Novo Scotia and Cape breton

by Dave Colwell















































































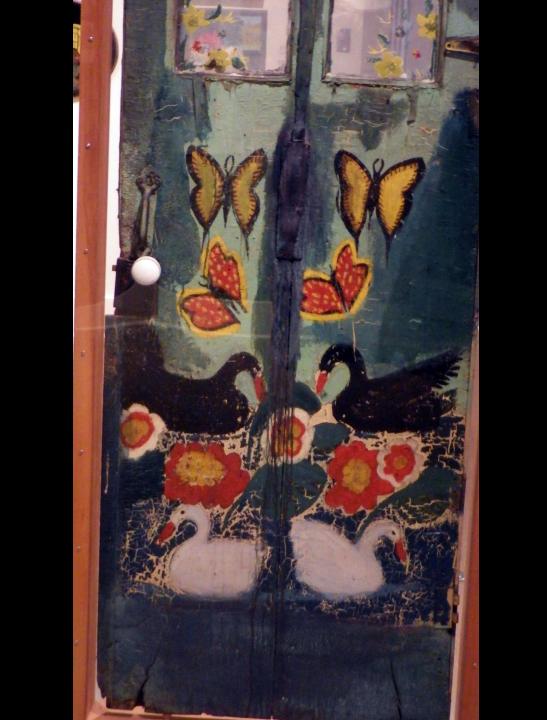














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The Painting of Maud Lewis

The emergence and popularity of Maud's paintings perhaps mark the beginning of national and international awareness of Nova Scotia's rich folk art tradition. Typical of some folk artists, Maud had no training in the visual arts and painted for the joy of adding colour and fun to a quiet, rural life. Her favourite subjects included flowers, cats, colourful teams of oxen, sleigh rides, birds and deer, painted onto small pieces of pulp-board, often with irregular measurements. Early on, Maud painted with whatever materials could be obtained close at hand: oil-based house paint, boat paint, and cheap hobby brushes. The resulting paintings were sold from her home for as little as \$2.50. Some were also available at a local store and as her popularity grew, requests came in the mail. Prices rose to \$5.00. Gradually, her materials improved to include artist quality oil paints and brushes provided by attentive friends and patrons. She also painted holiday cards in watercolour which Everett would sell from his wagon as he made fish deliveries Painted shells and beach stones were also popular for sale to tourists.

Although sh was not a formally trained artist, Maud's work demonstrates that she had a strong sense of composition likely acquired through close observation of the casual visual material that came her way, including postcards, calendars and magazines. Her early paintings and watercolours exhibit an abundance of detail often touched with humour and depict iconic scenes of rural life in Nova Scotia.

Her later works tend to be more simplified. The combination of a decrease in the mobility of her hands and an increase in the demand for her work forced a paring down of the early complex designs to ones that could be produced quickly with fewer fine brushstrokes. When she constructed an image that she partic larly liked, such as the pair of oxen in winter or summe, she made many variations on the theme.

Maud's Story

Maud Lewis was born in 1903 to John and Agnes Dowley in South Ohio, Nova Scotia. Her father was a harness maker whose business in South Ohio and later, in Yarmouth, provided well for his family.

As a young child, Maud spent much time alone, perhaps because she felt uncomfortable with other children who could be mean about people with differences. Because of her condition, juvenile arthritis, she had an underdeveloped chin and stunted growth. As she grew older her movement became more and more restricted due to swelling of her joints. It seems, though, that Maud was not an unhappy child and enjoyed the time she spent at home with her family. She learned to play the piano and it is said that the family enjoyed listening to music. For many years, Maud and her mother painted Christmas cards to sell to friends and neighbours. Thus began her career as an artist.

Her experience of the world extended to an area between her birthplace in Yarmouth County and her marriage home in Marshalltown, Digby County. In 1935, Maud's father died followed by the death of her mother two years later. As was typical at the time, her brother inherited the family home. At first Maud lived there with Charles and his wife; however, when the marriage broke up Maud was obliged to move to Digby to live with her aunt.

Everett Lewis, an itinerant fish peddler, lived in a tiny house near the 'Poor House' where he had spent much of his childhood. Maud probably knew Everett from his stops at her aunt's house to sell fish. A popular belief is that it was Maud's response to a notice Everett posted at the store for a 'live-in' that led to their marriage in 1938.

The tiny home the Lewis' shared for over 30 years had no electricity and thus no radio or television to bring in news of the outside world until Maud was given a small battery-operated radio. There was no indoor plumbing and the only heat was provided by a large wood-burning stove. In the 1960s, a small trailer was given to Maud which served for a few years as her summer studio. However, as her health declined she rarely left her home, content to paint in the corner by the window facing the highway.

Although it was a simple life, Maud seems to have enjoyed painting and the visits people began to make when they saw her "Paintings for Sale" sign on the roadside. Those who stopped by found a quiet woman with a delightful smile who took great pleasure in the enjoyment others seemed to get from her work. Through newspaper and magazine articles, as well as television documentaries, Maud became well known beyond her world and orders for paintings came from far and wide.



































