917 (when she was 21) and 1984 (age 88). Along with 14 related account books and a quilting log, they are now at the Provincial Archives.

In personal terms the diaries reflect a familiar life-tale. Decades of independent living in the country house her parents built transitioned in older age to a flat in the nearby town, then to a shared room at the local “manor”, then feeble confinement in a bed, until finally she “got away” (as she would say) at age 91. To students of rural history, the Viola diaries reveal themes and variations in another sort of story. Their half million words present a never-married country woman — marginal, precarious economically, yet engaged busily with neighbours and a vast kin network — who earned a living across most of the 20th century not through farming but by her needlecraft.

From the outset, **Viola Letitia Bell** (1896–1988) was marked by singularity. Born when her mother was already 44, she was the sole child of parents who were also first cousins. Her adored papa, a rising farmer in the neighbourhood, died when she was 17, and her sickly mother followed a few years later. She was left alone on 135 acres running from the American line to the Meduxnekeag. Here Viola lived most of her long life, near Briggs's Mill in the part of Carleton County that became “Oakville” when school districts got their names. For much longer than her neighbours, she remained without telephone or electricity, and she never had a car; drinking water was hauled from a spring. Yet one would not call her poor, and

Cover photo: *William A. Bell's house, Weston Road, Carleton County.*
(MC829-MS56-3.)

¹ For simplicity I refer to Viola as “cousin”. In fact, she was my paternal grandfather's first cousin. The extent of relationship between her and me defies ready calculation as both of her parents were Bells, as were both of my paternal grandparents. My father was her principal support in old age. Viola's mother was reared on the farm where I live.

the rocks and stumps of her childhood setting did not keep her from acquiring some of the badges of gentility. She kept her house fastidiously clean, subscribed for newspapers and magazines, read novels (I have 150 of them) on Sunday rather than working, attended Anglican services devotedly while often joining with the Methodists/United Church, gave time and money to good works and wrote her journal in a practiced hand.

By writing down her story daily and often at length, Viola imposed rigorous definition on a rather insecure life. One would not turn to her jottings for local perspective on the Abdication Crisis or the Bricklin. Neither was she in the least introspective, nor a retailer of neighbourhood gossip. What Viola recorded was facts — very local facts. The reader encounters an almost hypnotic stream of minutiae: how many “Martha” or “Red Men” cookies or pieces of fudge were in a batch, how many hills of beans she planted, how many quilt pieces she stitched that day, how many pints of wild strawberries or quarts of salmon she put away, how many folk attended church (and how many of them took communion), what the preacher made of his text, which hymns were sung, how many Christmas cards she received (and how many enclosed letters), who got ahead of her at picking fiddleheads or raspberries, who arrived first at Guild (typically Viola herself), and on and on. Her reportage amounts to a social encyclopaedia of old Oakville, preserving rural ways and cadences now lost to memory.

In person, Viola was dignified rather than exuberant. She collected playbills of the “Oakville Players” of her youth but is never listed among the actors. The only outright delight her journal expresses comes from opening a jar of preserves and finding it perfectly sound (“and it was good!”). Perhaps because she lived alone, she found female get-togethers especially enjoyable. She quilted with the Guild (Anglican), Ladies Aid (United Church) and wartime Red Cross. Meetings always included a potluck meal, and Viola gloried in the great number (including men and “kiddies”) who sat down to supper. She names the varied casseroles, salads and layered cakes. Such meetings were monthly, but the everyday centre of Oakville sociability was its one store.² Viola trekked there to make little purchases, use the telephone, deposit her latest Red Cross needlework, have her neck clipped, fit someone for a dress, catch a ride, and pick up news.



Viola L. Bell as a teenager. (MC829-MS56-6.)

Such daily doings were usually busy, never remarkable. Living alone and rather remotely, Viola led a life at the margins. Only once did she travel as far from home as Fredericton. At her death in 1988 she left behind neither posterity nor fortune. But by a gentle irony, those diaries she would once have consigned to the creek might someday bring her the modest notice she did not look for in life. ■

DAVID BELL

Viola Bell's formidable output joins about 150 other diaries of various genres (travel, farm, religious, military) available at PANB. Recent studies based on NB diaries include Gail Campbell, “I wish to keep a record”: Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick Women Diarists and their World (2017), Ross Hebb, A Canadian Nurse in the Great War: The Diaries of Ruth Loggie, 1915–1916 (2021), Bonnie Huskins & Michael Boudreau, Just the Usual Work: The Social Worlds of Ida Martin, Working-Class Diarist (2021), and David Bell's own The Canadian Journal of Ziba Pope (2022).

² Other neighbourhood diarists confirm the centrality of “the store” and its storekeepers in local affairs.

THOMAS ROBERT COLPITTS

WAS HE NB'S FIRST ELECTRICAL PHOTOGRAPHER

GENIUS OR JUST A SLICK PROMOTER?

When Thomas Robert Colpitts died in Portland, Maine, in 1901 at age sixty-two, he had led the life of a photographer whose travels took him from Albert County to Miramichi, Saint John, and as far west as Manitoba — often surrounded by controversy.¹

He began life in Elgin, Albert County, N.B. in 1839, the son of Robert and Margaret (Kay) Colpitts who operated a farm and mill. Some confusion surrounds events in his early years. By 1861, it appears his mother was widowed and re-married to Ralph O'Brien. At this time, Robert was identified as an artist. Where he came by his training is difficult to say, particularly located in a rural area many miles from Moncton.²

While a resident of Salisbury, Westmorland Co., on 25 October 1869 he married Janet Wood, a native of Chatham. The 1871 census captures him living in Chatham and he resided there until at least the Spring of 1875 when he was a signatory to a petition to the New Brunswick House of Assembly, along with 118 other inhabitants of Northumberland County, to incorporate a Loyal Orange Association in the area. He was thirty-seven.³

His exact movements over the next few years are murky, but it appears that part of that time was spent learning photography in Philadelphia. Part of the impetus for this change may have been the death of his wife, Janet, on 3 August 1875 and no encumbrance of children. His leaving is further substantiated by his

sub-lease of property with a remaining term of fifteen years to a Chatham merchant⁴ within a month of his wife's death.⁵

Four years later, Thomas had returned to Chatham to establish a photography shop opposite the Old Masonic Hall. He purchased, he said, the location originally owned by W. A. Campbell and was advertising in the *Miramichi Advance* as early as May 1879, that he was "Back Again".⁶

During his absence, he had studied and "taken care to note all modern improvements in the art of Photography" in Philadelphia. Also, he promised customers that he could do enlargements of photos finished in India ink, oil or water colours under arrangement with the best artists of Philadelphia. At his shop he kept a separate framing department with a display of older photos taken by him when a resident of Saint John in 1877 where he occupied the former studio of J. D. Marsters on the corner of King and Germain Streets. Unfortunately, he was a victim of the Great Fire of the same year.⁷

Between 1875 and 1877, it seems he spent a portion of his time in Philadelphia where he studied the arts and became fascinated by the exciting applications involving the science of electricity which was captivating the public. There, he took a "diploma" under the direction of Professor M. J. Galloway at the Philadelphia Electropathic Institution. Galloway took advantage of the period before the advance of accredited medical

schools to grant diplomas for the use of electric shock therapy to cure all forms of medical maladies. Building on these applications, the Institution recognized that there might be an audience for use of electricity to speed up the developing process in photography. Colpitts was smitten by this potential.⁸

Within two years of his return to Chatham, Colpitts was advertising in May 1881, "Photographs by Electricity". Whether he had a proven process is questionable. His ad implied that taking a photo of a fidgety child was not problematic, since "I am now working in connection with my camera, an ingeniously constructed apparatus, worked by electricity, enabling me to produce a beautiful picture of any child in one second of time."⁹

Had Colpitts confined himself to building his new business, all may have gone smoothly, but he apparently began to criticize his new competitors, the photographic studio partnership of J.Y. Mersereau and E. H. Thom(p)son at Canada House. This was the former studio location of J.A. Stevens. However, the editor, of the *Miramichi Advance*, D.G. Smith took umbrage. In an editorial on 12 May 1881, Smith under the nom de plume "Quack", took Colpitts to task for claiming he was the "only photographer" in Chatham. In fact, the editor recalled that Colpitts also spread negative rumours about Stevens when he was in business.¹⁰

"Quack" reminded him that he referred to himself as "doctor", alluding to his degree received from Dr. Galloway in Philadelphia, and, perhaps, in reality, Colpitts got his training instead from one of those "Buchanan Diplomas". Following the American Civil War, the Eclectic Medical College of Philadelphia run by John Buchanan was famously or infamously known for issuing diplomas for a fee, a trend not unheard of in

the 21st century. The editor contended that Colpitts had "an envious manner betokening a small and mean mind". Furthermore, Colpitts was accused of poaching photographs from Mersereau & Thompson without their customers' permission and then possibly re-selling after processing through his "electric studio".¹¹

Two days later, Colpitts sent a rebuttal. To prove he was the "only photographer" in town, he recounted how Mersereau approached him to get his opinion about buying Mr. Stevens business. In a high-minded manner, Colpitts concurred that it would be "the best way for them as they knew so little about this business" and "he had better buy and commence here at once for there were always a class of individuals in every place who were not judges of work, consequently he would always have some thing to do and that he could practise up". Colpitts went on to denigrate

Thomson despite having employed him previously from time to time and even allowed him to tend the studio alone in his absence out of town.

**"I am now working
in connection
with my camera,
an ingeniously constructed apparatus,
worked by
electricity, enabling
me to produce
a beautiful picture
of any child
in one second
of time."**

¹ Maine Death Certificates, Ancestry.com.

² *Ibid*; Canada Census, New Brunswick, Albert County 1851, 1861 and 1871.

³ Canada Census, Chatham, Northumberland County 1871; New Brunswick Marriage Records, Ancestry.com; Journals of the House of Assembly, New Brunswick, 1875, thanks to Jeff Ward for pointing this out.

⁴ Northumberland County Land Registry Records, Book 56, pp. 69 and 641, 1874–5.

⁵ *Saint John Watchman*, 21 August 1875. Daniel Johnson's N.B. Newspaper Vital Statistics.

⁶ *Miramichi Advance*, 29 May and 9 October 1879.

⁷ *Ibid.*, George Stewart, *The Story of the Great Fire in St. John, June 20th 1877*. Non-Entity Press, 1980, p.186.

⁸ Colpitts certainly must have read, Drs. Galloway and Bolles, *Electricity, Its Wonders as a Curative Agent and the Treatment of All Diseases*, Philadelphia, 1873.

⁹ *St. John Star*, 15 June 1881. Josh Green of the Provincial Archives has offered a plausible solution that electricity may have used to reduce exposure time.

¹⁰ *Miramichi Advance*, 12 May 1881.

¹¹ For more on the medical licensing system by diploma, consult David Alan Johnson's, John Buchanan's Philadelphia Diploma Mill and the Rise of State Medical Boards, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 89, No.1 (Spring 2015), pp. 25–58; *Miramichi Advance*, 14 May 1881.

Furthermore, the letter to the editor by Quack revealed that Colpitts while working in Hillsborough, N.B., was rumoured to have taken photos “en dishabille” or scantily clad and hoped this was not the case for clients in Chatham. These insinuations and inferences about Colpitts practices must have had definite effect.¹² By June 1, Colpitts publicly announced an action for libel against the editor of the newspaper, but nothing seems to have materialized. Nonetheless, by December, he had sold his business to another photographer, W.J. Williams and left the region.¹³ During this entire period, the only notable example of his work was an advertisement for the sale of photographs taken of the “great jam of logs” at the Southwest Bridge.¹⁴

By the beginning of 1882, Colpitts set his sights on the potential in western Canada. New homesteaders were being drawn from all over eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe by the offer of free land in Manitoba. By April 1882, he had applied and received approval for a quarter section near Brandon and his family included his second wife Angelina, originally from Hopewell, Albert County, along with five-year-old Claude, born in Saint John one month before the Great Fire of 1877, and one-year-old William. Angelina was the daughter of Millidge and Emily West and she and Robert had married on 19 May 1876 in her village. The records show they occupied their land grant near Brandon by October 1882.¹⁵ For the next four years, Thomas travelled across southern Manitoba with his camera, but eventually decided to move into Brandon where he opened a studio. During that time, they saw the birth of another daughter, Josephine Snowflake on 19 Jan. 1884 in the hamlet of Argyle, Manitoba.¹⁶

¹² *Miramichi Advance* 19 May 1881.
¹³ *St. John Star*, 1 June 1881; *Miramichi Advance*, 15 Dec. 1881.
¹⁴ *Miramichi Advance*, 15 Dec. 1881; *St John Star*, 18 June 1881.
¹⁵ Dominion Lands Register, Manitoba, Ancestry.com; Colpitts Ge-

Photographs

BY ELECTRICITY !

No more trouble in getting children's pictures taken. I am now working in connection with my Camera, an ingeniously constructed Apparatus, worked by Electricity, enabling me to produce a beautiful Picture of any child in one second of time—All we need now is a wink from the little folks, and we have a facsimile of them securely made.

In thanking the people of Miramichi for their very liberal patronage during my stay in Chatham, I can assure them in future of getting even better work done by me than in the past. For the greater the facilities, greater will be the results. I have just procured at a great expense the very latest improvements in apparatus, I keep on hand a large stock of pictures, such as Oil paintings, Chromos, and Mottoes. Also a very large stock of picture frames and mouldings. Pictures framed in any style desired, with but short notice and prices to suit the times. I do not wish as I am the only photographer here to exact unreasonably high prices. Old faded likenesses and pictures that have been taken by inexperienced workmen, can be renewed by me, enlarged and finished in Ink, Oil, Water Colors or Crayon. Rooms—Opposite Masonic Hall.

T. R. COLPITTS,
Chatham, May 6, 1881—3m Proprietor.

Chatham Star 15 June 1881. Colpitts advertisement.

nealogy, FamilySearch.org; Canada Census, New Brunswick, Albert County 1871; Chatham Census 1881.
¹⁶ Manitoba Birth Index, Ancestry.com; Manitoba Photographers, Manitoba Historical Society and Archives; Eva Calverley, *And So NINETEEN*: 1879–1919.

For whatever reason, the family suddenly appeared in Lewiston, Maine by 1889. Through U. S. naturalization records, Thomas’ daughter, Snowflake recalled that the family must have made their way by train to Montreal in 1888 and then south on the Maine Central Railway to Lewiston, Maine. Their travel method is attested to by her brother, Edison Colpitts in his U.S. application.¹⁷ Lewiston was a bustling industrial, textile town, which by 1890 had a population over twenty thousand. Once again, Thomas established a studio operating under the name, Colpitts & Co., located at 52 Lisbon Street. Here they stayed for at least two years until a move was made to join his son in Portland where they advertised in 1894 and 1897 as Thomas R. Colpitts & Co. at 514 Congress St. and lived in the same building known as the Baxter Block in downtown Portland. Initially Claude and Edison appeared to be employed as “clerks” in the studio.¹⁸

Claude married Florence H. Callaghan from the city on 22 June 1898 and planned to move to Gardiner, Maine, near the capital of Augusta. However, this undertaking may have been delayed due to Florence’s pregnancy and birth of their first daughter in May 1899. Unfortunately, complications from spinal bifida caused her death barely a month later. Claude undertook to establish a separate business from his father at 562 Congress Street advertised as the New Excel Studio. But the Spring brought further tragedy with the loss of another female child who succumbed to a premature birth in March 1900.¹⁹

Compounding these events was the news that his father had developed cancer of the bladder which proved

¹⁷ U.S Naturalization Records, Snowflake J. West and Edison William Colpitts, Ancestry.com.
¹⁸ U.S. City Directories, *Lewiston Maine City Directory* 1889, 1891; *Portland City Directory* 1894, 1897.
¹⁹ Maine Marriage Records, Ancestry.com; *Portland Evening Express*



Portrait from Thomas Colpitts Studio, Lewiston, Me., ca. 1894. (Source: Ebay.com)

fatal on 15 Sept. 1901. This final blow to the family may have prompted them to uproot and seek a new start further west in Seattle, Washington in 1901–2.²⁰ Initially, Claude joined forces with S. F. McKnight

25 June 1898; Maine Death Records, 18 May 1899, and, 28 March 1900; *Portland City Directory* 1899.
²⁰ The Colpitts may also have found the competition in Portland to be too much to make a living. In 1897, there were twelve other studios besides Colpitts. Granville H. Donham, compiler, *Maine Register or State Year Book*, 1897, p. 400.

to open the Seattle Art Studio on 2nd Avenue but that seems to have been short-lived. Revived as the Colpitts Studio Co. with partner, A. F. Herprich at 113 Marion, he seems to have maintained that establishment into 1904. Throughout this period, his widowed mother, Angelina and sister, Snowflake, resided with him, his wife, Florence and son, Robert, at first in Seattle and Archives West indicates a 1909–1910 presence in Mt. Vernon.²¹

Edison eventually moved on from photography and may have felt compelled to get a more stable income after he married Maude Louise Knapp on 17 March 1905 in Victoria, B.C. Residing in Seattle in 1910 with his wife and ten-year-old stepson, he managed to gain employment with the newly established Puget Sound Electrical Railway as a conductor. This daily service for commuters travelled between the cities Seattle and Tacoma until 1928.²²

Supporting his extended family must have been difficult in a competitive market and may have contributed to a decision by Claude to set up his services in New Westminster, B.C. by 1911. During the decade he opened a photography shop in Victoria known as the Crown Studio at 120 Government Street in 1920 and then a year later at 609 Yates Street called Colpitts Studio, and then a business in Ladysmith in 1921.²³

While in Vancouver, Claude’s sister, Snowflake, met William Aaron West, a cabinet maker, born in Harvey, Albert County, N. B., whom she married on 29 Sept. 1913. By 1918, they had moved to Seattle where they lived in 1920 with their son and her mother, Angelina Colpitts. Angelina lived out her remaining years with them and died on 1 Oct. 1929 at the age of seventy-four.²⁴

²¹ *Seattle City Directory* 1902–1905; www.archiveswest.orbiscascade.org; U.S. Census Mt. Vernon, Washington, 1910.

²² *Seattle City Directory* 1903, Ancestry.com; British Columbia Marriage Index 1905; U.S. Census, Seattle 1910; Puget Sound Electric Railway, www.wikipedia.org.

²³ Canada Census, New Westminster, B.C. 1911; *The Victoria Daily Times* 22 July 1921; *The Province* 24 June and 7 Dec. 1921; *Vancouver Daily World* 20 April 1921; *Vancouver Sun* 30 Nov. 1921.

Claude pursued the photography business in Vancouver/Victoria until about Nov. 1921. While living on Cook Street in the Spring of 1921, the census revealed Claude and Florence shared their home with their two children, Helen and Harold, as well as his cousins, Edna and Hallie Reay. Edna worked as a photographer and employee in the studio.²⁵

However, a subsequent move to Long Beach in 1922 did not have an auspicious start. After establishing the Lafayette Studio on Pine Street with his son, Robert, he was charged twice with violating state wage and employment laws. While running his photography business, he attempted to act as an employment agency to place people in his studio for a fee and then not pay their wages. In one case, he was accused of charging a new migrant \$200.00 in exchange of a promise of work as the studio’s solicitor at a rate of \$75–\$100 for weekly services — no money was forthcoming. Despite numerous complaints, by maneuvering, he continued to evade the Los Angeles police. One gambit was to change the studio name to Gainsborough while still operating at the same address.²⁶

To add insult to injury, in May 1924 he became a co-defendant along with an employee and school principal in a lawsuit brought by parents of a student at the Polytechnic High School who suffered injury the year before when a grandstand, filled with 1,000 students, collapsed during a photo shoot. This may have prompted Claude and Florence to re-settle in San Francisco where by 1926–27 he set up at 1326 47th Avenue.²⁷

By 1930, Claude’s family included his son Robert with his wife, Doris and one-year-old child, Clifton; and Claude’s thirteen-year-old son, Harold; and their cousin Edna Reay. They resided together in Gilroy, Santa Clara County, California, where Claude opened

²⁴ British Columbia Marriage Index, 1913; U.S. Census, Seattle, 1920; U.S. Naturalization Records, Snowflake J. West, Ancestry.com; Washington Death Records, 1929, Ancestry.com.

²⁵ Canada Census, Victoria, B.C. 1921.

²⁶ *Long Beach, Calif. City Directory* 1922 and 1923; *The Long Beach Telegram and Daily News*, 12 Sept. 1922.

²⁷ *The Los Angeles Times* 15 May 1924; *San Francisco City Directory*, 1827.

a commercial studio. He was endeavouring to break into the motion picture industry by transforming their ranch home into a production studio. Following Florence’s sudden death in 1931, Claude married Edna in 1934 near Seattle, Washington. The transitory life continued as his application for U.S. citizenship in 1936 found them living in Oakland, California, at 2819 Frazier Ave. Now, at age fifty-nine, he once again tried to re-invent himself.²⁸

By now, Robert had left the photography business and became a salesman for an aluminium manufacturer. Additionally, Claude and Edna had the extra burden of caring for Harold at home. It appears from the records that Harold had physical and learning disabilities from a young age. According to the 1930 census, he was not attending school at age thirteen. As late as 1938, he was still unemployed. Then, after Claude’s death on 8 Sept. 1939 at San Leandro, a suburb of Oakland, Harold was admitted to the Fairmont Hospital and Infirmary at Eden. For the next six years, he remained there as a patient until his death on 5 May 1946. He was interred with his mother and father at Evergreen Cemetery in Oakland where a peripatetic journey across two generations came to an end.²⁹ Many New Brunswickers and their families experienced such mobility in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and though the photography business leant itself to transportability, it was also rife with precarity.

Although a search has revealed several portrait photos attributed to Thomas and Claude Colpitts when they operated studios in Maine, nothing of substance has turned up for Claude’s photography businesses in British Columbia, Washington, or California. However, the City of Victoria Archives indicates that the Colpitts Studio operating in that city may have had an

²⁸ U.S. Census, Gilroy, California 1930; *Santa Cruz Evening News* 12 Feb. 1931; Washington State, King Co., Marriage Records 1934; U.S. Naturalization Records, Claude Colpitts, 1936, Ancestry.com.

²⁹ U.S. Census, Gilroy, Calif. 1930, 1940; California, U.S. Voter Registrations, 1938, 1940 and 1942; U.S. World War II Draft Cards, Harold



Portrait of Sarah Messer of Harvey, NB, Colpitts & Co. Studio, Portland, Me., ca. 1898. (Source: www.history.earthsci.carleton.ca)

agreement with his successors, Campbell Studios, to hold his negatives. When Claude died in 1939, it was reported that Campbell’s acquired possession of his photos.³⁰ ■

ROGER P. NASON

Francis Colpitts, 1940; Find A Grave Index, 1939 and 1946; *Victoria Times Colonist* 7 May 1946 and 11 Sept. 1939.

³⁰ See Campbell Studio Fonds, PR 0108, City of Victoria Archives; <https://www.archives.victoria.ca>; Da Mattison, Camera Workers: The British Columbia, Alaska and Yukon Photographic Directory 1858–1950, <https://www.cameraworkers.davidmattison.com>.

FANCY, FACT, AND FICTION — IMAGINING THE LIFE OF SARAH GRACE YOUNG

Fancy

I first heard of Sarah **Grace** Young when investigating the life of a Fredericton architect, William E. Minue. He was the designer of what was perhaps Grace’s “dream home” at 222 Waterloo Row in Fredericton. How did a woman from a farming/lumbering family in Taymouth find herself in a palatial home in a prestigious neighbourhood? My overactive, fiction-fed imagination started coming up with various scenarios. Perhaps the property was the dream of her husband, Peter McIntosh McDonald? He was a recently arrived Scottish immigrant; she was a successful (almost) middle-aged business woman who apparently hired him. Did he worm his way into the affections of a lonely but well-off soul? Was she “taken advantage of”? Did he insist on building an enormous house in order to achieve the social acceptance he craved? Or was it a marriage of convenience? Or could it be a love story?



Sarah Grace Young, c. 1890.
(from PANB P61-471)

Just the facts

Secondary sources cite Grace as a successful businesswoman: the proprietor of a popular millinery shop, “The Misses Young”, on Queen Street, located across from the Soldiers’ Barracks. It is said that she and her sister Eva employed up to ten milliners. Born in Taymouth in 1852, Grace was one of eleven children of James A. Young and Christianna MacBean. There were nine girls in the family, which may have seemed a burden to a farmer/lumberman and his wife. (Incidentally, most of the nine girls went by

their middle names, which led to some confusion when searching the records.) In 1871 Grace was still “going to school”, apparently Normal School, as her obituary states that she was part of the class of that year. In 1881 Grace (age 29) and her sister Mary Elizabeth (23) were both earning their keep as school teachers, but still living at home with the rest of their siblings (at least when the census taker visited.)

Grace left teaching and she and another sister Eva (Catherine Eve) were operating “The Misses Young” by January 1884, after purchasing the stock of Sarah A. Gilman’s successful millinery business. The shop was situated at 476 Queen Street, next to a dry goods store, Tennant Davies and Co.

Peter McIntosh McDonald arrived in Canada from Scotland around 1880. According to the 1881 census, he had an “income” (perhaps a stipend from his father?) and he was in Fredericton wrapping up the affairs of his deceased brother, Robert M. McDonald, who had operated a dry goods store. After Robert’s estate was settled, Peter left Fredericton for Ontario but returned to work as a clerk at Tennant Davies and Co., where he would have met the neighbours (The Misses Young). Evidently Grace and Peter hit it off, and they were married in February, 1886. She was 34, he a few years younger. Peter’s place of employment put up bunting to celebrate the happy occasion.



The “Misses Young” shop, on the right of Tennant Davies Dry Goods. (PANB P5-289w)

In 1891 the couple were “lodgers” in Windsor Hall, as were Grace’s sisters, Eva and Bertha, who was also employed as a milliner. In 1892 Peter bought out Eva’s interest in the store, and she left for “the west” (Minneapolis) with another of the staff from the shop. Sometime after 1899 Grace and Peter moved to the new Windsor Hall annex apartments. They entertained friends, family, and the choir of St. Paul’s Church in the public parlors of Windsor Hall.

Their hat business seems to have flourished, despite the fact that there were other milliners operating in Fredericton. At that time hats were as necessary as shoes: women wore one whenever they left the house. Grace travelled regularly to New York and the continent

to keep up with the latest trends in hat fashion. The *Progress* of March 16, 1895 reported that she had set off for New York and Boston to inspect the spring styles, and was expected to return “with lots of Yankee notions”. She and Peter also travelled together (and separately) for pleasure – to Scotland, London, Paris, and “the Upper Provinces”. According to the *Progress*, of July 14, 1900, Grace accompanied three single women who were travelling to the National Women’s Council Annual Meeting in Victoria, BC. It is unclear whether she attended the event or was just along as a chaperone – but even that might suggest that she thought the Council, which focused on women’s issues, was a worthy organization.



The elaborate interior of “The Misses Young” establishment, date unknown.
(PANB P37-9150)

The income from the store was at least sufficient enough to allow Sarah’s purchase of land in Stanley and three other properties in Queensbury Parish on the St. John River, amounting to 500 acres. These were likely acquired as investment properties, as she rented or held the mortgage on them. By 1901 she had disposed of the bulk of her country lands.

According to Grace’s obituary, she retired in 1904, when she sold the business to another milliner, Julia Morgan. (Grace held the lease to the store until 1908.) Peter and Grace then began building their home at 222 Waterloo Row. *The Daily Herald* of March 30, 1905 deemed the house “magnificent” and “in the colonial style... a model of elegance and convenience... handsome and commodious”. It included a carriage house as well as a billiard room on the third floor. By July, Peter and Grace were “receiving friends” on Thursdays and Fridays and over the next few years they entertained the church choir, held bridge parties, and had family and friends come to stay at the house. It was officially christened “Glen Isla” as a nod to Peter’s Scottish heritage. (The house was also known to locals as “Bonnet Hall” in tribute to the business that probably paid for its construction.) In 1910 they hosted “the Misses McDonald of Scotland and Chicago”, possibly Peter’s sisters or nieces. One of Grace’s sisters (Gertrude Amelia Young, known as “Millie”) lived with them for a time. (She was the bookkeeper for the millinery business.) A “domestic” as well as a gardener completed the household and certainly would have been a requirement for a property of that size. By 1911 neither Grace nor Peter was working, although two years earlier, Grace’s brother John A. Young, an MLA, tried (unsuccessfully) to have Peter appointed to the position of Legislative Librarian. (*Daily Herald*, April 10, 1908)

The couple was evidently part of the upper (or at least upper middle) class in Fredericton. In 1912 they were among those in the city paying the most in annual taxes: Peter \$129 (on the house and another Fredericton lot) and Grace \$77.50. (*Daily Mail*, July 13, 1912)



222 Waterloo Row, 1906. “The home of Peter McDonald”, as shown in an advertisement for pianos, found in the *Daily Gleaner*. (Issue unknown.)

In addition to her participation in St. Paul’s Church and its’ choir, Grace joined the IODE sometime before 1910, when she was the Corresponding Secretary for the Provincial Chapter. In 1914 she was responsible for making sure a shipment of “field comforts” found its way to the troops in Britain, just a part of the good works undertaken by the group. The IODE was also about socializing, and Grace attended the “Rose Ball” given by the Sir Howard Douglas Chapter in February of 1914. (She wore a black velvet gown with black trim – there is no mention of a hat.) Grace played an active role in the IODE until at least 1917.

For his part, Peter was involved with the local Society of St. Andrews, and was friends with other Scots in the community, including successful businessmen Donald Fraser Sr. and James F. MacMurray.

Life changed for Grace and Peter in 1916, when their huge house was put up for auction. (Interestingly, the house is variously referred to as either belonging to Peter or to Grace.) The highest bid of \$6900 was deemed too low and the house was taken off the market. It was subsequently rented to Lieutenant-Governor Josiah Wood, newly arrived from England. The McDonalds spent the winter of 1916 in St. Stephen (Grace had at least two sisters living there). That was the year that she survived a “serious operation” in Boston. Perhaps she recuperated in St. Stephen.



222 Waterloo Row: “Bonnet Hall” in 2024. (Moore)

By the spring of 1918 the McDonalds were advertising two suites of furnished rooms available “for light housekeeping” but it is not clear if they were still living in the Waterloo Row house at the time. Finally, in the fall of 1918 the property was sold to David W. Olts. It was reported that “Mrs. MacDonald” was moving to apartments on Regent Street. This led to the idea that Grace and Peter had gone their separate ways, but a year later the *Daily Mail* (October 6, 1919) stated that they were living at the Kirk apartments on Charlotte Street. (The apartment building was the repurposed, original St. Paul’s Church.) In the same year, Grace demonstrated her domestic skills, as she won several

prizes at the Exhibition. Various jams, jellies, pickles, breads and cakes as well as “Women’s Work” (needlework and embroidery) received special notice.

Peter died December 10, 1924. Their residence at that time was 348 Charlotte. Grace was the informant on the death certificate, which described Peter as a dry goods merchant. Oddly, the first names of his mother and father were “unknown”. The other surprise on the death certificate was the revelation that he had had his legs amputated “7–10 years earlier” due to gangrene. So from at least 1917 on, Grace had been his

caregiver. (This may explain why they sold their very large home, as the upper floors would have been inaccessible to Peter.) Peter’s will had been made twenty years earlier, and all of his estate went to his “dear wife”. He had no life insurance and left \$1573.

Her disabled husband was not her only responsibility. Grace’s father died in 1910 and his will stated that once his wife passed away, Grace and her sister Mary Elizabeth (Lizzie) Bell were to be the guardians of their younger brother, William J. Young, who was deemed “incompetent”. After his mother died, William was sent to live with various farming families, some as far away as Carleton County.

By 1931 Grace, age 79, was still living at 348 Charlotte, with a “domestic” (Margaret Akerly). Grace had apparently had an awakening and now identified as a Christian Scientist, after years of attending St. Paul’s church. She also owned



Were some of the elaborate hats in this photo designed by “The Misses Young”? (Elders of St. Andrews Church, PANB P5/507 c. 189?)

a radio, which was a relatively new fixture in private homes. Three years later, in January of 1934, Grace died. At that point she was living with her sister Millie VanWart, on St. John Street. Grace’s will was not settled for another fifteen years, as her estate was linked to the ongoing responsibility for her brother William, who lived until 1956. Grace’s finances had been well looked after, as in 1949 her estate still amounted to over \$12,000.

The Lure of Fiction

So much for the facts. As in the case of most historical research into private lives, the facts of Grace’s life lend themselves to speculation. In the absence of personal recollection, diaries, or autobiographies, only our imagination can fill in the gaps. Grace’s story, like that of so many others, is ripe for interpretation. And there can be as many versions of her story as there are “imagers”. Perhaps other researchers will come up with more sources (facts) that will fill in the gaps in Grace’s story. Were Peter and Grace a happy couple? I like to think so. ■

DIANA MOORE

Jones, Ted and Anita. *Fredericton and Its People:*



The extended Young family, c.1890. Sarah Grace is in the back row, 3rd from left. Her husband Peter McDonald is in the middle row, seated, second from right. (P61-471.)



Advertisement from the Daily Mail, March 18, 1910. Ads such as these were uncommon until after Grace sold the business.

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S U M M E R W O R K

A T P A N B

For the past 100 years in Canada the Girl Guides movement has given young women a space where they feel safe and celebrated in being themselves. As a young girl I got to participate in Girl Guides, and still to this day hear a common refrain from women who were once a Girl Guide. The movement gave them a chance to feel seen and heard. Spending the summer at the Provincial Archives I got the chance to see the evolution of the movement in the Maritimes through its records and to help preserve its rich history for generations of Girl Guides to come. It was a unique privilege and afforded me by being the Margaret Hamilton student archivist this summer. It gave me the opportunity to share the history of a movement that played an integral role in my younger years.

The Girl Scout movement — which would later become the Girl Guides — was inspired by the girls attending the Crystal Palace Boy Scout rally in London in 1909. Lord Baden Powell, the founder of Scouting, witnessed their enthusiasm and a year later established the Girl Guides. Agnes, Baden-Powell’s sister, was put in charge of the movement initially but she was later succeeded by his wife Lady Olave Baden-Powell.

As Chief Guide of the World she traveled across the globe visiting Guides and celebrating young women. It was only a year after the guiding movement began in London that the first Canadian Guiding group was established in St. Catharines, Ontario and by 1912 there were units in every province. Some parents considered activities like camping, tying knots, and canoeing down rivers of no benefit to young girls, but in the face of such pushback the Baden-Powell’s advocated that adventure, real life skills, and connecting to nature and each other built character. Do your best, be good to others, and be a good steward of the world and your community still resound today.

A look into the background of the Guides, especially through the various records of Provincial Commissioners, reveals that the movement is more than just selling cookies and getting badges. Guiding is a space where girls feel like they are part of a special community that believes in them. Each activity that Guides participate in works toward building a supportive community of women across the globe. Even the iconic Girl Guide cookies are a way to help girls learn about diversity and com-

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munity by allowing them the financial ability to travel across the world to see the span of the movement they are a part of and meet girls from different places. From singing camping and paddling songs, to learning to tie the Guide sash, Guiders are encouraged to work as a team.

MC3624, the records donated by the NB Girl Guides Archives, date back the early 1920's in the province. Photos, event planning, corres-



Lady Baden-Powell visiting Guides on one of her visits to NB, ca. 1961.



Mary Jo Stickels (holding flag in front) and Guiding Group July 6, 1945.

pondence, awards, and memberships show the movement as it progressed and grew over the years. This collection highlights important historical moments in Canada through the lens of the movement. Correspondence in this collection shows that during World War II the Girl Guides struggled to keep their famous cookie sale fundraiser going under the strain of sugar rations. Guides

also served their communities during global and national hardships by taking on nursing roles and helping those in need.

Women from across the world can attest to the remarkable experiences that Guiding offers. As a young girl it gave me the opportunity to explore and connect with other girls, and served as a community that was my very own. The Guiding movement has not been without its difficulties as it faced challenges, going through war, financial difficulties, social changes, and enrollment fluctuations over the many decades of New Brunswick Guiding. I got the chance to meet Amanda

Rouse the New Brunswick Girl Guide Commissioner who spoke to how the movement has adapted over the years to become more secular, focused on supporting members who identify as belonging to marginalized groups and standing up against biases to remain relevant to the concerns of today's young girls. Through this collection one sees how the resilience of women and their commitment to celebrate one another and push toward a better future for the next generation of girls unfolded in New Brunswick. ■

GRACE CUNNINGHAM

ROGER P. NASON

New Brunswick and the Provincial Archives recently lost a stalwart in the efforts to research and disseminate the province's past, Roger P. Nason.

Whether to meet academic requirements or be employed in archives, museums, tourism promotion, business development, and educational outreach, research was at the heart of everything he did. A life-long avocation to the province's history was only matched by his enthusiasm to share the information and patterns he uncovered. As with most research, you run across interesting things that do

not pertain to the subject at hand. These may be dismissed, set aside for future exploration, or in Roger's case stored in his encyclopedic memory to be passed along to others when he heard of their research pursuits. Although Mr. Nason's research focused mostly on Grand Manan, St. Andrews, Saint John, and

the Fredericton area, the tidbits he would come across could pertain to any era or part of the province and benefited a wide range of researchers. His name was one commonly

raised when the question would come up, who would know something about that.

In recent years his retirement meant more time to follow his many threads of interest and to mine two resources that had come online, the New Brunswick Land Registry records and the Brunswick News historical newspapers. From these sources, as well as a wide range of others, he was able to

connect people and events at an unprecedented rate and this led to a spate of articles in local and national outlets, including Silhouettes. His passing is a loss to all interested in the province's past and especially those looking for a research assist or morale boost when the trail seemed to go cold. ■



Roger Nason speaking at PANB.

(P154-Fred21 cropped.)