

# Easel, paints and man named Manly

## Writer compiling details on local artist

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By LUKE HENDRY, THE INTELLIGENCER

Charles Beale can't forget the man on the riverbank.

It was around 1962, and a young Beale was wandering near the Napanee River. Not far away, his nine-year-old brother John and a friend were fishing from a boat.

Sitting at an easel near the shore was a man in a crumpled hat who, in Beale's words looked "sort of like a vagabond," not an artist.

The painter was Manly MacDonald, born at Point Anne in 1889 and a prolific artist, who years earlier had declined an invitation to join the Group of Seven.

MacDonald stopped painting to talk with Beale, noting he was painting the entire scene before them: the fishing boys, buildings such as a grey warehouse at the foot of West Street, and a docked boat.

The scene has since been replaced by an apartment block, but MacDonald captured it.

Now Beale is on the hunt for that painting and any other MacDonald art.

He's writing a book entitled Manly E. MacDonald, Interpreter of Old Ontario.

It is scheduled for a September 2009 release at the Belleville Public Library's John M. Parrott Gallery, which has a large collection of the painter's work. Loyalist College and Glanmore National Historic Site also have noteworthy collections.

The book is Beale's attempt to promote the man he says is a significant, if lesser-known, Canadian artist.

"It's his due to have his life's work appreciated," Beale said Tuesday at his Napanee home.

Painters such as the the Group of Seven, Emily Carr, and David Milne, he said, also used to be relatively unknown.

"Before people started telling their stories they were nobodies."

MacDonald died in 1971 at age 82, having

spent his life as a full-time painter.

Within a few years Clark Cunningham, a student of MacDonald's at what was then the Ontario College of Art, started cataloguing his late teacher's work and related newspaper clippings.

Hollis Arnold, a Port Hope resident, would later carry on

Cunningham's efforts, expanding the catalogue to 850 of MacDonald's estimated 3,000 paintings.

Both men died before their efforts could be finished. Beale was given their research by Arnold's daughter, Rosemary Brander of Kingston, and has spent the last two to three years working on his book.

Beale said MacDonald's life combined three of Beale's own loves: history, art, and local surroundings.

He's now working with the MacDonald family's blessing.

"My family and I are indeed pleased that Charles Beale has undertaken the writing about my father and his artwork," Duncan MacDonald told The Intelligencer

Wednesday from his home in Guelph.

"Charles has proven to be most diligent in the quest for

information and the assurance of its

accuracy," MacDonald said. "This project is certainly in enthusiastic and competent hands."

Beale said he hopes anyone with MacDonald art or related information will contact him. Beale has arranged for paintings to be photographed, and plans to feature about 100 pieces in the book to show a broad cross-section of MacDonald's talent.

"He always saw himself as a very

traditional painter, and yet he's seen by the art world as a semi-impressionistic

painter," he said.

MacDonald "fought the modernist forces in Canadian art" and experimented with different media and styles.

So far, he said, the public response to his search is encouraging.

"I've got a stack of replies here," he said, pointing to the papers on his desk.

Cataloguing the work can be difficult.

"He didn't name his paintings or catalogue them. He did date some of the early ones."

Others would sometimes write the locations depicted on the paintings on the back of each work, but Beale said that information was sometimes wrong.

Yet he remains hopeful he'll be able to uncover and publish more details.

He's now on his third draft of the manuscript, and the final draft must be ready by June.

"I'm not doing the book because of a sense this will heighten the profile and then the paintings will be worth more," said Beale, who with wife Paula owns 16 MacDonalds.

He stressed he has "collected them because I like them" and wants only to promote "a great Canadian.

"His legacy is an important one ... As others said, this is a story that should be told."

Beale asks anyone with information about MacDonald's art, especially the location of a piece, to contact Beale through his website at [www.charlesbeale.ca](http://www.charlesbeale.ca). [lhendry@intelligencer.ca](mailto:lhendry@intelligencer.ca)