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A STORY FOR ALL CANADIANS

There are many volumes devoted to the stories of the men of the Hudson's Bay Company whose courage and stamina established the HBC in North America as one of the greatest corporations of the past four hundred years. Less attention has been paid to the stories of the women who accompanied them into the Canadian wilderness.

COMPANY WIFE brings to life the story of one of these wives. Maggie McLeod Ross McKenzie's bravery and endurance in the face of extreme hardship, isolation in the wilderness of northern Ontario in the late 1800s and escalating domestic violence is in itself a tale of indomitable strength.

Born in the Saguenay region of Quebec in 1850, Maggie married a young HBC trader named Thomas Barnston Ross in 1867 and ten years later travelled with him and their five children, the oldest nine, the youngest three months, to a lonely HBC post on Whitefish Lake, 150 miles north of Lake Huron

Maggie lived in that wilderness for almost two decades, bearing five more children there. She raised and educated her ten children in that lonely cabin. The caring and enormous strength of character of their mother is evident in the successful lives lived by her children. Four of them grew up to become doctors, several were successful business men, one became an athlete of great renown. At the close of the 19th century, the family returned to the Saguenay when TB was given the position of Jr Chief Trader at Roberval, in the Lac St Jean region.

In a final twist of fate in the extraordinary life of this remarkable woman, Maggie McLeod Ross, by this time fearing for her life, left TB and fled to Sudbury with her children. Within two years, she obtained a divorce and married Peter McKenzie, a Chief Factor of the HBC, moving to Montreal with her younger children. There she lived the life of a society matron until Peter's death in 1910.

The author, Helen Webster, lives in Nanaimo, BC. She is a fifth generation Canadian, and the great-granddaughter of Maggie, the COMPANY WIFE in the story. Growing up she was enthralled by the stories her grandfather told of his 'larger than life' mother and this ignited in her a passion for writing, for research and for Canadian history. She was determined that someday she would write Maggie's story for all to read.

Contact:

Helen Webster

Spindrift Arts

92 Summit Drive

Nanaimo, BC, V9T4Y1

Phone: 250-758-8641

Email: helenwebsterart@gmail.com

Web: www.helenwebster.ca