

**A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY
OF GERTRUDE BOWEN WEBSTER 1891 - 1946**

(By Eric Webster)

*From Gertrude Bowen Webster's life
We've gathered precious love,
And learned to treasure simple things,
And value them the more.
Yes, simple things were her delight,
She kept them all in store.
The woodland path that led to home,
The roses by the door.*

*The friendly glow of neighbour's light
Across a snowy field,
O'er all she cast that magic spell
Her gifted pen could yield.
The sunny kitchen held a charm,
The kettle's cheery song,
While letters from home folks, too,
Brought joy the whole day long.*

Mrs. Jennie Moulton



*Gertrude Bowen Webster
(Picture courtesy Eric Webster)*

Gertrude Bowen Webster was a well known poetess and writer of note. Her life's work and ambition was fully exemplified in her writings. In addition to her literary works, she was a devoted wife and mother, and a church and community worker.

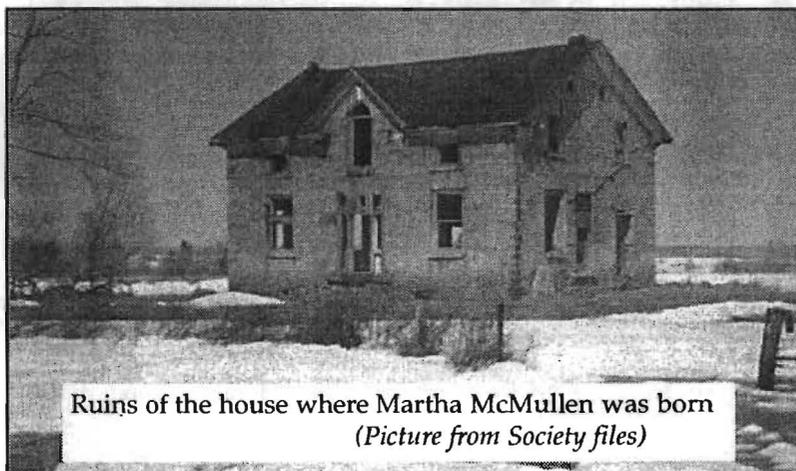
Since she was the last person to bear the family name of Bowen in Lansdowne Township, it might be of interest to relate some family history. Her mother, Martha McMullen, was born in what the Lansdowne School students call "The Haunted House", the stone house which lies directly north of Lansdowne School on the brow of the big hill. Her father, Nelson Bowen, lived a half mile north-west in Fairfax. That farm is now owned by Chris Smith. The ruins of the Bowen house lie at the end of a long laneway, the first farm entrance on the south side of the Fairfax Road. She had a sister Ruby and a brother Ford who died at age 12.

Mother seemed obsessed with the need to write. We have scribbler after scribbler filled with daily diaries, and even booklets made from paper bags sewn together to make pages on which to write. The notes were mainly concerning weather, cleaning and cooking, and notes on trips to church meetings.

There is recorded an incident about school life when the teacher asked the pupils what they were going to do when they grew up. Mother's answer was, "I am going to write a book". The teacher stilled the classmates laughter and said, "I hope I live long enough to be able to read it". She knew how long it would take to write a book of poems, and the cost of publishing.

By age 18 she was writing stories for the Sunday School papers.

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*Ruins of the house where Martha McMullen was born
(Picture from Society files)*

**A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY
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World War I came along, and in 1916 her father, now Captain Nelson Bowen, sold the farm and moved to Brockville to become a Director of National Service; one, I believe, of four in Canada.

By 1919 my father, Wilfred Webster, persuaded her to marry him, and she moved back to Lansdowne. I arrived on the scene in 1926. At this time she was a regular contributor to the Ottawa Farm Journal, Canadian Countryman, Farmer's Magazine and the New Outlook, a weekly United Church paper. Here she scored two front page printings. (See Photo on Page #12). We were visiting an old neighbour who had moved next door to Sydenham Street United Church in Kingston. Mother heard the organist practicing. She went into the church and absorbed the scene, came home and wrote a poem which she sent to the New Outlook. By chance the General Council of the church was meeting at Sydenham Street shortly after, so the poem went to the front page. Then she wrote a hymn for the General Council and it was printed on the front page of a succeeding issue, and was sung during the proceedings.

During the Depression times, there was no money to print books, and no one had money to buy them. But the human spirit is hard to defeat. People couldn't buy printed books, but for a few cents one could buy a scrap book. Then it was a simple matter of waiting, clipping out the poems printed in papers or magazines, and pasting them in the scrap book. Many were the scrapbooks filled with mother's poems.

While it was impossible to publish alone, five local poets under the leadership of Wallace Havelock Robb of Abbey Dawn, financed the book 'Nin Naunanimin', Indian for 'There are Five of Us'. Then sometime in the 1940's her childhood dream came true, a green booklet with a big G.B.W. on the cover appeared in our house. I know none of the particulars, but it was there. Many local people have copies of it

Reading in her diary of January 1, 1946 we come upon the entry "To-morrow I go to Kingston General Hospital for a check up". There are no more entries. On New Year's Day 1947, her funeral services were conducted in Lansdowne United Church., with burial in Union Cemetery. She, who had written hundreds of poems and articles on a host of subjects, had also written her own epitaph.

RESURGEM

When wrapped in sleep I lay me down
As someday soon I must
And this embodied dream becomes
A bit of dreamless dust
My soul shall shed its chrysalis,
Spread its white wings and then,
Fly to fulfillment in the blue,
For I shall rise again.

G.B.W.

She never craved praise of earth,
Or in wide fields to roam,
But magnified the beauties,
And joy of love, and home,
She needs no monument of stone,
Or plaque with praise entwined.
For homage true in hearts will dwell,
With thoughts she left behind.

Mrs. Jennie Moulton

Ruins of the Bowen house, childhood home of
Gertrude Bowen Webster

(Picture from Society files)*(Continued on Page #10)*

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The Poetry of Gertrude Bowen Webster

TOMORROW

Tomorrow we must begin to live,
Pouring out love to meet our neighbour's needs.
And minting all the gold of long desires
Into the coinage of substantial deeds.

Tomorrow we must well begin to work,
Discarding frothy fantasies and dreams;
Building in stern reality a house
Buttressed with stone, and braced with oaken beams.

Oh, slothful soul, tomorrow is too late,
And yesterday has vanished with its sun,
Your house is still a visionary thing.
And deeds deferred are very seldom done.

"The day before tomorrow" is the time
To grasp the opportunity that drums
With swift insistence at your careless door -
Tomorrow is the day that never comes!

JUNE EVENING

From my haunt among the hills
I can hear the whippoorwills,
I can see the brush of sunset paint the sky,
A prima donna airily
Trills from out a maple tree,
While the snow wings of cloudland flutter by.

A blue tent is widely spread,
In the great overhead,
One by one the star-points prick a peeping place,
And the silver-spangled moon,
Friend of every friendly June,
Lights the tent by reflection from her face.

Grass beneath my grateful feet,
Carpets this rural retreat,
Where the richest flower fellowships are free.
On the looms of loveliness
Nature wove their fragrant dress
With the skill of her unequalled artistry.

Marvellous it is to me,
Wonder linked to ecstasy
That to mortals Grace yet grants this blessed boon -
To the simple souls who kneel,
To the worshipping feel,
God comes walking down the garden of His June!

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The Poetry of Gertrude Bowen Webster

SCHOOL DAYS

Today I saw him start to school,
My sturdy little son;
His book-bag on his shoulder, and
Life's lessons well begun.

And as I stood behind the bars,
And watched him down the lane
I learned what other mothers know -
That Love is linked with pain.

I bravely smiled till my wee man
Must turn his back on me.
For I would make his mother's face
A smile of memory.

And then, oh friends, you know the rest -
You have watched them go -
Our straining eyes are blurred with tears
Because we love them so!

That day stands out, defined and clear,
From other days apart,
When children pass from home to school,
And take with them our hearts.

For something of herself goes forth
With every mother's son;
She weaves her daughters' various robes
And girds them every one.

For we are watchers at the gate,
The guardians of home's fire;
We wait while youth goes marching on
To lands of new desire.

But may we fit them first to face
The trials they must meet;
May all the roads that lead to school
Be safe for little feet.

On this symbolic day I pray;
"Father be kind
To little folks who start to school,
And those they leave behind."

Editor's Note

This poem was first published in 1932 when son Eric went off to school. It appeared in print again some 50 years later in 1989 when her great grandson, Evan, started school.

It is interesting to note that Eric's first teacher tells the story that "the sturdy little son" fell on a rock and cut his chin open before class even began. (See Newsletter #15, Page 5)

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The Poetry of Gertrude Bowen Webster

TO THE IRISH

A Tribute from Lansdowne

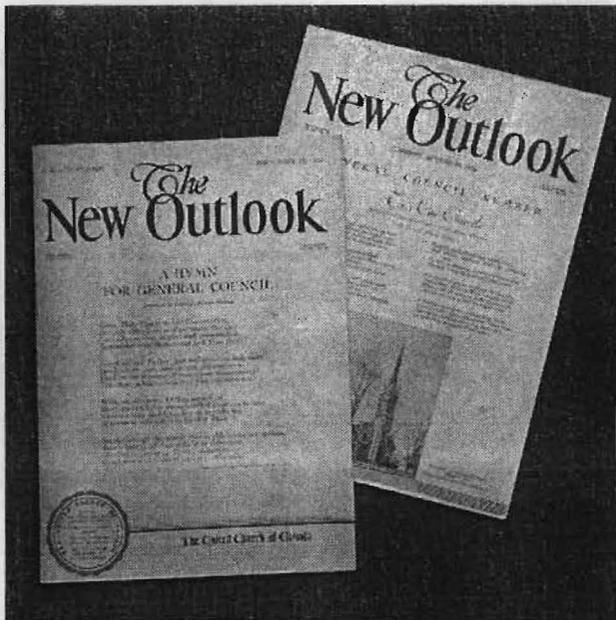
The Irish came to Canada
Long years and years ago,
Yet what they brought to Canada
None but the Irish Know.
They pioneered with homely tools -
Axe, shovel, pick and spade
And theirs were firm, courageous souls
That none could make afraid.

The Irish came to Canada
Long years and years since then,
And they have built for Canada
Stout homes and stouter men;
A race, strong-sinewed, that survives
The crushing blows of fate,
That fight to win and conquer oft
Because its faith is great.

No heart more warm beats on this earth
Than in an Irish breast
Of fervent, glowing friendliness
The Irish are possessed.
A rollicking and ready wit
Sparkles in old and young,
And tenderness still smoothly tips
Each blarneyed tongue.

So here's to Erin's rugged isle!
Though seas roll far between,
The sons of Ireland everywhere
To-day are wearing green,
And lovers of the good "Ould Sod"
Beneath high heaven's arch,
Remember this, their Saint's own day,
The seventeenth of March.

(Originally appearing in the Ottawa Farm Journal)



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Studio Photography Courtesy of
Ted Hewitt Photography