

JANUARY Ten Cents

# Chatelaine



In This Issue

Confessions  
of a  
Debutante

Allan Wilson

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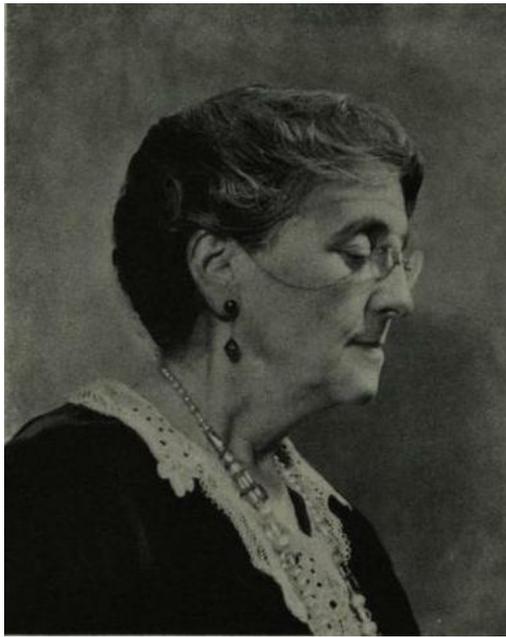
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# Is This My Anne?

**Asks L. M. Montgomery**  
authoress of the famous “Anne of  
Green Gables” recently brought  
to the screen

L. M. Montgomery

First published *Chatelaine*, January 1935.



**An authoress goes to her movie.** L. M. Montgomery, who, thirty years ago began the story of “Anne of Green Gables”—went recently to a preview of the screen feature which has been made of her story. How did she like it? What did she think of the things Hollywood had done to her story? Mrs. Montgomery tells you herself.

Many years ago I sat down one spring evening, in the kitchen of an old Prince Edward Island farmhouse, and wrote the first chapter of my first book, *Anne of Green Gables*.

It might be more correct to say that I sat “up.” For I climbed up on the high, old-fashioned sofa and sat on the end of the kitchen table, by the west window, to catch the last gleams of sunset. It was one of my favorite roosts for writing. I have always liked to write with my portfolio on my knee and the sofa made a capital footrest. And I could look out into an old apple orchard and a ferny grove of spruces and birches.

Outside it was a warm blossomy May evening. There had been a shower and the leaves of the big maple that almost brushed the window were wet and glistening. I finished one chapter and then, a caller dropping in, I put the work away. I hadn’t the most remote idea that I would one day sit in a theatre and see that chapter “come to life” on the screen. At that time “movies” were not even dreamed of; and if they had been, it would never have occurred to me that my simple little story of life in the Maritimes, nine miles from a railroad and twenty miles from a town, would make its appearance in them. Yet the other day I sat with a small group and saw a preview of the film, just before it was released in Canada.

Although I began the story that long-ago night, I had been “brooding” it for some time, waiting until I could find leisure to write it in the intervals of writing the “pot-boilers” by which I made my living. Indeed, *Green Gables* itself was first intended for a pot-boiler, and only escaped that fate because *Anne* simply wouldn’t be confined within the limits of a pot-boiler. She demanded more “scope.”

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People ask me how I came to create *Anne*. I didn’t create her. She simply sprang into being in my mind, all ready created—Anne, spelled with an e, red-haired, dreamy-eyed and elfin-faced. Yet she seemed so real to me that when I tell people that she is “entirely fictitious” I have the uncomfortable feeling that I am not telling the truth.

People ask me, too, why I gave her red hair. I didn’t. It *was* red. And as I described her long red braids as she sat on the shingle pile at Bright River Station, I did not foresee a curious situation of the future when four prominent lawyers of the Boston Bar would sit around a table piled high with dictionaries and books of engravings, and argue heatedly for three mortal days over the exact tint of Anne’s tresses. Were they or were they not Titian red? And if they were, then just what shade exactly *was* Titian red?

In due time *Green Gables* was completed and started out to find a publisher.

Eventually one was found and Anne made her bow to a world that took her at once to its heart. To my unbounded surprise I found that my little story seemed to possess universal appeal. Letters soon began to pour in. They have been pouring in ever since. Anne has gone through so many editions that I have lost count of them.

In 1921 Anne appeared in the “silent” pictures. Mary Miles Minter starred as Anne, but I did not like her. She was too “sugary sweet”—not a scrap like my gingery Anne. There was a good Matthew and a good Marilla and a passable Gilbert, but on the whole the picture made me furious. The producers evidently thought it had to be “pepped up,” and they introduced a lot of absurdities—among others, Anne at the door of her school, a shotgun in hand, standing off a crowd of infuriated villagers who were bent on mobbing her because she had whipped one of her pupils!

There were two things in the silent film that especially enraged me. One was the fact that in a scene at Queen’s Academy, on the occasion of Anne’s graduation, the Stars and Stripes was prominently displayed! The other was that on her way to a Sunday-school picnic Anne foregathered with a skunk which she mistook for a kitten!



Anne Shirley as the red-headed, hot-tempered girl of Prince Edward Island.

Now, at that time there were no skunks in Prince Edward Island nor ever had been, and I was jealous for the good name of my fair native land. But “coming events cast their shadows before.” A few years afterward some brilliant Island mind conceived the idea of breeding skunks for their fur. Fox farming was profitable. Why not skunk farming? Accordingly some man started a skunk ranch and imported several pairs of skunks. But the ranch did not pay. It was abandoned. The bars were

thrown down and the skunks left to wander at their own sweet will. In a few years the Island was overrun with them. They became such a nuisance that the Government was compelled to offer a bounty per snout for deceased skunks. As a result the skunk population has been reduced but some still remain.

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The silent film was a huge box-office success but in mid-career it suddenly ceased to be. It had been advertised for release in Great Britain, but it was never shown and Mary Miles Minter disappeared with it. I never knew the reason for years. Then one day in a railway station I bought a book for train reading with the delightful title, *Twelve Unsolved Murder Mysteries*. Among them was that of William Desmond Taylor, the director of *Anne*, who had been found murdered on the floor of his Hollywood bungalow. The murderer, or murderess, was never discovered. Mary Miles Minter was not suspected of it, though it ruined the careers of two other stars; but the police found in Desmond's desk a packet of letters which proved that the little golden-haired star who was heralded as a rival to Mary Pickford, had been in love with her director—who had a wife somewhere—and the great American public threw back its head and howled. Her career was ended and every film in which she had starred was hastily withdrawn from circulation.

That was thirteen years ago. The other day I sat and watched the "talkie" with mingled feelings. On the whole I liked it much better than the silent picture. Naturally, no picture can, in the very nature of things, reflect the characters and setting just as the author has conceived them. So at times I had the sensation of watching a story written by somebody else.

The little girl who played the part of *Anne*—whom we must call *Anne Shirley*, since she has taken that name for the screen—is a good *Anne*. There were many moments when she tricked even me into feeling that she *was* *Anne*. I loved the "rick-rack" braid on her pinafore: it was just what I wore myself once. Matthew, whom I have always seen with a long grey beard, seemed a stranger to me at first, but he was so good that I finally forgave him his clean-shaven face. Oddly enough, both Matthew and Gilbert Blythe were exceedingly like the Matthew and Gilbert of the silent pictures, though entirely different people. Marilla was not the tall, thin, austere Marilla of my conception, but it was impossible to help liking her. I had, for the time being, the conviction that although Marilla was not the least like that, she should have been.

Of all the cast I liked Mrs. Barry the least. They tried to make a composite of Mrs. Barry and Rachel Lynde, and the hybrid result was not satisfactory. And Diana was a washout.

There were no American flags in the picture. Canada and the Island were given some credit for the story. Prince of Wales College was even mentioned by name. Which indicates some faint glimmerings of a sense of geography on the part of Hollywood, which seemed entirely lacking in the silent version. The opening views are real Island pictures but the rest of the setting is California, not Prince Edward Island; and “Green Gables” is New England colonial and not an Island farmhouse. The river where Anne was nearly drowned, while dramatizing *Elaine*, is not my blue Lake of Shining Waters. But how could it be? One must not be unreasonable.

Naturally, the introduction of dialogue into the picture adds to the verisimilitude and is a distinct asset to stories which, like mine, owe much of their interest to the “talk.” The producers sent me a copy of the script, but I had no “say” in it in any way or in any features of the story which was bought outright from the publishers. For two-thirds of the film my story was followed with reasonable fidelity. In the remaining third the producers “produced” a narrative of their own for the purpose of providing Anne with a love story. They dragged in the old Montague-Capulet *motif* and everything ended bee-yew-tifully, with Matthew—who died in the book—rescued from the brink of the grave. But I am devoutly thankful that they did *not* end the story with a long lingering kiss between Anne and Gilbert. Had they done so I would have risen up and shrieked!

On the whole, the “talkie” gave me a much greater sense of reality than the silent picture. And I looked back to the evening of long ago, when I began the story of Anne with a smile and a sigh. For it is a “far cry” from those days to these, and the creation of the story and its characters and atmosphere gave to me a delight that Hollywood cannot give or take away.

To see one’s own story on the screen certainly provides plenty of “thrills.” But one always wonders!

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Is This My Anne?* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]