

Monday » November
20 » 2006

A bit of history with your mystery

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In July of 1958, the dams holding back the water during construction of the Seaway project were finally blown apart, releasing the flood waters that would send 200 farms, hundreds of homes, and 17 churches to a watery grave. Maggie Wheeler has just published her third murder mystery full of historical details of the Seaway's past, helping to preserve the story of the day 6,500 people lost their riverside homes and communities.

"Maggie's first two books in the series are regional bestsellers," says Tim Gordon, of General Store Publishing House. Gordon was at the recent launch in the small village of Ingleside, one of two created after the flooding, for Wheeler's latest novel, *All Mortall Things*. Gordon says regional best seller status is achieved once a book has sold 5,000 or more copies. National best seller status in Canada is 10,000 copies.

Wheeler's first novel, *A Violent End*, was published in 2001, followed by *The Brother of Sleep* in 2004. Although Gordon expected the series to do well, he admits the popularity of the first two books has exceeded his most optimistic predictions. Both novels have gone into a third printing, with more than 12,000 copies sold, earning them solid regional bestseller status.

Like the first two in the series, *All Mortall Things* is a mystery novel, and starts off with a murder. The murder takes place in one of the guest bedrooms of a house that is currently operating as a popular bed & breakfast in Ingleside. Wheeler based one of the book's characters, Mildred Keeps, on the actual owner of the B&B, Lesley O'Gorman.

Known today as the Nightingale House Bed & Breakfast, the fine old home serves as the model for Sterling House in the novel. Built in 1880, the home was the largest frame house to be moved during the Seaway construction and retains much of its original charm, character and style, with butternut interior wood trim, original gas fixtures, period furniture and fireplace tiles. Although O'Gorman's character in the novel is a widow, in reality she actually co-owns and manages the unique inn along with her husband, Stuart.

Wheeler says she didn't set out to write a definitive book about the Seaway project, she just recognized it as a great background story for her novel's plot after spending months of poring over old newspaper reports and aging documents and interviewing dozens of former residents from some of the lost villages. Wheeler's final in the series, *On a Darkling Plain*, will be published in 2008.

Since the publication of her first novel, Wheeler has become an established voice in the community, dedicated to preserving the history of the Seaway. *A Violent End* is used in a Canadian history class at the University of Ottawa, and was selected by the City of Brockville for the launch of its 22,000 member book club, "One Book, One Community."

"Maggie doesn't realize we've signed her for 10 books in the series," Gordon says, with a grin.

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