

Manly Edward MacDonald (1889 - 1971)

A County Painter by Charles Beale

The name Manly MacDonald is probably unknown to many county residents, but to the hundreds in the Quinte area and around the world who own MacDonald's paintings, he is revered. A prolific artist, he not only painted landscapes in Prince Edward, but moved to a summer home overlooking the county at Long Reach, Napanee in 1956. The family enjoyed summers there until his death in 1971.

MacDonald's work is important locally for a number of reasons. Born at Point Anne, now part of Belleville, he scoured the highways and byways of the county and Eastern Ontario in search of mills, homesteads, rural bridges and settlements, many of which are now completely lost to local history. Hence, he is referred to as the "*Interpreter of Old Ontario*".

Secondly, MacDonald was also an accomplished portrait artist using both traditional and semi-impressionistic styles. He worked and lived with Group of Seven artists but, although invited declined the invitation.

Thirdly, he inspired the local area with his art. Collectors, like the late Jack Parrott, and his surviving wife Bernice of Belleville began buying his works at auctions in 1986, then later donating all of them to a new gallery attached to the library complex. Prior to that, MacDonald's surviving son Duncan and his wife Barbara gave some 60 paintings and etchings to Loyalist College, also in Belleville. The MacCauley Museum in Picton has one entitled "High Shore" and Waring House, just west of town, has five in the formal dining room.

Of unique interest to county residents is Roblin's Mill, Ameliasburg. Built in 1861 by Owen Roblin, a United Empire Loyalist, the grist and flour mill was relocated to Black Creek Pioneer Village, Toronto in 1984 after a number of years of reconstruction. MacDonald's painting of the mill, now in a private collection, shows the mill in its original state and location on Roblin Lake.

The Picton Times reported in February, 1947 that MacDonald planned to be down in the county that summer. Earlier he had painted the old Quinte Hotel atop Bridge Street, which was chosen along with a number of local scenes for the Canadian Artists' Christmas Card Series. Picton was now "on the map". A "Picton Old Boy", then living in Montreal and missing home, inquired about buying the original hotel painting.

I am now preparing a book on Manly MacDonald's life and work. After three years of research, I have produced a draft manuscript with 100 paintings to be included. However, many of MacDonald's finest landscapes, portraits and etchings remain in private collections, and it is hoped that this article will generate interest and further the research results.

If you have information or paintings for consideration, contact me via my website:



Roblin's Mill