

Excerpts from

L.M. Montgomery and the Railway King of Canada

By Christy Woster

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As only a true fan of Lucy Maud Montgomery could understand, it is thrilling to walk over the paths that Maud once did, or to sit in a room that she once occupied. A lesser-known destination that Maud visited often is Kirkfield, Ontario. Kirkfield is near Maud's home in Leaskdale and Lindsay, Ontario.

Still standing in Kirkfield is the home of Sir William MacKenzie, now open to the public as an Inn and Bed and Breakfast. Maud stayed here often as a guest of the MacKenzie family, and must have loved the beauty of the surroundings.

Sir William MacKenzie was born in 1849 in the Kirkfield area to John and Mary MacKenzie. When he was three years old his mother died and he went to live with his aunt and uncle, Catherine and Donald Munro.



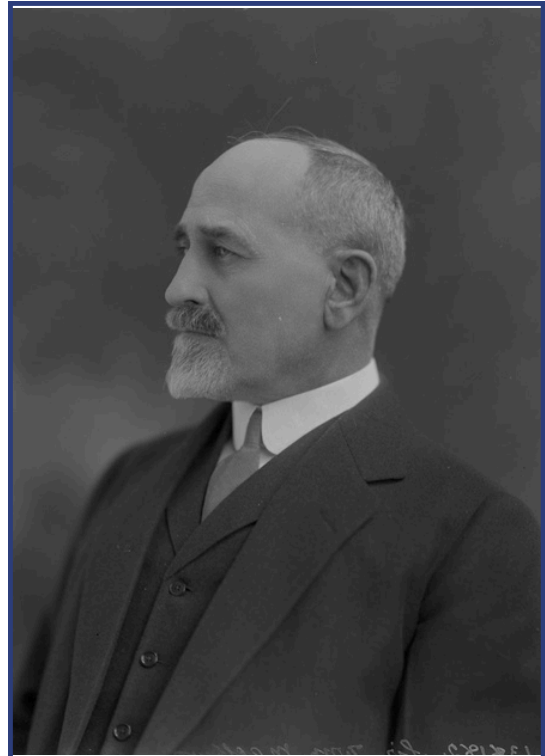
Lucy Maud Montgomery, c. 1908

He attended public school in North Eldon, and graduated from the high school in Lindsay. [...] In 1872 he married Margaret Merry in Lindsay, Ontario. William was of Scottish descent and Protestant, Mary was Irish and Roman Catholic and so they had a very secret wedding with only two guests -- strangers from off the street. After their marriage they settled in Kirkfield to begin their life together. [...]

On April 5th, 1887, Maud's father, Hugh John Montgomery married his second wife, Mary Ann McRae. Hugh had been transferred from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to Battleford and had rented his house in Prince Albert to John McTaggart, the new Prince Albert land agent. Mary was his stepdaughter and Hugh met her there. Mary was originally from the Kirkfield area and was William MacKenzie's niece. MacKenzie was, by the time of Hugh and Mary Ann's wedding, an important and influential man. Hugh must have felt that he marrying into a very prominent family indeed. Hugh and Mary's wedding took place in the Kirkfield Presbyterian Church. The wedding breakfast was held at the William MacKenzie home. What a wonderful affair the wedding breakfast must have been, in the 40-room mansion with the gorgeous grounds and gardens.

In the Uxbridge Journal in 1887 the wedding was recorded -- "At the Kirkfield Presbyterian Church by Reverend Mr. McLaren of Cannington, Mr. Hugh Montgomery of Battleford to Miss Mary McCrae of Prince Albert, both of the North West Territories..." Although LMM did not attend the wedding, she pasted her invitation to it in her scrapbook, now in the archives of the Confederation Centre, Charlottetown.

And so, William MacKenzie became Maud's step-grand uncle. In Maud's family a person's place in society was very important, and the family must have been pleased with Hugh marrying into such an important and well-known family. [...]

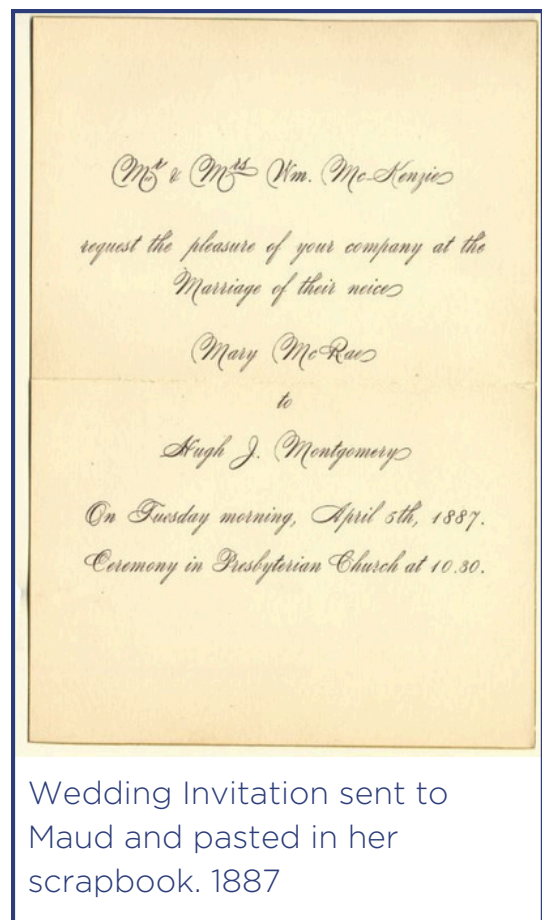


Sir William Mackenzie



Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Montgomery's Wedding Portrait, c. 1887

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Mary had gone to high school in Uxbridge and probably wanted her friends there to read about the marriage. And so, William MacKenzie became Maud's step-grand uncle. In Maud's family a person's place in society was very important, and the family must have been pleased with Hugh marrying into such an important and well-known family. [...]

In March of 1890, Hugh and Mary moved back to Prince Albert, and in August of that year, Maud, traveling with her Grandfather Montgomery, left for Prince Edward Island and arrived in Prince Albert to stay with her father.

There she met her stepmother for the first time. While there, they were visited by the MacKenzies, as Maud wrote in her journal:

Wednesday, September 3, 1890, "Company came last night -- Mrs. MacKenzie of Toronto and her two daughters. Her husband, William MacKenzie is my step mother's uncle, and is a railroad king and millionaire, I understand."

Maud lived with her father and stepmother for one year. She did not get along well with her stepmother and with that and homesickness for PEI, Maud left Prince Albert for the Island in August of 1891. On her way back to PEI she had a stop in Toronto and she wrote this in her journal:

"We reached Toronto at 4 and as I had 5 hours to stay there I decided to go and see the Mackenzies'. Eddie's cousin met him and we took a streetcar and drove three miles up Sherbourne St. to Mr. McKenzie's house. I was delighted with Toronto. It is a beautiful city. When we got to my destination I got off, bade Eddie good-bye-not at all regretfully-and ran up the steps. To my disappointment I found that Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie, Gertie and Mabel were out in the country. However, the governess and a Miss Campbell who was there were exceedingly kind and so were the children. I had a lovely time. Later on Rod McKenzie came in. He is very nice and I spent a delightful evening. At 8:30 Rod drove me to the depot and put me on board the train." [...]

As the years passed and Maud began her career as an author, William MacKenzie continued with his passion for building railroads. From 1900 to 1915 railway mileage doubled in Canada, much of this due to the work of MacKenzie. He also built the Sir Adam Generating Plant in Niagara Falls with a group of others. This was the beginning of Ontario Hydro. {...}

But perhaps his biggest accomplishment was the building of a Trans Continental Railway of over 5,000 miles. Today, this line is called the Canadian National Railway, now privately owned, and one of the most successful railways in the world. [...]

William died in Toronto in December of 1923 and is buried in Kirkfield. [...]

I was not able to find the date that Maud first met the MacKenzie's, or the dates of Gertrude's and Mabel's weddings. It would be interesting to know how often Maud got together with the MacKenzie family, but she must have been fairly close to the family, as the two sisters asked her to stand up for them. Hopefully with further research, I can solve these mysteries.[...]

In Maud's journal dated, Wednesday, July 15, 1925, The Manse, Leaskdale, Ontario,

"...Yesterday we motored to Kirkfield and spent the day with the Burkholders. Very pleasant but of course, for me, marred by the ceaseless talk about the Union and its results which made an otherwise excellent dinner a meal of bitter herbs. Kirkfield is where father was married to his second wife. The old MacKenzie house, where the reception was held, is still there, across the street from the manse. A beautiful place which has been shut up for years. The ceremony was performed in the old church which has been torn down. We went for a walk through a most beautiful long lane of lombardies on the MacKenzie estate. It was the part of the day I enjoyed the most. How I miss out of my life now the long intimate walks through woods and secluded fields..." [...]



Sir William MacKenzie Estate

Resources:

A Decade of Memories, by Paul D. Scott
The Lucy Maud Montgomery Album, compiled by Kevin McCabe
The Selected Journals of LM Montgomery, Vol. 1, edited by Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston.
The Selected Journals of LM Montgomery, Vol.3. edited by Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston
The Sir William MacKenzie Inn web site: www.themackenzieinn.com

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The full article: https://lmmontgomery.ca/islandora/object/lmmi%3A5220/datastream/PDF/download/lmmi_5220.pdf

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As of 2023, the MacKenzie Inn is no longer open.

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Lucy Maud Montgomery, Age 30
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