

MAUD LEWIS

PAINTER OF JOY



Maud Lewis in her home, 1965 (Photo ©Bob Brooks)

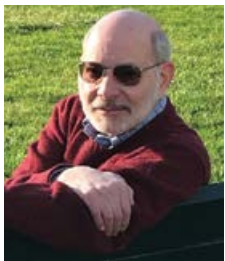
In 1939, Nova Scotian folk artist, Maud Lewis, hung a painted sign on her house in Marshalltown advertising "Paintings for Sale" and began to sell her paintings with success for five or ten dollars each. Eighty-three years later in May, 2022, one of her paintings sold at auction for \$350,000! Maud Lewis's remarkable story is one of pain, hardship, resilience and joy.

Maud Kathleen Dowley was born in 1901 in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia to a middle-class family. Her father was a blacksmith and harness maker. Her mother encouraged her love of drawing and painting. From birth, Maud suffered a painful curvature of her spine due to juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. As she aged, the arthritis worsened and her hands were gnarled into closed fists (as you can see in the photo.)

travelers and summer tourists would stop to buy one of Maud's paintings. Her colorful images and joyful subjects—sunny landscapes, flowers, black and white cats, a team of oxen, horse drawn sleighs—belie her pain and austere circumstances.

In the mid-1960s, word of Maud Lewis's paintings began to spread. In 1965, the *Toronto Star Weekly* ran a feature with photos of Maud and her painted house. Canadian Broadcasting interviewed Maud and Everett for a 15-minute television profile (available on www.cbc.ca). Maud is seen painting and is rather charming; Everett is shown cutting Masonite board for Maud's canvases. And in 2016, a touching film, *Maudie*, starring Sally Hawkins and Ethan Hawke as the couple was released to favorable reviews.

Maud Lewis died in hospital in 1970 from complications of emphysema—she was a heavy smoker—and a broken hip. Today, she is considered one of Canada's finest folk artists and a national treasure. In 2020, Canada Post honored her with three holiday stamps. Her paintings as well as her restored house are on permanent display at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, who were kind enough to provide the images of Lewis's paintings appearing with this article.



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In her teens, Maud sold her Christmas cards door to door and in shops. After both her parents died, she moved to Digby to live with her maternal aunt. There, she saw an ad for a housekeeper and walked six miles to the doorstep of Everett Lewis, a fish peddler and night watchman ten years her senior. She offered to be a live-in if Everett would marry her. They were married in 1938.

Everett must have learned quickly that Maud's arthritis limited her ability to do manual labor. Most of the time, she remained indoors painting while Everett performed chores. Their cramped one-story house, heated only by a coal kitchen stove, was right off a main road, and



Maud Lewis, Logging Scene in Winter, 1966. Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



Maud Lewis, Team of Oxen in Winter, 1967. Collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia



Maud Lewis, Three Black Cats, 1960s. Private Collection