

Kate McIntyre Ruttan, 1855-1928

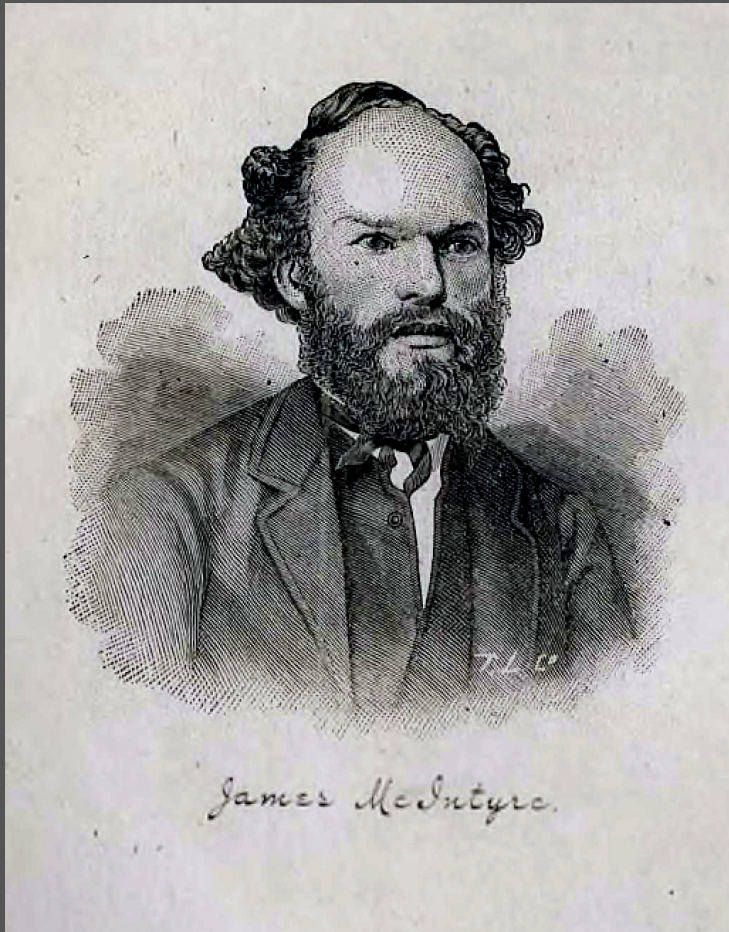


KATE McINTYRE RUTTAN.

Image from Kate McIntyre Ruttan. Rhymes Right or Wrong of Rainy River (Orillia. ON: Times, 1926), frontispiece.

Kate McIntyre Ruttan's life has been researched for inclusion in the Canada's Early Women Writer's project at Simon Fraser University. The following has been revised by Linnea McNally. Research contributions by Elizabeth Donaldson, Patricia McDonald, and Carol Fraser.

Daughter of Ingersoll Cheese Poet, James McIntyre (1827-1906) and Euphemia Frazer (1823-1859), Catherine Frazer McIntyre, known as "Kate" is a fascinating and enigmatic character in Canadian literary history. Born in 1855 in Ingersoll ON, where her family had settled after emigrating from Scotland in the 1840s. Kate lived at home only a few years, residing in the rear of her father's undertaking establishment on King Street East. In 1859, Kate's mother Euphemia, sister of writer Catherine Frazer MacNiven, died. Kate then went to study at the Loretto Academy for Girls in Hamilton, ON.

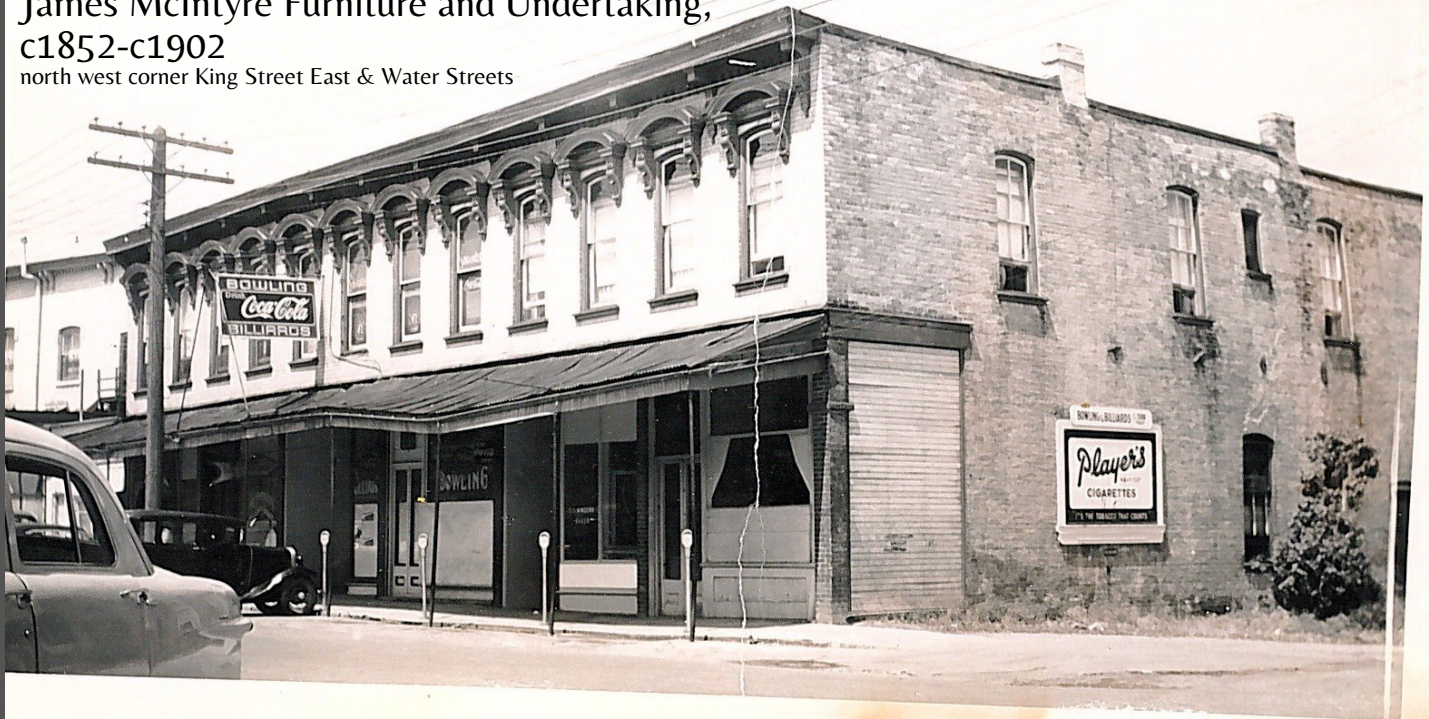


James McIntyre was born in Forres, Scotland in 1829, to Peter Mackintyre and Primrose Simpson. He emigrated to Upper Canada in 1841 and married Euphemia Frazer (1823-1859) in 1855. In 1887, after Euphemia's death in 1859, he married Hannah Belinda (Laur) Walker (1839-1903).

James, a cabinet-maker, coffin dealer, and undertaker on King Street, became known as the "Cheese Poet" of Ingersoll. Many of McIntyre's poems expounded on Oxford County scenery and rural life. McIntyre was tireless supporter of Ingersoll and all things literary. He thought to be the best Shakespearean scholar in town and was a driving force of the first public library. He was financially ruined by a bad partnership and by the flooding of the Canadian River Thames. James died in 1906 in Ingersoll.

James McIntyre Furniture and Undertaking, c1852-c1902

north west corner King Street East & Water Streets



BIRTHS.

At Ingersoll, on the 4th instant, the wife of James McIntyre, Cabinet Maker, of a daughter.

The Flood of 1894

In May of 1894, there was a sudden melting accompanied by warm rains. The Harris Creek, which flows through central Ingersoll became badly flooded and three dams on this stream gave way.

As water rushed through a conduit on King Street East, it washed away the foundation of the brick building on the east side of the stream on the north side of King Street. This building was part of the brick block formerly known as the Jarvis Block, but at the time of the flood, it was known as the Campbell Block.

When the flood waters washed out the foundation of the building adjoining the stream, the brick wall fell into the water which caused the floors of the building to slope to the stream. The building was occupied by James McIntyre. Coffins, rough boxes and much furniture fell into the rough waters and were carried down to the Thames River. The river was high at this time, and many boats were tied up to the trees along the shore. Young men got in the boats and took after the furniture and coffins. Much of the merchandise was pulled on shore at Paton's Sighting, three miles west of Ingersoll. Upholstered chairs were seen floating down river as far as Dorchester. Water flowed over King Street and down Water Street a foot deep.

Furniture, Furniture



JAMES McINTYRE respectfully announces to the inhabitants of Ingersoll and the County of Oxford generally, that he has opened a Furniture Store in the large building nearly opposite Carroll's Hotel, where he has on hand an extensive and varied assortment of Mahogany and Walnut Furniture, consisting of Sofas, Sideboards, Bureaus, Tables, Rocking and common Chairs, Bedsteads, &c. &c. The public are respectfully invited to call and examine the stock on hand.

N. B. Orders for furniture, and jobbing of every description promptly attended to. Coffins finished in the neatest style.

Ingersoll March 1, 1855.

28-y



Kate McIntyre Ruttan family genealogy chart


• Catherine Annabelle Frazer McIntyre 1855-1928 • G6Q3-NLT

Details Time Line Sources **7** Collaborate **1** Memories **0**

Spouses and Children



Show All **+** Add Spouse

 **John Hilyard Cameron**
1856-1919 • GSZN-P7T
Marriage: 10 Sep 1881
Seven Bridge, Muskoka, Ontario, Canada 



 **Catherine Annabelle Frazer McIntyre**
1855-1928 • G6Q3-NLT


Preferred

Children (1)

 **Maude Fraser Cameron**
1883-1959 • GQMR-M3X 

+ Add Child

 **Christy Ruttan**
1868-1912 • KZHJ-2D7
Marriage: 16 May 1888
Ryde, Muskoka District, Ontario, Canada 



 **Catherine Annabelle Frazer McIntyre**
1855-1928 • G6Q3-NLT


Preferred

Children



Parents and Siblings



Show All **+** Add Parent

 **James McIntyre**
1829-1906 • L5B3-PVN
Marriage: 12 Feb 1855
Ingersoll, Oxford, Ontario, Canada 

 **Euphemia Frazer**
1823-1859 • M4V6-2HW

Children (2)

 **Catherine Annabelle Frazer McIntyre**
1855-1928 • G6Q3-NLT 

 **Alexander Murray McIntyre**
1857-1876 • G6QQ-XD2 

+ Add Child



Kate finished her education at the Ingersoll Collegiate Institute, beginning to teaching in Ingersoll in 1881. Sometime later she lived with a family named Canning in Morrison Township Muskoka District, where she also taught. Through the 1880s she remained in Muskoka where she possibly wrote as "Fanny Squires" for the local newspaper. In 1881, she married John H. Cameron (1857-1919) who fathered Kate's only child, Maude Frazer Cameron (1883-1959). After her marriage to John dissolved, Kate briefly married yeoman, Christy Ruttan (b. 1868) in 1888.

The unorthodox nature of Kate's teaching career which lasted from about 1881 to about 1906 is evident in a number of stories appearing in local newspapers, a report from the Muskoka Herald in 1892, for example, described a court case in which "Mrs. Kate Ruttan had been "charged with undue severity in the whipping of [student] Robert John Burnett". The law and community of Lewisham in which Kate taught sided with the teacher and expelled the student from school for his own aggressive behaviour.

Not all of Kate's teaching experiences were negative. In 1897, through a commemorative poem in a local newspaper, she demonstrated compassion for a student whose death had been reported as the result of an epileptic fit, but who seems rather to have died during an unpublicized and fatal case of childbirth. Later that year, while teaching at Houseys Rapids School, Kate rewarded students who had excelled in their exams with a Customary twenty pounds of candy, and during another session of exams, "one dollar to every child who attended every day." According to Kate's own reports, her students seem to have been accustomed to winning awards, for which she was proud.

In 1900, Kate was reportedly offered to teach in Rainy River District, then a growing area. Her last recorded residence in Muskoka was as a boarder in Watt Township, in the census of 1901; although she is listed as a married schoolteacher, she appears without an accompanying husband. Kate arrived with her daughter Maude in Rainy River in about 1902. Whether or not the story held truth, Kate informed her new community that she had just come from training at Winnipeg Normal School, and that she had been teaching in Stodgell, Manitoba. Details about previous marriages seem never to have surfaced during her more than twenty years in Rainy River. For a time, mother and daughter were both hired to teach at Barwick in Chapple Township. Maude later married Bert Eason of Barwick and moved to Saskatchewan. Kate was purportedly dismissed from her instructional work on account of conflict with school inspectors.

Kate moved in about 1906 to LaVallee Township, for one last attempt in the classroom: again facing difference, she agreed to leave but instead became a correspondent for the Fort Frances Times. For more than twenty years (1906-1928), she interpreted the ways and events of LaVallee in rhyme and scottish dialect, often as "Charming Kitty." Her poetry carried on her father's legacy as the Cheese Poet of Ingersoll."

An ode penned to her father by Kate McIntyre Ruttan, that appeared in
'The Four Jameses' by William Arthur Deacon

THE FOUR JAMESES

James McIntyre : The Cheese Poet

TO JAS. McINTYRE

By his daughter, Kate McIntyre Ruttan

A man of mighty mark,
Who crossed the ocean dark
To win some glory;
Resolved to carve his name
High in Canadian fame,
And live in story.

And this methinks will be,
For friend and foe agree
Rare is his talent;
And as much diversified
As our old world is wide,
Hail Scotia's gallant!

He racy is, and witty,
As shown by many a ditty
In humorous vein;
And some say wit's his forte!
His muse all turns to sport,
He eschews pain.

But we who know him best
'Gainst this view must protest,
He's oft pathetic;
And with his pen so wise,
Can bring tears to the eyes
Of each ascetic.

Another memorial poem to her father by Kate McIntyre Ruttan, that appeared in
'The Four Jameses' by William Arthur Deacon

THE FOUR JAMESES

But misfortune came to McIntyre when he took into partnership William Watterworth and Sam Crotty. The firm soon became bankrupt. This disaster was felt very keenly by McIntyre, who was reduced to such financial straights that, to use the language of his daughter, Mrs. Kate Ruttan, her father "couldn't pay for a sitting hen." It seems that even Nature conspired at this time to bring sorrow to her devoted son and eloquent mouthpiece; for in another communication—a telegram this time—Mrs. Ruttan, with characteristic impetuosity, tells of the destruction of her father's place of business by flood and fire:

HIS FACTORYS FOUNDATION FELL FROM THAMES
TORRENT COFFINS CASKETS CARD TABLES PIANOS
PIANOLOS BEDS BUNKS ETC SAILED DOWN RIVER
THAMES WILL WRITE TONIGHT AWAIT MY LETTER
BURNED UP FLOODED DOWN KATE RUTTAN

The fuller explanation in the letter runs:

He was the bright & shining star of Ingersoll Literary Society, attended a Night School for Elocution, & taught (unofficially), the boys, how to "spout." "Spout" was his own word for "declaiming or elocution or harangue." One morn at six he heard the crack of doom & the crash of worlds. His 3 story steam furniture factory fell, (note 3 Fs) "Apt alliteration's artful aid." Foundation of furniture factory fell & sailed down the River Thames. Coffins, caskets, cupboards, card tables, chairs, pianos, pianolas—all commingled in confusion worse confounded. Also he was previously burned out. He wrote me his true townsmen collected Six Hundred Dollars for him that mournful morn. He was the loveliest man on earth.

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JAMES McINTYRE

It has been erroneously stated that McIntyre had a very large factory and business, and died wealthy. It is generally believed that he was in the cheese business, and some have even thought that it was his own factory that made the "Mammoth Cheese" that was sent to the World's Fair at Paris, and inspired the poem generally recognized as McIntyre's masterpiece.

There is not the slightest foundation of truth in any of these rumors. McIntyre was not basely advertising his own concern when he wrote his various lyrics in praise of milch cows and the dairy industry that caused Oxford to be called "the banner county of Ontario." Any one who has ever penetrated to the upper story of one of these combined furniture and undertaking establishments, and found it stocked with stains and varnishes and embalming fluids, and very likely a corpse stretched out on a bench awaiting treatment, will realize that it was no place for the making of cheeses; and that McIntyre, who had an eye to the fitness of things, did not deal in foodstuffs, except in verse. His trade has been defined once for all in the memorial poem by Kate Ruttan:

TO JAS. McINTYRE

An undertaker bold
Who can't be undersold,
Jas. McIntyre;
He has caskets rich and rare,
Fit for the young and fair,
All you'd desire.

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THE FOUR JAMESES

And incomplete our verses,
Did we forget his hearses
All built of glass,
And draped with hangings golden,
Of barbaric splendour olden,
None can surpass.

His book he'll give you gratis,
Filled with divine afflatus
And local news;
High on the wall of fame
He hath written out his name,
Inscribed his muse.

McIntyre was genuinely inspired by the fertile and lovely mixed farming district around Ingersoll—as who is not moved that has ever seen that rich and beautiful country? And he was thrilled by the epic-pastoral drama of this large tract of Canada's loveliest land saved from ruin by excessive wheat raising through the introduction of cheese and butter making on a large scale. It was, in truth, a wonderful union—the grazing herds on the hill-side, the equivalent of the shepherd life the Greek poets sang of, with modern industrialism and international trade—so fruitful that it served to keep that portion of Ontario the garden one wishes it may always remain.

His poetic insight gave him early knowledge of all this; and if his themes are new, surely they are none the worse for that. There is plenty of precedent of the first order for a poet's endeavor to get away from sterile classicism, and refresh his art by singing of the heroic

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JAMES McINTYRE

and beautiful in the life around him, even though the objects and thoughts he treats in his verse are so common as to be vulgarly thought prosaic. Instead of filling his landscapes with non-existent gods and goats and shepherdesses, he saw beauty in what was actually in every meadow—the pacific face of the cow:

THE VALE OF THAMES

In vale of Thames oft'times are seen
The cattle graze 'mong sweetest green,
Or there contented with their fate¹
The gentle cows do ruminate.

And enjoy a double pleasure
In re-chewing hidden treasure,
The cow is a kindly creature,
Kind and pleasant in each feature.

So McIntyre found his avocation. He became the supreme voice of the dairy industry and of the prosperous and progressive farmers of Oxford County; who were almost as content with their fate as the cows themselves. His first volume, *Musings on the Banks of the Canadian Thames*, was published in 1884; and was followed in 1889 by the larger collected and definitive volume, *Poems of James McIntyre*. Both books were greatly in demand, and attained large circulations for that time. He was respected and beloved by all who knew him. Engaged with his

¹Dairy cows would naturally be more contented with their fate than range cattle, that go to the slaughter-house at the age of one or two years.

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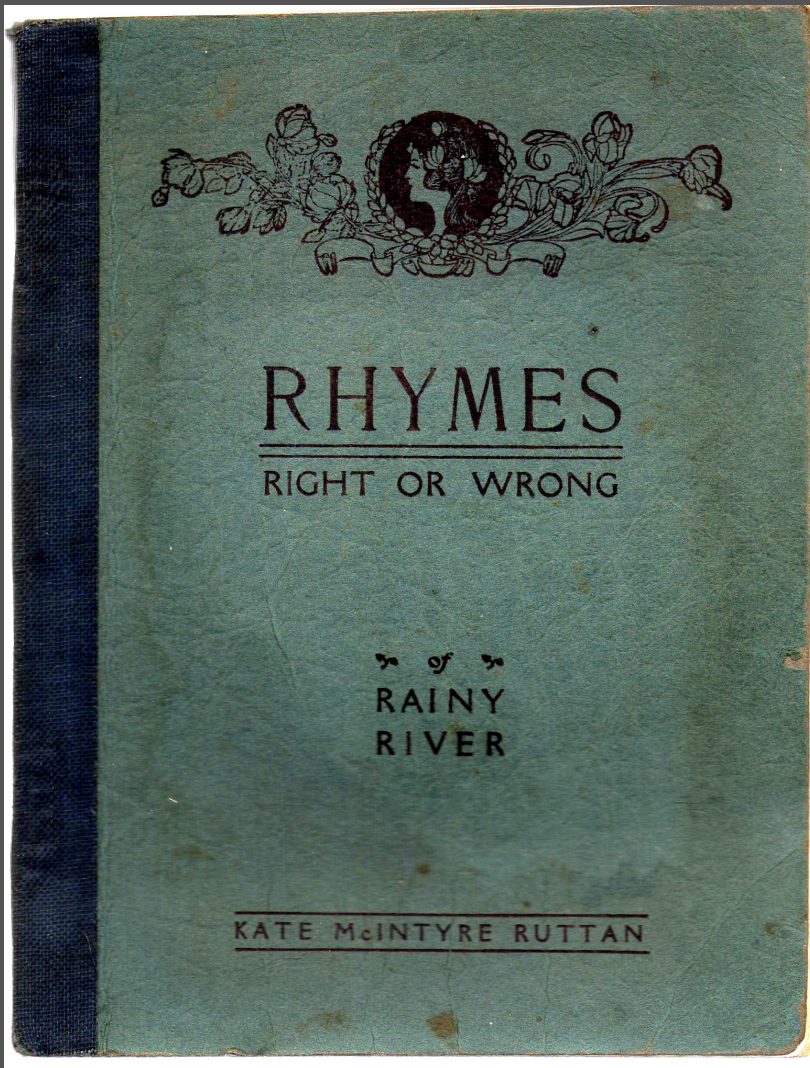
OXFORD COUNTY LIBRARY CO-OPERATIVE

Although hundreds of miles apart their relationship remained close: when Kate's "dear dead daddy" suffered bankruptcy on account of a bad business partnership and the flooding of Ontario's Thames River, she memorialized the events in verse [above].

As a result of the destruction caused by the flood, Kate was left without an inheritance in the future and financially vulnerable in the present, so for additional income she took various forms of part-time employment in addition to writing. According to reports from various dates in the Fort Frances Times, she rented rooms to boarders at her home (called the "Ruttan Reading Room") and at least temporarily operated a bakery on Saturday evening (12 September 1912), peddled Billy Sunday's evangelical tracts (8 February 1917) and designed and sold Christmas cards (20 December 1917). In the summer of 1917 reports claimed that she had taken on work "firing on a freight train" as a stoker (31 May 1917) — unusual and unlikely employment for a woman. Despite facing such financial setbacks, Kate regularly infused even her business interactions with a good measure of wit; she once reported to be on the lookout for "ten cords of good wood," and advertised that she would offer old copies of the Fort Frances Times as partial payment (9 November 1916).

Socially, Kate seems to have been a compilation of contradictions. Despite her financial hardships she was known to offer assistance to others in need. In 1912, when visiting Maude in Winnipeg, she decided to take in John Mannister, an orphan who remained with her in LaVallee for at least two years (and whose help at home coincidentally compensated for Kate's lackluster domestic skills). Her generosity and hospitality found an audience when women were granted suffrage; she hosted a "jubilee" at the Reading Room where her friends freely drank a "delightful draught out of the Holy Grail", on account of succeeding in such a "Holy Quest" (22 March 1917). However, Kate's writing was often offensive and capricious and not surprisingly the source of much misunderstanding. Townspeople recognized her as a secretive woman who rarely appeared in public without her face hidden behind a dark veil, her stout frame dressed in loose kimono-like robes over-sized shawls, and large hats.

From 1917 to 1923, Kate took on yet another job this time as post-mistress and mail carrier: being exposed to town communication provided her with further fodder for her writing. She continued to struggle to earn an income, though, and increasingly relied on neighbourly assistance. In the last decade of her life she developed a relationship with one of her boarders, fellow post-master John Thomas Montgomery (c1856-1924) who is listed as "head" of the house in the 1921 Census of Canada, with Kate as his "pardner". John died in 1924.



Two years later, in 1926, The Times Printing Company in Orillia issued Kate's self-published volume of poems: Rhymes, Right or Wrong, of Rainy River, which she sold door-to-door. Within the year, Kate was busy writing letters to William Arthur Deacon who was at work on The Four Jameses (1927), featuring Kate's father, James McIntyre. Her continual and brassy pleas for further publishing opportunities, and her demands that she earn her "claim to the fame" under her own name, are proof that despite being in her early seventies, Kate had become no less enterprising and bold. In February 1928, Kate was discovered unconscious in her home, after fainting while attempting to bathe a frostbitten foot. She died at Sutcliff Hospital in Emo ON, where pneumonia and blood poisoning proved insurmountable ailments. It is thought that she was buried next to John Montgomery at Devlin Cemetery.

Kate McIntyre Ruttan lived life on her own terms, in a time period when women were often constrained by social and gender barriers. She was able to forge a path for herself and her daughter in the Ontario north, where lumberjacks and railwaymen dominated the rugged landscape. Perhaps she found a place in the north west where she could express herself freely, rather than conform to the social niceties demanded of ladies in Ingersoll, in the last half of the 19th century. Kate was a mother, poet, teacher, and journalist ahead of her time.

LITERARY FAME.

We have become convinced that the sure and certain road to literary fame is to correspond for the Fort Frances Times. The "leading literary lady" of LaVallee (as she loves to style herself) has had her efforts pronounced upon by no less an authority than McLean's magazine as the "Most interesting reporting in Western Canada." Honor to whom honor is due.

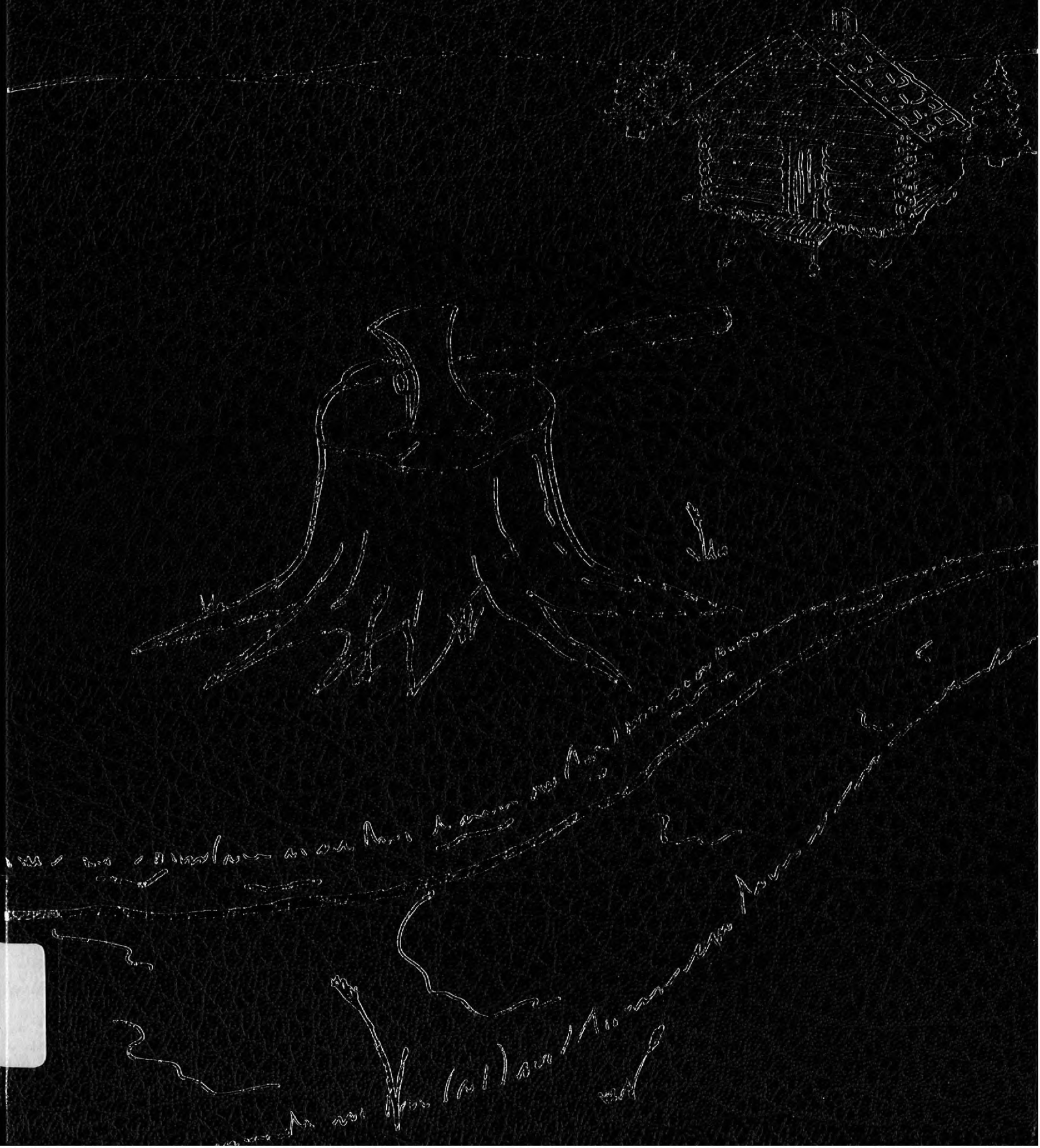
Excerpts from 'Rhymes, Right or Wrong'

Domestic duties fast do scramble,
And squalling babies in your bed;
The rose of love becomes a bramble,
You'd wish you would be quickly dead.

So do not wed at all, unless
You desperately love the man,
And believe his love will ever bless
Each movement of your earthly span.

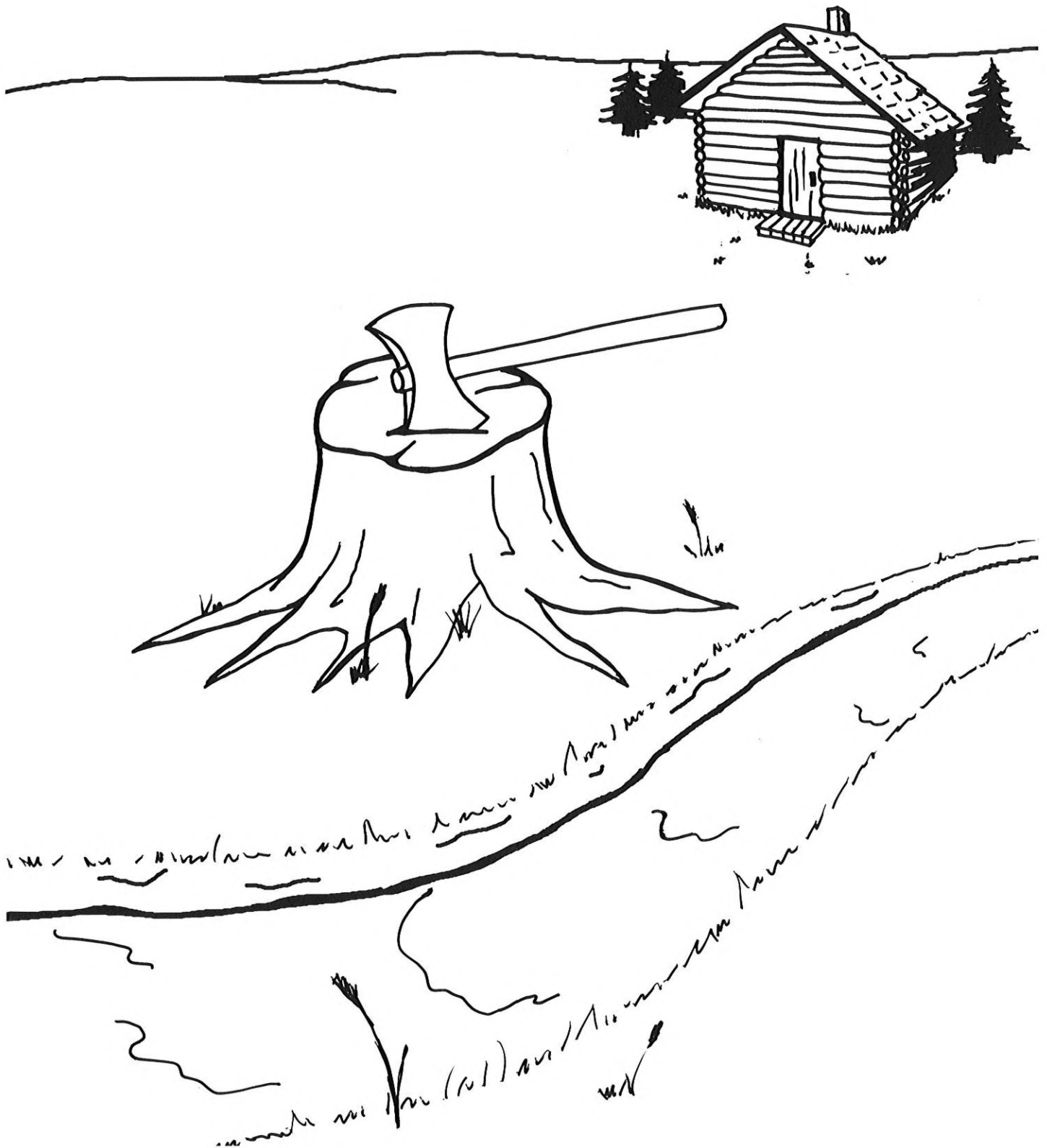
Connections

History of the Pallolee Mummies Site



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Connections





LaVallee School

RUTTAN, KATE

Mystery woman, self-styled poetess, historian, reporter, postmistress, humourist. All of these words describe this woman who lived in LaVallee for almost two decades. Every place has its characters and Kate Ruttan fits that description for LaVallee. Almost any one who has been raised in the area has heard of Kate Ruttan. Her little book of poetry entitled "Rhymes Right or Wrong" has become a collector's item. It was printed by The Times Printing Company, Orillia in 1926 and it is said that she went door to door peddling her book. She marked the place with chalk if they bought a book.



Kate Ruttan

Kate was born Kate Annabelle McIntyre but no one knows when. Her father was James McIntyre of Ingersoll, Ontario. He also was an amateur poet and referred to himself as the "Bard of the Cale-donian Society of Ingersoll."

Kate never imparted any information of her past life, what hap-

pened to her husband Fred Ruttan, where she had lived or where she had been educated. All this remained a closed book at the "library or reading rooms" as she called her small two-storey house. The only date that has been established is that she taught school in Barwick in 1902. It was said that both she and her daughter Maude, also a widow, were teaching there at that time. Maude married Bert Eason of Barwick and moved to Saskatchewan.



Maude Fraser Eason, daughter of Kate Ruttan

Kate then moved from Barwick to teach at the LaVallee School that was located about a mile north on the McTavish Road. One morning she greeted a member of the school board with "I know, I know. Pick up thy bed and walk." The trustee agreed with her and she never taught again. In earlier days I.P.S. (Inspectors, Public School) made regular visits to the schools

and reported back to the School Board about the efficiency of the teacher. Such a visit may have prompted Kate to write "*The Inspector's Visit.*"

"The Inspector is coming and the children are drumming

*With unmerciful din on book, desk and floor;
The school ma'am's dejected, no program's erected,*

And the room's not been scrubbed for six months or more."

The poem goes on to tell of the mortification and nervousness of the teacher as "*Each little cupid seems fearfully stupid*" and she "*outwardly smiles though she inwardly rages.*" He asks to see her program and then said, "You teach well without it? *Excuse me, I doubt it. I'm really distressed to find you have none.*"

When the inspection is over "*the school mistress draws along sigh of relief.*

And anathematizes, Inspectors all sizes, Or white, black or brown may they all come to grief."

Kate had a short entry that she prized enough to put in her book. "Mrs. Kate Ruttan of Stodgell School, Manitoba is to the front with seventeen educational prizes, taken by eight of her pupils on Field Day. They were awarded 2nd prize in parade out of four schools."

From about 1906 until her death in 1928 she was the regular correspondent from LaVallee for the

Fort Frances Times. She had a very distinctive style, at times high flown, flowery, poetical, humorous and often lapsing into Scottish dialect. January 23, 1919. "Mr. Walter McFayden, owner of McFayden's Hall and implement shed hath resumed the management of same and the polished hardwood floor is standing quite a racket. Wull ye no hae a hop every Friday nicht, Walter, and gie the winsome wee things a chance til ease their chilblains? Walter McFayden being the best violinist in the district, his ain sel, 'twould be very easy for him til circumnavigate a series of hops."

She did not hesitate to name names and people must have wondered from week to week just who she would report on next. August 5, 1915 "Miss Jennie McLean has left LaVallee for a season and returned to gladden her mother's modest mansion. Several of the boys meditate suicide, for how to support life in the interim they know not."

Who can know what prompted Kate to write the following?

*"Billy Howell's a nifty boy
And dons white pants and shoes with joy.
The mud to his instep sucks him in.
Oh shame! Oh sorrow! Disgrace and sin."*

John Mannister was an orphan in the Children's Home in Winnipeg in 1912 when Kate arrived to be interviewed as a potential adopting parent or foster mother. They were treated well in the home but looked forward to leaving. Mr. Mannister described her, "She was a short fairly stout woman with a loose hanging dress more like a kimona reaching down to her ankles. She wore a bonnet on her head with a veil covering her face, making it hard to see her features."

John Manister's sister also came with them. Samuel and Emily Shine had lost their daughter Gertrude in a fire in 1909. Family lore has it that Mrs. Ruttan came to the Shine family and said words to the effect "Here is a daughter to replace the one you lost." and the child was then raised by the Shines.

Her veil was a trademark and she never showed her face. Some people described the veil as a lace window curtain. Her huge appetite was often mentioned and when she left a social gathering she would ask for food to take home. There was some speculation that she did not have much food at home. She grew potatoes and other vegetables and kept two hogs for her winter's meat. September 12, 1912, Fort Frances Times, "Mrs. Kate Ruttan is opening a bakery on Saturday evening. She will be supplied by the Hub Restaurant in Fort Frances. She will deliver the goods and take the bun so patronize her just for fun." Kate loved making little references to her own doings in LaVallee.

John Mannister said that it was soon apparent that Kate had no desire or intention to keep house. He was assigned to the kitchen and was on his own and remained that way for the years that he lived with Mrs. Ruttan.

About this time Kate became postmistress and mail carrier. She had to dispatch the mail between 1 and 2 a.m. The train men would hold up the train a minute or two if she were late but if she missed the train the penalty was \$5. This was a disaster as her pay was not large. Being postmistress meant that she saw the villagers every day and no doubt was able to pick up many news items and topics for her poems. She had this position from 1917-1923.

The LaVallee Dramatic Club put on many plays and Kate liked to report on these in rhyme. One in 1920 was entitled "*Escaped from the Law.*" Some excerpts follow.

*"Ed Cuthbertson was a fine heavy villain,
With five hundred tools both able and willing,
Gen'ral Howell the fair Jessie Smiley had married.
She poisoned her first man, her life he had harried.
Now Willie Cornell was a red headed Mick.
With shillaleh for Ed, but with love he was sick,
Fair Bertha Gomoll his pulses had quickened
And he wooed her and won her
As the gory plot thickened."*

Her poems now can be scanned for information about the local people and that period of time when the municipality was developing. Kate wrote about Dr. Bethune with obvious respect for his devotion to his patients.

*"Pioneer physician before the roads began.
Over moor and muskeg he rode or else he ran;
When horses were available, at Devlin he'd relay
And when the pioneers were poor, he did not press
for pay.
He healed their mumps and measles, diphtheria and
fever
And when a woman needed him, he'd never, never
leave her.
He sent a flood of knowledge through the Rainy
River Valley
His cheery air and rosy cheeks most made the sick
to rally."*

Deaths were reported in terms guaranteed to wring emotion from a person even eighty or more years later. Friends gathered "to do honour to the mortal remains of Duncan McLennan's estimable wife Mary McLeod McLennan. Her whole life she dispersed distilled sweetness and the pure imprint she left on her seven children will pass along through the ages. Twelve motor cars headed the triumphant procession of a suffering saint entered into everlasting bliss."

Weddings were reported in extravagant phrases. Kate told of the bridal shower of Katherine McLennan where "many were the pure white tokens emblematic of the pure white bride-to-be. She wrote, "Charming Kitty's tiny token was accompanied by the following 'pome'" which would almost make Bill Shakespeare hide his diminished head in a coal scuttle."

*"Now here's a Turkish towel a piece
To wash your features free of grease,
And here's a tiny towel for each,
To glow your faces like a peach.
And always when your nose is shiny
From lovers' quarrels and tears so briny,
Apply my powder to your noses,
And make them look like pure white roses."*

Elva Madison told a story about her mother and Kate Ruttan in 1915. "Mother got off the train at LaVallee with a sick baby and a little boy but it was too late to call anyone. She planned to stay at the hotel. A woman came up to her and said her name was Kate Ruttan and that the hotel was closed but she had a room for rent. The woman was dressed in an odd way with a large shawl and a big hat with a dark veil. Mother felt she had no choice and went with her. The room was untidy and none too clean. Mother spread some diapers on the blankets and slept on top.

In the morning Mrs. Ruttan took her to the station to phone for one of her uncles to come for her. The agent asked mother why she hadn't stayed at the hotel and when Mother told him he said 'Kate, you old liar, you knew the hotel wasn't closed.'

Kate replied that she hadn't lied and if Mother had gone to the hotel she would have found the door closed."

John Montgomery a nearby farmer came to stay at Kate's. She became very fond of him and called him Lord Montgomery. She won a cart and a pony in a contest sponsored by the Winnipeg Free Press and she and John would go riding around the countryside, stopping at some farmer's place for dinner. At a party or social event Kate would be asked to sing and would seat herself at the piano to always sing the same song "Little Brown Jug." She would sometime sing at a concert and report that she was greeted with "thunderous applause."

John Montgomery died in 1926. Records show that Kate Ruttan bought a plot in the Devlin Cemetery where he is buried.

Kate was by then trying to sell her poetry book "Rhymes Right or Wrong" and she contacted William Arthur Deacon, book editor of "Saturday Night" magazine. The correspondence was mostly one-sided as Deacon was more interested in the

poetry her father had written to enter his "worst poetry contest." Kate wrote to Mr. Deacon, "I have his scarf and buckskin apron in blue parallelograms and cardinal equilateral triangles."

Kate did not sell many of her little blue covered books and she died in February, 1928.

Her obituary tells of her death but not much of her life. "On Wednesday last week, neighbours Mrs. Ketcheson and Mrs. Parker went to her home only to find her unconscious on the floor. She had suffered from frostbite and was evidently in the act of bathing a foot when she suffered a fainting spell. She was given first aid and removed to the Emo Hospital but pneumonia coupled with blood poisoning caused her death."

She was described as "possessed of a generous nature, she out of her limited earthly possessions was ever a friend to the needy."

On February 16, 1928 a pay list from the LaVallee Council had this item: "L.W. Loney, Funeral expenses, Mrs. Ruttan, \$80 and Mrs. E. Sutcliffe, hospital expenses, Mrs. Ruttan, \$20. A June 21, 1918 item stated that Mrs. Eason paid \$ 102.35 for hospital and funeral expense, with interest.

In death as in life Kate Ruttan remains a mystery and it seems that is the way she wanted it. It is believed that she was close to seventy years of age at the time of her death. Although no record exists it is believed that she is buried in the Devlin Cemetery beside "Lord" John Montgomery.

John Mannister, her foster child, described Kate as a character, individualist, and a free soul sort of person but also as a lonely, unhappy woman. John Montgomery did bring a ray of sunshine into her life.

*"But suddenly out bursts the sun,
Her earthly cares almost done.
Her pulses leap, though her hot tears run
With the coming of Montgomery."*

Kate wrote serious poems about such figures as Abraham Lincoln, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Sir John A. MacDonald. She also wrote about local people E.T. Cornell, George Strachan, "King" David Strachan, Callum McLeod, Doctor McKenzie, Doctor Reeves, Hugh McFayden and many others. These might start out in a serious way but then could end up poking sly and good-humoured fun at these pillars of society. It seemed that she just could not resist.

McLean's Magazine said that hers was the most interesting reporting in Western Canada. Mrs. Ruttan modestly replied, "Honour to whom honour is due." There were other tributes to her writing and one such letter appears in her book that seems to sum up the "real" Kate Ruttan.

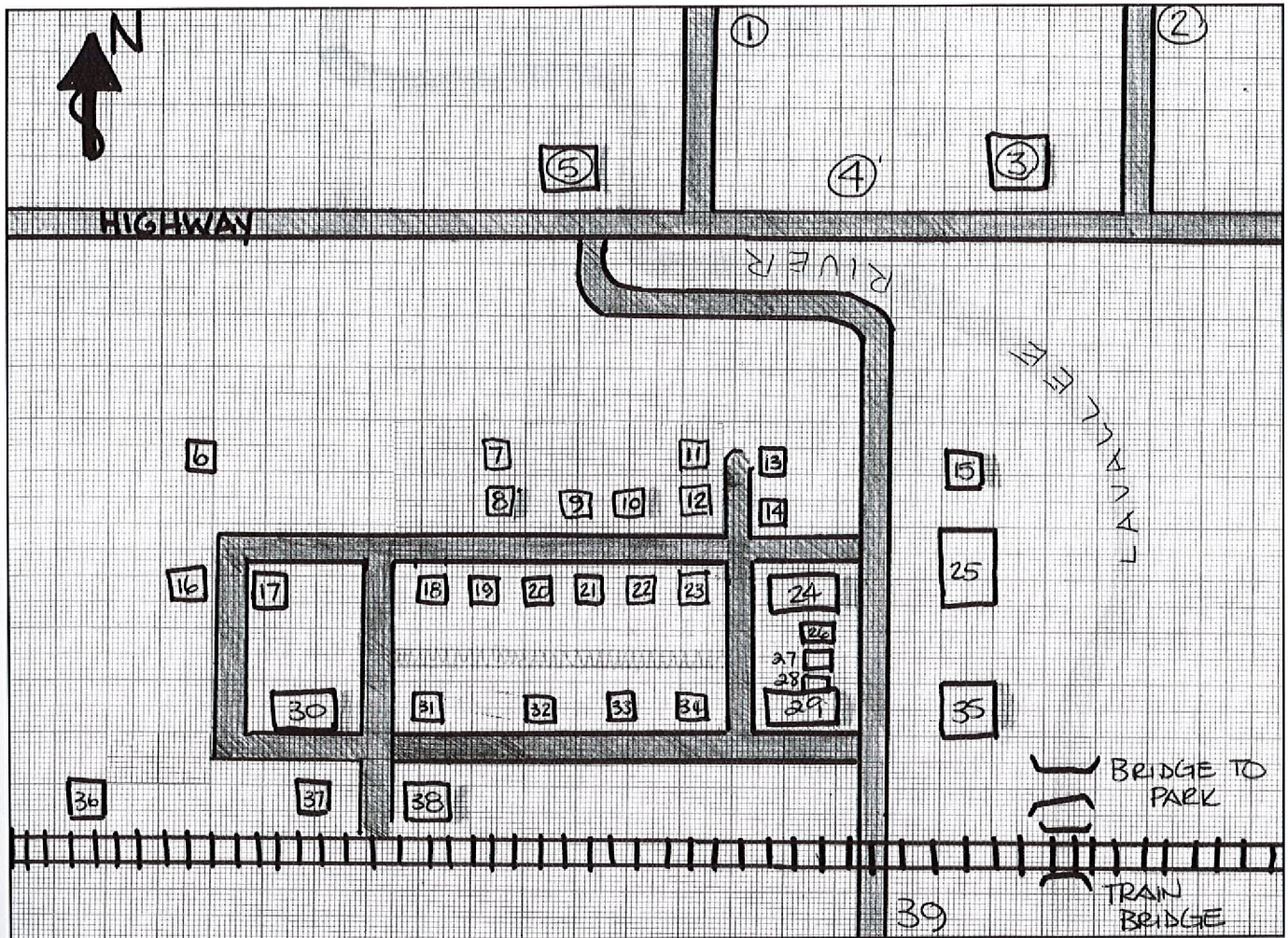
“My Dear Mrs. Ruttan – Your writing has a charm and grace which doubtless also characterizes your nature. It indicates good business ability of a moderate kind but some caprice or indecision as if you were often in an unsettled mind. Some tendency is shown to dodge an issue and not come out in the open about it. But you are very clever, witty and chock-full of pep. You have experienced much grief but you keep well closed. You should have been a fiction writer, your imagination is good and you have great descriptive powers.

Sincerely, Maisie Connor/ Feature writer,
Daily Times-Journal, Fort William, Ontario”

My copy of Kate Ruttan’s book was purchased in a used bookstore in Winnipeg. The cover is tattered and the pages now brittle but the writing is fresh and vibrant with the charm of Kate Ruttan’s own particular style.

“Rhymes Right or Wrong”/Kate Ruttan , “Known only by her Rhymes” /Beatrice Fines

*“Fabled Kate Ruttan,” Fort Frances Times
(Written by E. Donaldson)*



Hand drawn map of LaVallee

- ① North Rd.
Platski (Logan)
Macedon
Pope
Pope
Jacobson
W. McFayden
Pyne
- ② McTavish Rd.
Klinter, Lockman,
McLeod, McTavish,
Gundersen (Young)
Heward, Yurchuk
- ③ School
- ④ Highway Res.
Langtry, Drennen
Miller, Smith,
Cross, McEneaney
- ⑤ E.T. CORNELL'S
Flour Mill
(Johnny Canucks)
- ⑥ Debrusky

- ⑦ Stable
- ⑧ Church
- ⑨ G. CORNELL
- ⑩ MARTIN (Post office)
- ⑪ Stable
- ⑫ Cement House
- ⑬ Ketcheson
(The Manse)
- ⑭ FRAME
- ⑮ BLACKSMITH
- ⑯ KEREHUK
- ⑰ KOSOWICK
- ⑱ RICE
- ⑲ HICKETS
(KATE RUTAN)
- ⑳ Book
- ㉑ IRWIN
- ㉒ STEELE
- ㉓ MURCHISON
- ㉔ HALL

- ㉕ WAREHOUSE
- ㉖ MCALL GANTON
- ㉗ A. McCALL
- ㉘ PERSON
- ㉙ STORE
- ㉚ CREAMERY
- ㉛ KATERICK
- ㉜ B. McCALL
- ㉝ CUTHBERTSON SR
- ㉞ SPRINGSTEELE
- ㉟ RINK
- ㊱ BACHYNSKY
- ㊲ KOSONIC
- ㊳ Station
- ㊴ SOUTH RD.
Hnatluk
Kellar
Geary
Galbraith
A. McFayden
A. RUSSELL

Hand drawn legend

In death, as in life, fabled Kate Ruttan remains a mystery

RUTTAN, Kate Annabelle
McIntyre

In death, as in life, the fabled, eccentric Kate Ruttan of LaVallee remains a mystery.

Many of the older generation in town and district will recall her by that description of her, written in 1916, as "the leading literary lady of LaVallee who always wears a white veil and blue hat."

That broad-rimmed hat, with its heavy white veil hanging down to her shoulders and concealing all her facial features, was her familiar trademark and it was worn even during the hottest days of summer.

Interest in Mrs. Ruttan was sparked recently when Miss Anne McLennan of Fort Frances presented the Women's Institute Museum at Emo with a copy of Mrs. Ruttan's published verse "Rainy River Rhymes Right or Wrong."



MRS. KATE RUTTAN as she appeared in public. Here she is pictured with Jim Pope on the left and Bill Cornell on the right. Her hat and heavy veil, which hid her facial features, were her well-known trademark.

It was decided then to collect additional information on Mrs. Ruttan and John Mannister who, as a youngster came out from Winnipeg to make his home with Mrs. Ruttan, volunteered to undertake the task. It has been a difficult, almost futile, undertaking.

For instance, there is no record of her interment, although it is believed she was laid to rest in Devlin cemetery, where she had purchased a plot for "Lord" John Montgomery who had resided with her for some years.

From her writings, one can surmise some of her background.

Kate Annabelle McIntyre Ruttan was the daughter of James McIntyre, furniture dealer and undertaker, of Ingersoll, Ontario. He also was an amateur poet and included in her volume is a poem dated April 2, 1901 entitled "Alas, Alas for McIntyre," which referred to him as the "Bard of the Caledonian Society of Ingersoll." According to Mrs. Eason, Mr. McIntyre had published a volume of verse entitled "Musings on the Banks of the Canadian Thames."

Mr. Mannister, in communicating with the Ingersoll town clerk, could obtain no additional information concerning the daughter. One poem, in her book, is entitled "Fred Ruttan" Of him, Kate wrote:

"Born of British bulldog breed,
With a heart as big as a whole world's need,
Flew to war to starve and bleed
And die for our salvation."

One of the popular sayings before the turn of the century was "Go West, young man, go West." It is presumed that Kate Ruttan followed that advice. There is reference in her book, to the success of her scholars of the Stodgell, Manitoba, school at a field day.

"The only early date that I have been able to establish is that she taught school at Barwick in 1902," Mr. Mannister writes. "Willard Canfield states that his family moved to Barwick in that year and Mrs. Ruttan and her daughter, Maude Fraser, also a widow, were both teaching school there at that time. The daughter later married Bert Eason of Barwick and they moved to a farm in Saskatchewan. Mrs. Eason was living at Gravelbourg, Sask. at the time of her mother's death.

"From Barwick, Mrs. Ruttan moved to LaVallee and taught school there. The first LaVallee school was located about a mile east

and about a mile north on the McTavish Road. It was at this school one morning she greeted at her door a member of the school board with the exclamation: 'I know! I know! Pick up thy bed and walk!' The trustee agreed with her, thus ending her school teaching career. According to Mrs. Eason, her mother had taught school for over 30 years.

Perhaps that is why, in one of her poems entitled "The Inspector's Visit", she concluded by writing "That all I.P.S.'s (inspectors, public schools) are officers useless and a nuisance malign."

"She was a character, individualist and free soul sort of person." Mr. Mannister writes.

"No doubt she was actually a very lonely and unhappy woman and it was at this point, probably, that she considered adopting a boy.

"I first met Mrs. Ruttan at the Children's Home in Winnipeg. She was being interviewed by the matron of the home with the intent of adopting. Although we were all quite well treated at the home, we all looked forward to the day when we would be leaving. Probably it was the thought of family life that appealed to us.

"The boys did remark that she was a funny looking woman but they still wished it was they who were leaving. She was a short, fairly stout woman with a loose hanging dress, more like a kimono, reaching down to her ankles. She wore a sort of bonnet on her head with a veil covering her face, making it hard to see the features of her face. However, it was my turn and I was quite happy about it.

"It was the summer of 1912 when Mrs. Ruttan, my sister and I arrived at the Village of LaVallee, My sister made her home with the late Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Shine one-half mile east of Devlin."

LaVallee, at that time, was a thriving community where everyone appeared to be working and happy. The Cornell sawmill, grist and flour mill was located alongside the LaVallee River where Johnny Canuck's store now stands. The Saunders sawmill was located farther down the river, opposite to what is now the LaVallee Community Hall but then a store operated by M.J. Saunders. The Ross McKenzie store, later owned by David Strachan; the hotel with its bar and footrail; the Ab Steele blacksmith shop; the Jack Steele implement shed; the Wesley Methodist Church; a very busy CNR station were part of

the community when the very young John Mannister arrived there. The creamery, where he was to begin working, was erected in 1917.

"Mrs. Ruttan owned a house which was rented at the time," Mr. Mannister recalls. "However, the tenants soon moved away and we settled in. The house had an addition built onto it and there was another small house at the back of the lot. She also rented upstairs rooms; there was an extra lot at the back for potatoes and vegetables; and a pigpen where she kept two hogs for the next winter's meat. This appears to have been the extent of her income.

"It soon became apparent that she had no desire or intention of keeping house or cooking. I was assigned to the kitchen and I was on my own. It remained this way for the two years that I lived with her.

"During this period she never imparted any information of her past life. What happened to her husband, where she had lived, where she had been educated, where she had taught school, remained a closed book at the 'library or reading rooms' as she called her residence. She was a difficult person to communicate with and I guess I was too young.

"While I was there, Mrs. Ruttan was appointed postmistress and mail carrier. She later had to dispatch the mails on the trains each morning. This was no easy job as the train arrived between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m. As we lived quite close to the station, trainmen would hold-up the train a minute or two if necessary to get the mail. She did miss once or twice and a penalty of \$5 was imposed each time. This usually turned out to be quite a disaster as her pay wasn't very big.

"The front room of the house served as post office and her living quarters which were tabu to me.

"She also was LaVallee correspondent for the Fort Frances Times, a labour of love which she filled for over 20 years until her death in 1928. The news items were mostly happenings in the community and of people involved. She attracted a great deal of attention with her writings which often were in rhyme and people of the community looked forward to receiving the paper. McLeans Magazine said it was 'the most interesting reporting in Western Canada' to which Mrs. Ruttan appended the modest comment: 'honor to whom honor is due.'"

Excerpts from the files of The Times show her skill with words and reveal that although she might have been a poor teacher, she was an educated and perceptive woman:

January 27, 1916: The dramatic club organized by Robert Ferguson has dissolved partnership and ceased to exist for the simple reason that Hugh McFayden, Fred Cornell and Robert Ferguson have become soldiers of the King and no member is left but Chester Page to lead it on to glory. "Sec transit gloria mundi". Thus changeth the glory of the world.

June 12, 1919: Postmaster James Smith has gone to his reward at the age of 82.

Born in Orkneys, sailed till fifty,
Captain he in seven seas.
Scientific, brave and nifty,
Weathered many a biting breeze.
Brought his sweet wife to Rainy.

Farmed for full 19 years.
Alert and honest, true and brainy,
Wiped away her every tear.
Postmaster then for years eleven,
The truest soul to earth e'er given.

May 23, 1923: (At a United Farmers of Ontario meeting at which a UFO man said he was prepared to support a labour man, if nominated) Mrs. Kate Ruttan timidly inquired:

How can farmers affiliate with labour?
Farmers want three dollars per bush.
For wheat and other things according,
And hired help sixteen hours per day,
Thirty dollars per month affording.

Labor wants a five cent loaf,
And farmers stuff all down to zero;
Eight hours per day of labour vile
One hundred and eight per month each hero.

January 3, 1918: her final words for the Times were as follows: "Our sunny scribe Kate Ruttan is hibernating for two weeks with the Hayes family in their hospitable mansion in Barwick and renewing old times on the Mississippi (her favorite expression for the Rainy River.)"

"It was the popularity of her news items which gave her the idea of publishing her book. She was a lover of Bobbie Burns poetry and, in conversation, would quite often break out in poetry with a hint of Bobbie in her speech. Her booklet was published in the mid

20's a year or two preceeding her death.

"At this early date, there were no cars. Roads were passable for horse and buggy or wagon, although they were not in very good condition in wet weather. There were no telephones. Rush messages had to be sent by telegram. A trip to Fort Frances was quite an event. Holidays, such as the 24th of May and the 1st of July would warrant a special train or a coach on a freight. Everybody accepted this as the appropriate way to have a good time and they enjoyed themselves immensely. Each town had its football team, very competitive and supported by the community. There was no thought of taking off to the lakes or for some distant point for a holiday.

"The summer of 1914, when I was on the William Pilkey farm, a gentleman by the name of John Montgomery came to LaVallee and stayed at Mrs. Ruttan's. This proved so satisfactory that he decided to stay. Mrs. Ruttan was happy. It brought a ray of sunshine into her life as she was to write later:

"But suddenly out bursts the sun,
Her earthly cares are almost done,
Her pulses leap, though her hot tears run
With the coming of Montgomery.

"There was a man sent from God,
Whose name was John, no common clod,
But the noblest soul above the sod
To lighten human woe."

Perhaps that is why, in her book, in the first poem entitled "Platonic Love" she could write: "A blessing when the two fond hearts may meet and ne'er to sever."

"She referred to themselves as Lord and Lady Montgomery. Now she had a mail carrier and could devote more time to her book. Now there was no need for me to return," Mr. Mannister writes.

"Mrs. Ruttan won a pony and cart in a Free Press contest so Lord and Lady could go driving into the country. She always showed up at dances and parties about lunch time and then, before lunch, she was asked to sing. Seated at the piano, she would play and sing "Little Brown Jug." That was the only song I ever heard her sing. The request always was made, not because the song was well-rendered, but because it became a ritual that had to be followed.

"Mrs. Ruttan was a great lover of ice cream and, apparently, could eat it as long as someone brought it for her. At one ice cream social, someone put snuff in a dish of ice cream and, as it was a bit dark, she did not see it. She was very sick afterwards.

"When about to leave a dance or party, she would ask if there was a sandwich or cake she could take home to Lord Montgomery. Mission accomplished, she would today off home quite happy.



MRS. KATE RUTTAN from the photograph which appeared in the front of her book of poems *Rainy River Rhymes*. Although no details were or are known of her background, Mr. Mannister feels that she was close to 70 years of age at the time of her death. Mr. Mannister, 608 Victoria Ave., would appreciate receiving any additional authentic information concerning Mrs. Ruttan.

"Like all good things, this came to an end in 1926 when Lord Montgomery became quite ill and died. The record shows that Mrs. Ruttan bought a plot in the Devlin cemetery and there, one must assume, that he was buried.

"Her book by this time had been published and she went from door to door selling them. She would make a chalk mark on a house called on if the people had been contacted. I never did hear how many books she sold, but I am inclined to think that it wasn't very successful financially. In her grief, and declining years, she may have lost heart with this venture. Her lines on 'The Coming of Montgomery' concluded with 'And when his earthly race is run, there'll be a woeiful wail.'

Mrs. Ruttan carried on for two years after Montgomery's death and on February 1, 1928, some of her neighbours, not seeing any activity around her home, called on her. They found her unconscious on the floor, suffering from frostbite. She was rushed to the Sutcliffe Hospital in Emo where she passed away from pneumonia and blood poisoning on February 3. Funeral services were held on Saturday, February 4, 1928, from Wesley United Church in LaVallee and, although the records do not say so, it is presumed she was interred in the Devlin cemetery along side her John.

Although she had been the Times' best known correspondent for just over 20 years, yet her obituary carried no details of her life — they just weren't known.

Her obituary described her as "possessed of a generous nature, she out of her limited earthly possessions was ever a friend of the needy." Then it quoted some of her own verse:

"They who own an estate
May be noble and great,
Despite their park, palace and splendour
Silks, diamonds and jewels
May betoken the fools.
Or may cover a heart pure and tender."

In death, as in life, Kate Ruttan remains a mystery and evidently that is the way she wanted it.