
THE ELIZABETH BISHOP SOCIETY

OF NOVA SCOTIA

NEWSLETTER



The EBSNS was formed in 1994 to celebrate the life and work of the poet Elizabeth Bishop. The society seeks through its various activities and projects, to promote the appreciation and study of Elizabeth Bishop as a Nova Scotian writer. The EBSNS publishes an annual newsletter and holds its AGM in Great Village in June of each year. For more information about EBSNS and about membership, visit our website <http://www.elizabethbishopns.org> You can also find more information about Elizabeth Bishop on the EBSNS blog www.elizabethbishopcentenary.blogspot.com You can also visit our Facebook page “The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia” <https://www.facebook.com/EBSofNS>

Editorial

When the EBSNS turned 20 in 2014, we considered it a milestone and felt pleased and proud of the society’s many accomplishments: publications, exhibits, festivals, concerts, lectures, readings, and lots of outreach and education, especially through our social media (website, blog and Facebook page). We feel that the activities of the society have significantly helped raise awareness of Elizabeth Bishop’s deep connections to Great Village, N.S., and, as a result, have helped bring people from all over the world to the province and the village. Though active from the start, we feel that a turning point occurred in 2011 with the year-long celebration of Bishop’s 100th birthday. This centenary (EB100) saw the society collaborate with many artists and organizations and offer exciting events and activities that highlighted Bishop’s Nova Scotia legacy and also solidified the EBSNS legacy.

And here we are turning 25 — a quarter of a century! We are delighted to say that EB activity in Nova Scotia continues to be strong. Nova Scotia film-maker John Scott, who is based at Ithaca College in the USA, has provided an update about his feature documentary about Bishop, *The Art of Losing*. In the fall, Nimbus Publishing will bring out Rita Wilson’s book about Bishop’s childhood, *A Pocket of Time: Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetic Childhood*, with illustrations by Emma FitzGerald. The 2018 newsletter featured an interview with Rita. This year, we feature an interview with Emma. Nova Scotia storyteller Claire Miller has been a friend of the EBSNS for many years. She is retiring and her “Swan Song” salon happened on 26 May, with free will donations for the EBSNS. Thank you Claire. In 2020 Cambridge University Press will bring out a major new collection of essays about Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop in Context*, in which Sandra Barry has a chapter about Bishop’s connection to Nova Scotia. Soprano Suzie LeBlanc, the EBSNS Honorary Patron, performed settings of Bishop poems at a concert in Vancouver on 4 May, with Elektra Women’s Choir. Some of the settings were commissioned in 2011 for EB100, but she also premiered two new settings by Alberta composer Stephen Smith.

None of the EBSNS’s projects and activities could have happened without the faithful support of its board and membership. The society is grateful to all the volunteers who have served on the board and who have participated in events for the past 25 years. In this day and age when daily life is hectic, a small arts organization like the EBSNS (indeed, any charitable organization) cannot take volunteers for granted. The support the EBSNS has received since its formation in April 2004 has been tremendous, resulting in the impressive range and quality of offerings presented to residents of the village and to fans across the province and the world. Thank you everyone.

We are looking forward to the next quarter century!



Interview with Emma FitzGerald

Emma FitzGerald is an author and illustrator. Her first book, *Hand Drawn Halifax* documents her chosen home city, while *Hand Drawn Vancouver* (Spring 2020) explores the city she grew up in. Emma fell in love with Elizabeth Bishop's poetry when she first discovered it in 2013. She has since completed two residencies in Bishop's childhood home in Nova Scotia, and has visited various homes in Brazil that Bishop lived in, creating artwork as she went. This helped greatly when illustrating *A Pocket of Time: The Poetic Childhood of Elizabeth Bishop*, written by Rita Wilson with words by Bishop, it will be published by Nimbus Publishing in Fall 2019.

1. How did you discover Elizabeth Bishop and her work?

It was in Summer 2013, when I was getting ready for a “White Rabbit” artist residency at Red Clay Farm in Upper Economy. My project involved biking around Bass River with a Bass River Stool (my studio chair) strapped to the back of my bike, and drawing the area while sitting on said stool. As I did preliminary research on the internet, Elizabeth Bishop and her poems kept coming up. I was immediately intrigued, and it went from there. By that Fall I spent a week at the EB House in Great Village on retreat, but couldn't have at that time imagined I would travel to her various homes in Brazil, create a body of work about her that would be exhibited in Rio, and illustrate a children's book about her! But looking back, I am also not surprised, that was the kind of energy I got from her poems and especially her sense of place.

2. What did you learn about Elizabeth Bishop and her Brazil when you went there in 2015?

I learned what a beautiful place Brazil is and could see why she fell in love with it! I travelled to specific places she lived: Lota's house in Petrópolis, and Casa Mariana in Ouro Prêto, where I was lucky enough to sleep for a few nights in her bedroom. All the while, I was taking buses, travelling alone as a woman in Brazil, existing in quite a different space than EB would have, but also feeling many of her “Questions of Travel” in a very real way. I also kept up a kind of performance the whole time I was there — echoing my bike and stool in Bass River. Everywhere I went I used an applewood walking stick that was about 100 years old, bought from the antique store in Great Village where Layton's General Store used to be, right next to EB's house. The stick felt like a form of protection — people either helped me out, or wanted to stay away from me (it looks quite impressive/possibly menacing with contorted shape and a bullet casing at its tip). I did a kind of study of the mentions of colour in all her poems, and made note of Before Brazil/After Brazil in both English and Portuguese, that was an interesting exercise that also became interesting visually.

3. What has been your approach to illustrate Rita Wilson's book about Elizabeth Bishop's childhood?

It is still in progress, but I am using my time in the house and in the area as firsthand research. Also archival photos, and more texture than I have used in the past. On the one hand I wish I had more time, but on the other hand I am grateful I have quite a tight deadline — otherwise I could over work things. This way I have to go with my first instincts, though there are always surprises along the way.

4. Do you have a favourite Elizabeth Bishop poem?

Yes, “The Moose,” which describes that same ribbon of road I rode my bicycle on, and “Sestina.”



Storyteller Claire Miller Is Retiring

To mark her long career as a storyteller, Claire Miller hosted a final salon. In her words: “As I approach the end of my career as a performing storyteller, I wish to celebrate this wonderful 30+ year journey with those who have been good friends, supporters and collaborators along the way.” This “Swan Song” event took place on Sunday afternoon, May 26, in the Miller living room on Victoria Road in Halifax. She charged no admission, but accepted freewill donations for the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia.

The concert was part retrospective and part stories that she had longed to tell but for one reason or another had just not found the right occasion. Special musical guests were harpist-singer Vanessa Lindsay-Botten, singing storyteller Margo Carruthers, singer-folklorist Clary Croft, and percussionist Heather-Anne Pentz.



Of her association with the EBSNS, Claire writes: “I have been a member of the EBSNS for many years and have received great pleasure and fulfillment from my involvement. The Society has given me opportunities to support their work through storytelling performances and presentations, and it has meant a lot to me to know that Bishop herself loved stories. In 2011, the centennial year of Elizabeth Bishop’s birth, I was privileged to record for the Society, Bishop’s story, ‘In the Village,’ which describes a significant period of her childhood in Great Village. [https://elizabethbishopns.org/media/.](https://elizabethbishopns.org/media/)”

The EBSNS is most grateful to Claire for her generosity and has deeply valued our association with her. We wish Claire all the best in her future endeavours.

John Scott’s Elizabeth Bishop Documentary: An Update

Film-maker John Scott reported that on 1 March 2019 he finished the first cut of his documentary film about Elizabeth Bishop, “The Art of Losing.” He says that at this point the film is one hour and forty minutes, but it will be somewhat shorter once his evaluation and the editing is done. As he says, he will be “deciding what should stay and what should go, the order of it and trying to see the whole thing fresh again.” He hopes to have a final cut by the end of June. According to John, there is a saying in the film world that “a movie gets written three times, once on the page, once when it’s shot, and once again when it’s edited.” John reports that he is “firmly in stage 3.” Bravo John! And good luck. We will let our members and EB fans know on our social media when and where this film will premiere. Thanks to John for letting us know what is happening.



**The Elizabeth Bishop Artist Retreat 2018
by Laurie Gunn**

2018 was a very busy and rewarding year for the EB House. Joy Laking, Carol McNutt and myself are the sub-committee of the St James Church of Gt. Village Preservation Society, who look after the running of the EB House and Sandra Barry is our EB House expert.

Our first guests arrived in May and our last guests left the end of November. We had over twenty artists take advantage of the creative energy that the old house is famous for. Most of our visitors were from Canada and the United States but we did have Anne Marie Fyfe and husband from the UK and Moya Pacey and husband from Australia. We had seven artists who did readings of their work and invited the public to come as well. Artist Deborah Banks gave an amazing poetry workshop that was very well attended. In September, our artist in residence was Claudia Radmore of Ontario. She came for two weeks and was very well received by the community.

In September 2018 we received a \$10,000 grant from the Robert Pope Foundation. The letter said, "Congratulations! Your grant application for the 'Elizabeth Bishop House Revitalization Project' was approved by the Board of Directors of the Robert Pope Foundation. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour as everyone felt it was a strong project involving a living museum, artist retreat and local art network." We have lots of things to accomplish in 2019 some of which include two new skylights, chimney and roof repairs to name a few.

A special thank you to Deverne Rushton for the wonderful exterior painting job, Jim Hudson for fixing any plumbing problem that came up, Carl Smith for all things involving electricity and Corey Spencer who did a great job keeping the grounds looking well cared for.

2019 is looking like a very busy time at the EB House. We are almost completely booked but we do have 6 weeks available between now and the end of October 2019. Please check our Facebook page to see when these dates are available.



THE ELIZABETH BISHOP SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA

2019 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 25 YEARS STRONG!

Saturday, 22 June 2019
St. James Church, Great Village, Nova Scotia
1:00 p.m.

Opening of “Echoes of Elizabeth Bishop” Gallery
(with works by rug hooker Penny Lighthall)
and the “Elizabeth Bishop’s Beginnings” exhibit.

Guest Speakers

Harry Thurston is the author of more than two dozen books of poetry and prose, including the multiple award-winning *Tidal Life, A Natural History of the Bay of Fundy*, and his most recent book of poetry, *Keeping Watch at the End of the World* (Gaspereau Press) which was shortlisted for the 2016 ReLit Award. He shares the love that Elizabeth Bishop expressed in her poem “The Moose” of “narrow provinces / of fish and bread and tea/ home of the long tides / where the bay leaves



Margo Wheaton was born in Moncton, New Brunswick and currently makes her home in Halifax. Her poetry has appeared in publications including *The Antigonish Review*, *CV2*, *Event*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Literary Review of Canada*, *The New Quarterly*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Prism International*, and in the anthologies *Undercurrents: New Voices in Canadian Poetry*, *Poet to Poet: Poems Written to Poets and the Stories that Inspired Them*, *Landmarks: An Anthology of New Atlantic Canadian Poetry of the Land*, and *Vintage 2000*. Her first poetry collection *The Unlit Path Behind the House* was published by McGill-Queen's University



Rita Wilson, retired educator and curriculum developer, lives in Cariboo River, N.S. She has written articles *Saltscapes* and has had poems published in *The Antigonish Review*, *Fathom*, *The Cumberland Review*, and *Arc*. Her book *A Pocket of Time: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetic Childhood*



Penny Lighthall

From Pen to Hook, is a series of traditional maritime hand hooked rugs by Penny Lighthall. Upon reading her first poem by Elizabeth Bishop, she experienced a very visual image of the poem. She has created this series inspired by the poems of Elizabeth Bishop. The eight rugs in the Echos of Elizabeth Bishop Gallery focus on the poems that she wrote about life in the Great Village or in Nova Scotia. The poem, “The Ballard of the Subway Train,” was written while Bishop was in high school and only published in her school paper, OWL.



Suzie Leblanc Sings Elizabeth Bishop Songs

Montreal-based soprano Suzie LeBlanc and Vancouver's Elektra Women's Choir joined forces on 4 May 2019 to present "I am in need of music," a concert that included settings of Elizabeth Bishop poems, as well as songs of her Acadian roots and Purcell's famous *Music for a While*. Montreal-based soprano Suzie LeBlanc is known around the world for her interpretations of early music. Vancouver has been a home-away-from-home for her many summers, as she has taken leading roles in baroque operas and projects by Early Music Vancouver. But this consummate performer is also passionate about other kinds of music, which this concert highlighted. The concert offered the music of Gwyneth Walker, Alan Bevan, Pärt Uusberg, and world premiere compositions by Nicholas Ryan Kelly and Stephen Smith (the new Bishop settings), and world premiere arrangements by Laura Hawley and Marie-Claire Saindon.



County of Colchester Presents Gt. Village Preservation Society with a Municipal Heritage Award



Laurie Gunn accepting the award from Bob Taylor on behalf of the Preservation Society,

Through the efforts of the Society, the Elizabeth Bishop house and the land were registered as a Municipal Heritage Property in the County of Colchester in June of 2018. The house has a long history in the village, parts dating from the 18th century.

Elizabeth Bishop was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet and short story writer whose grandparents owned the house. It became the centre of her universe as a child and in later life, she wrote about this house and the Gt. Village landscape.

The EBSNS congratulates the St. James Church of Great Village Preservation Society for this well-deserved recognition and its good work taking care of the EB House. The EBSNS looks forward to working with this organization in the future to ensure the house remains part of the village's esteemed heritage.