

*Four American writers of the 1920s — Part I of IV*

## *F. Scott Fitzgerald – Novelist of psychological and spiritual malaise*

Robert Cotner

*Author's note: For this series, I have chosen four American writers of the 1920s to represent what I consider the dominant literary motifs emerging from American culture in that decade. Each arose from a distinct intellectual vantage point; each carried forth into later generations, and all are with us, in some form, to this day. Presented at the Bluestem Festival of Arts and Humanities, Lake Forest, IL, June 8, 2001.*

F Scott Fitzgerald launched the 1920s with his novel *This Side of Paradise*, under the guidance of the most notable editor of the '20s, Maxwell Perkins at Charles Scribner's Sons. The concluding passage of this novel enunciates well what might be considered the theme of the age. Fitzgerald, in a closing authorial summation, suggests that the final chapter, "The End of Many Things," is a transcendental termination of things beyond the men's college days:

It is graduation day at Princeton, and Amory Blaine, the novel's protagonist, and his friend Tom sum up their university experience in this final conversation.

*"And what we leave here is more than this class; it's the whole heritage of youth. We're just one generation – we're breaking all the links that seemed to bind us here to top-booted and high-stocked generations. We've walked arm in arm with [Aaron] Burr and Light-Horse Harry Lee through half these deep blue nights."*

*"That's what they are," Tom tangented off, "deep blue – a bit of color would spoil them, make*



*Statue of F. Scott Fitzgerald in Rice Park, St. Paul, MN, by Michael B. Price.  
Photo by Jon A. Cotner.*

*them exotic. Spires, against a sky that's a promise of dawn, and blue light on the slate roofs — it hurts . . . rather — — "*

*"Good bye, Aaron Burr," Amory called toward deserted Nassau Hall, "you and I knew strange corners of life."*

*His voice echoed in the stillness. . . .*

*The last light fades and drifts across the land — the low, long land, the sunny land of spires; the ghosts of evening tune again their lyres and wander singing in a plaintive band down the long corridors of trees; . . .*

*. . . Here, Heraclitus, did you find in fire and shifting things the prophecy you hurled down the dead years; this midnight my desire will see, shadowed among the embers, furling in flame, the splendor and the sadness of the world.<sup>1</sup>*

"The splendor and the sadness of the world" might well be the theme of the 1920s. Fitzgerald, fragile though he was, captured as well as any novelist that splendor and sadness throughout his writing. His novels are about those "certified," by proper educational credentials from the "right" schools and by social-class identification, which sets them apart through wealth and its accouterments. Fitzgerald, with his own certification at Princeton, aligned himself with the tradition of Henry Adams and composed a life, in actuality and in fiction, that might well have begun "Under the shadow of Boston State House,"<sup>2</sup> as Henry Adams began his *Education of Henry Adams*.

There were other great novelists of the age, including Ernest Hemingway, John DosPassos, Sherwood Anderson,

Thomas Wolfe, and E.E. Cummings, to name but a few. And there was a host of second-tier novelists, whose works yet live, including Gene Stratton Porter, Ring Lardner, and Marjorie Rawlings. But distinct from all of these creative masters, Fitzgerald captured the alienation and loneliness of the era better than any other.

Midway through the decade, in 1925, Fitzgerald wrote what may be the greatest novel of the era. I speak of *The Great Gatsby*, a novel



# Musings...

## CAXTONIAN

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We are not there yet. We appear to be closer, but with every three steps forward, we seem to take one backward. I speak of the ideal enunciated and demonstrated by Colonial leader Roger Williams (1603?-1683). This brilliant and powerful leader, born in England and educated at Cambridge University, began his career in the study of law and then turned to theology, taking orders in the Anglican Church in 1629.

At odds with Anglican Church authorities, he became a Puritan and relocated to Massachusetts in 1631. There he found the Separatists insufficiently separate. He moved from Boston, where he refused to accept a pastorate, to Plymouth, and then to Salem, where there was a more liberal view than in the other two Colonial settlements. His views regarding the imperialistic treatment of the American Indians, the mingling of affairs of religion and politics, and the church's failure to welcome people of diverse views caused such grief that, in 1635, the General Court banished him from all jurisdictions surrounding Massachusetts Bay.

In the dead of winter, he went south to what is now Providence, RI, where he and a few followers established a colony, which became known for its openness and its tolerance of all creeds and all peoples. He cultivated friendship with the Narragansett Indians, living with them for a time, learning their language, and establishing a cooperative and productive relationship. His first book, in fact, was the much-read *A Key into the Language of America* (1643).

He became a Baptist for a time before leaving organized religion completely to become what was known as a "Seeker," an adherent of the faith but not in any organized body. As a Colonial leader, he was singular in his vision, as he expressed it in the "Providence Agreement" of 1640: "We Agree, As formerly hath been the libertyes of the Town: so Still to hold forth Libertye of Conscience." *Liberty of conscience!* This was, throughout his long life, a constant theme, his devoted demand within every society of which he was a part. It brought diversity, disorder, even chaos to the society — but rather than kill people for their differences, he said, engage them in discussion, dialog and debate!

In his late 70s, he challenged visiting Quaker George Fox to a four-day debate, covering 14 propositions relating to faith and scripture. Because Fox had a schedule conflict, he appointed three Quaker missionaries to debate. Williams rowed the 30 miles from Providence to Newport, where the first three days of debates were to take place. Massachusetts Bay Colony members were so impressed with Williams' performance, they published Williams' final book, *George Fox digg'd out of his Burrowes* (1676), a summary of his arguments with the Quakers.

Although many of Williams' papers have been destroyed or lost, he has been remembered through the centuries as, according to his first biographer, "The first founder and supporter of any truly civil government upon earth." His views on individual liberty, his opposition to a single national church, and his demands for the absolute and complete separation of church and state were elements that had great impact on the minds of the Founding Fathers a century later.

We are not there yet. But when we arrive, freedom of conscience will bring forth absolute equality among our people. And democracy will find ultimate fulfillment in the early wisdom of Roger Williams.

Robert Cotner  
Editor



Statue of Roger Williams, Providence, RI, from the Providence Historic Website.

## Fitzgerald

Continued from page 1

that has a vital life even in our day. There have been various motion picture adaptations and a recently created opera, performed by the Chicago Lyric Opera in October 2000.<sup>3</sup>

The novel is the story of one Jay Gatsby, a popular, wealthy resident of West Egg. He has a penchant for fast automobiles and beautiful women. But he is flawed: he has not been duly certified by graduation from an Ivy League college, and he is an "outsider," albeit a polished and wealthy outsider. In addition, he has connections with people whose reputations do not pass muster.

So we have here twin themes — alienation and accommodation. Surrounded by the symbols of success within America — his home, his car, his society — Gatsby cannot achieve full acceptance and is assassinated, the ultimate alienation. We learn that Gatsby's real name is Jimmie Gatz, when his father, an Eastern European by birth, comes to West Egg for Gatsby's funeral. Mr. Gatz reveals the painstaking way in which Gatsby had accommodated himself to what Gatsby thought to be the standards of personal behavior. From his earliest years in America, he had a daily schedule, which included exercise, study, work, the "Practice [of] elocution, poise and how to attain it," and a list of "General Resolves,"<sup>4</sup> which read like something from Ben Franklin.

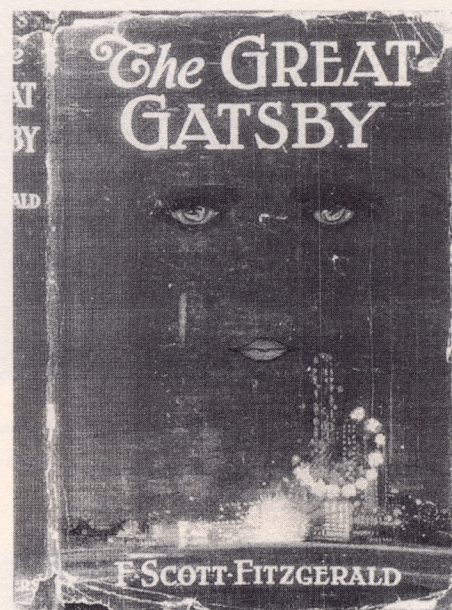
But this thoughtful accommodation, without certification, avails nothing. What Gatsby does not grasp is the fact that, as Fitzgerald points out, Daisy Buchanan, whom Gatsby loves, "was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes."<sup>5</sup> It was Fitzgerald's strength to create this "artificial world," this "cheerful snobbery," and the sadness that came from the "new tunes" of America in the 1920s. Fitzgerald was decidedly anti-democratic in his vision of America. And he was, though Midwestern by birth, an Eastern, urban novelist in spirit, who captured the decadence of the Jazz Age through his five novels and dozens of short stories. ❖

To be continued  
(Next month will feature Langston Hughes)

## Chronology of books By F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

- This Side of Paradise*\*, 1920.
  - Flappers and Philosophers*, 1921.
  - The Beautiful and the Damned*, 1922.
  - Tales of the Jazz Age*, 1922
  - The Vegetable; or, from President to Postman*, 1923.
  - The Great Gatsby*, 1925.
  - All the Sad Young Men*, 1926
  - Tender is the Night*, 1934.
  - Taps at Reveille*, 1935.
  - The Last Tycoon*, ed. Edmund Wilson, 1941.
- \*All books first published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.



Dust jacket for first edition of *The Great Gatsby*, © 1996, by the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina; from the university's website.

### End notes:

- <sup>1</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, New York: Gramercy Books, 1996, p. 118.
- <sup>2</sup> Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, New York: Modern Library, 1931, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> The opera, *The Great Gatsby*, with music and libretto by John Harbison and popular song lyrics by Murray Horowitz, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1999 and performed at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2000. A new and excellent, made-for-television version of *The Great Gatsby* was presented in 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925, p. 175.
- <sup>5</sup> *Gatsby*, p. 151.

## George Fox

Digg'd out of his  
Burrovves,  
Or an Offer of  
**DISPUTATION**

On fourteen *Proposals* made this laft Summer 1672 (fo call'd) unto G. Fox then present on *Rode-Island* in *New-England*, by R.W.

As also how (G. Fox sily departing) the Disputation went on being managed three dayes at *Newport* on *Rode-Island*, and one day at *Providence*, between *John Stubbs*, *John Burnet*, and *William Edmondson* on the one part, and R.W. on the other.

In which many *Quotations* out of G. Fox & Ed. Burrovves Book in *Folio* are alleadged.

WITH AN  
**A P E N D I X**

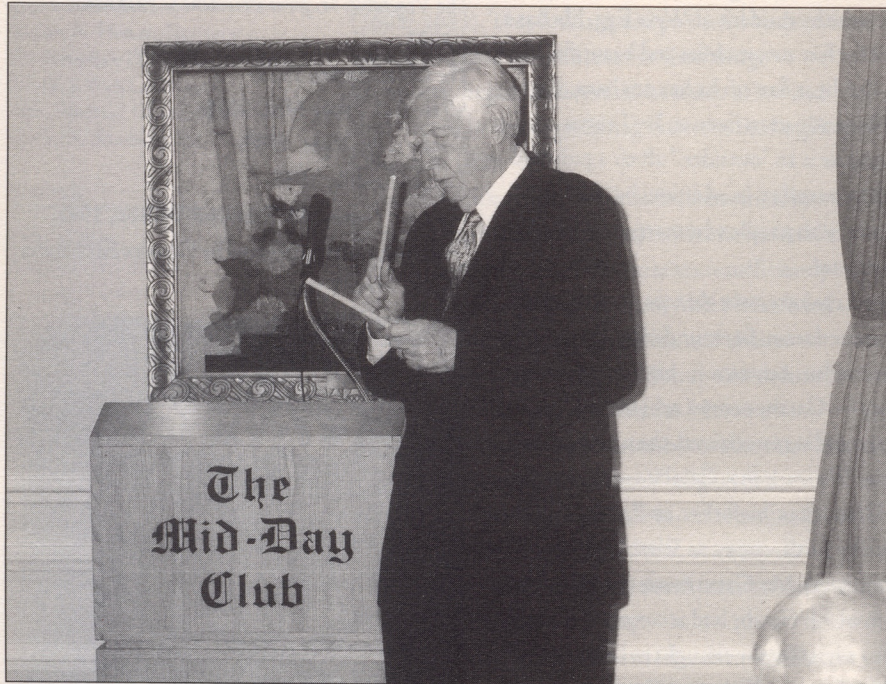
Of some scores of G. F. his simple lame Answers to his Oppofites in that Book, quoted and replied to By R. W. of *Providence* in N. E.

B O S T O N  
Printed by *John Foster*, 1 6 7 6 .

Title page of Roger Williams' final book, extracted from a four-day debate with Quakers. Publication of the *Narragansett Club*, Vol. V, Providence, RI, 1872. Used through the courtesy of the Newberry Library.

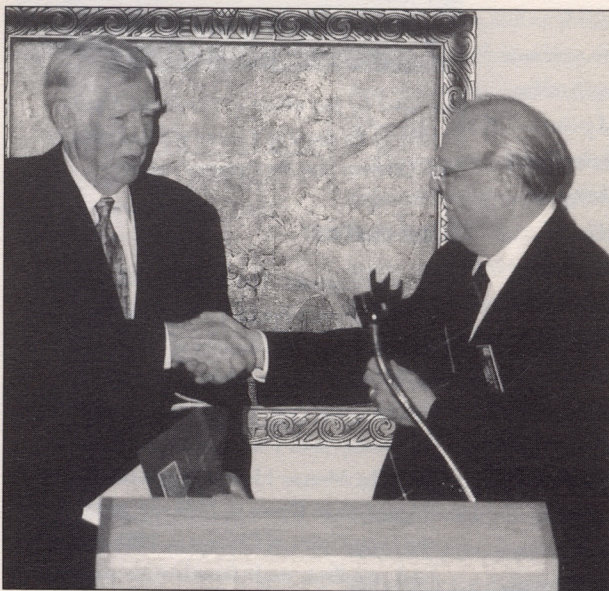
# *The final evening in the short reign of Dr. Frederick Kittle*

Caxton Vice President Jim Tomes came with camera in hand to the June Caxton dinner meeting — the final evening of Fred Kittle's term as president of the club. The photos on these two pages capture that evening, enjoyed by more than 100 Caxtonians and friends at the Mid-Day Club of Chicago.

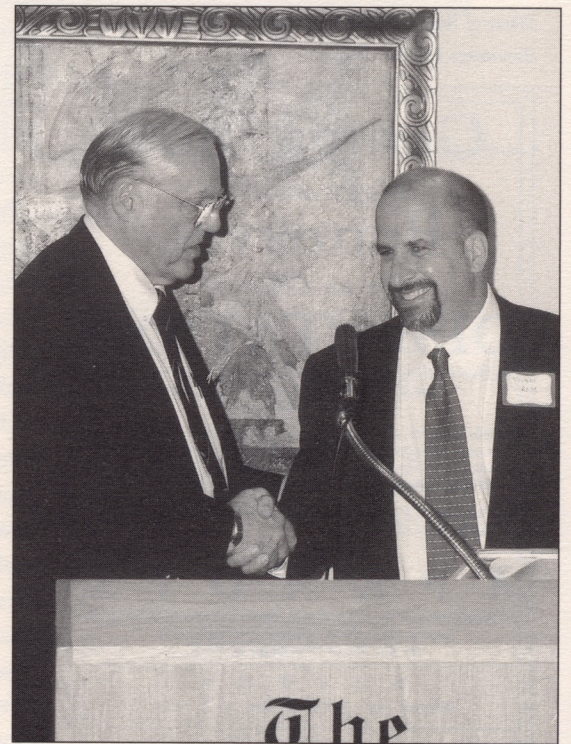


*The voice of William Caxton, our beloved magician Jay Marshall, informed Dr. Kittle that Caxton had a date on this particular evening with Gertrude Stein and he would prefer not being bothered hereafter in the Hereafter.*

*In the final moments of the evening, Dr. Kittle, having had several lessons in spiritualism by his long-time associate and mentor, Arthur Conan Doyle, was successful in contacting the spirit of William Caxton, with whom he had a brief conversation.*



*Jim Tomes presented the Good Doctor with a Caxton book inscribed by all the evening's guests — a tribute to his two years of sterling leadership of The Caxton Club.*



*Program Chair Jim Tomes presented the evening speaker, Stuart Rose, with the traditional Caxton book signed for all guests present.*



The rowdiest table of the evening was led by Jay Marshall, who entertained editor Cotner(l), his wife NJC, Bob Sullivan, and David Meyer (back to camera).



Following the meeting, Jay Marshall (l), Abel Berland, and Charles Miner got their heads together to talk about books — what else!



Stuart Rose, speaker for the evening, left us with "Rose's Rules."

### *Rose's rules for book collecting*

1. Have a passion for books and acquiring them.
2. Buy the best, one at a time (leave the collections to book dealers).
3. Find a top-notch advisor and listen to him or her.
4. Set your budget, adhere to it, and don't collect for the money to be made.
5. Find friends in books (addicts need friends!).
6. Be your own person in choosing books for your collection.
7. Never pay more at an auction than you would pay in a bookshop or on the Internet.
8. Never trade a major title unless you have a better one.
9. Collect with a strategy — what do you want to do with the books when you're finished with them?
10. Above all, have fun, enjoy your hobby — and don't rationalize!

Given by Stuart Rose at the Caxton dinner meeting, June 20, 2001

# Flower Language, B.C. (Before Charlotte)

Dan Crawford

Rose: "Beauty"

Rose Leaf: "I Never Importune"

Rose, Faded: "Beauty is Fleeting"

Rose Stem: "No"

Rose, In A Tuft Of Grass: "There Is  
Everything To Be Gained By Good  
Company"



The romantic flower code still to be found in gift books and on florists' websites descends from a Turkish prototype called *Selam*. Brought to the attention of the West by European tourists in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, it was expanded, improved upon, and finally assembled into dictionary form around 1817 by a writer known to us as *Charlotte de la Tour*.

Whoever Charlotte was, her book appeared at just the right time to set off a fad, which grew to epidemic proportions among the Early Victorians. Outmoded by the time of the American Civil War, it lived on as a sweet and silly relic of our ancestors, useful to romantic novelists and florists who needed a sales gimmick. Everyone who has done the research knows these things.

But when one's research turns up a flower language dictionary published in 1545, it kinda throws off the story. The dictionary in question was actually an afterthought, an appendix to a book called *Del Significatio de Colori e de Mozzelli*, by one Fulvio Pellegrino Morato. It was the last of his three books, and outlived its author, going into eight editions. (His book on Dante and Petrarch also went into eight editions, but did not see print after the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.) Nearly 50 years after the final edition, in 1664, Adrain Vlacq, a French forerunner of Dover books, found the book interesting enough to translate into French, as *Traite Curieux et Recreatif*.

It is a curious treatise. Dealing mainly with symbolism and color, it included the flower language dictionary as filler. Flower symbolism was, of course, not new, even in 1545. The lords and ladies of chivalrous Courts of Love had a system of flower symbolism, Renaissance

painters had such a system, and the Ancient Romans seem to have had something of the kind. In fact, the principle that a flower could represent some abstract concept no doubt goes back to Noah's olive branch if not to Eve's apple.

Morato's pioneering came in other areas, several of which would be important to the Victorian floriographers centuries later. Putting his code into dictionary form was one of these; the fact that he had made up the whole language himself, without bothering much about the ancient codes of chivalrous flowers, was another. His was no system of deep cultural importance; it was a code in which specific flowers represented specific sentences or phrases. His reason for compiling such a code was revolutionary, too: he says he made the whole thing up to entertain the ladies.

Currently, Morato is mentioned in so few biographical works in the Western Hemisphere that there is little chance of judging now how successful he was at this. The best we can do is consider what influence his dictionary might have had on Charlotte de la Tour and Morato's other successors.

The answer is that he had none. There was no rash of imitators in the Italian press in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, nor did French publishers start a run on

flower language dictionaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. His definitions for the flowers involved were not used by his successors. (The measure of influence in a flower language dictionary is to trace where the definitions turn up in other works; flower language information tended to move from one dictionary to another through a method known in literary circles as "theft.") His work was a "curious treatise"; no more. None of the travel writers who were to bring *Selam* to the West ever mention Morato or his little dictionary; to them, the concept of a romantic flower code was a hothouse exotic, a souvenir of a strange and distant world of harems and scimitars.

Still, even as a curiosity, Morato's work is worth a look. (One wonders why Dover hasn't brought out an English edition yet.) If nothing else, it cuts through much of the Victorian romantic code by going straight for the finish line, including a flower which means "I Want To Go To Bed With You," something his 19<sup>th</sup> Century successors never did. The flower involved, if anyone wants to know, is the *Stoncrop*, or *Sedum*, or *Prickmadame*. The eminently readable nature writer Geoffrey Grigson is quick to dismiss any suggestion that this last name is meant to have any off-color associations. It is, he explains, an English corruption of the French colloquial name "*Piquemadame*," itself a corruption of real name, "*Triquemadame*." This, of course, does not even mean "*Trick Madame*," as you might suspect. No no, he goes on, "*trique*" was merely a word for "*an upright stick*." He seems to feel he has proved something by this, but for the rest of us, it leaves the matter more or less where it started.

Anyhow, the Victorians who put *Stoncrop* in their flower language made it mean "*Tranquility*." Obviously, they hadn't read Morato at all. ❖

## New staff assignments created for Caxtonian

Caxtonian Editor Robert Cotner has created a staff of Contributing Editors, who will serve as consultants, prepare special issues of the journal, and advise the editor on matters related to their special fields of interest. The Contributing Editor staff will begin their work in January 2002.

### Contributing Editors

Archives/Special Collections – Bro.

Michael Grace

Bookbinding – Barbara Korbel

Bookstores and Selling of Rare Books –

Florence Shay

Book Collecting – Paul Ruxin

Design/Graphics/Type – Mathew

Doherty

International Scene – Junie Sinson

Libraries/Exhibitions – Kathryn

DeGraff

Literary – Wendy Husser

Printing/Paper-Making – Bob

McCamant

"We are grateful that these Caxton Club members are willing to volunteer their time for these special assignments. They will enrich and diversify the coverage of the *Caxtonian*," Cotner said. "And we hope to will find a new editor for the publication from their ranks some-time in the future." ❖

## Caxton Club Officers, 2001-2002, elected

In a meeting prior to the Caxton dinner meeting, June 20, 2001, the following officers for 2001-2002 were elected by a unanimous vote of the membership present:

### Officers

President – Jim Tomes

Vice President – Peggy Sullivan

Secretary – Susan Hanes

Treasurer – Dan Crawford

### Council Members, Class of 2004

William Drendle

Lynn Martin

Robert McCamant

Charles Miner

Susan Rossen

## 100<sup>th</sup> issue of Caxtonian due out in December 2001

The 100<sup>th</sup> issue of The Caxton Club's monthly journal, the *Caxtonian*, will be published in December 2001. The club Council has authorized a special, 16-page, four-color edition. A grant from the Helen M. Harrison Foundation and a gift by Caxtonian Morrell M. Shoemaker, Jr. will underwrite the cost of the special issue.

*Caxtonian* founder and editor Robert Cotner has arranged for Nicholas Basbane to write the lead story for the special issue. Basbane is the author of *The Gentle Madness*, was the Caxton dinner speaker on May 15, 1996, and is scheduled to speak to the club again at the dinner meeting in October 2001. ❖



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## Saints & Sinners Corner



Caxtonian Paul Ruxin, a member of the Governing Board of the Folger Shakespeare Library, has been named to membership in the Grolier Club of New York City.

Caxtonian Peter Stanlis was in New Hampshire for six days in June. He gave a talk on Robert Frost for the Friends of Robert Frost. His discussion included Frost's poems "Two Look at Two" and "The Most of It." President of the Friends of Robert Frost, Carole Thompson, wrote, "I have never heard a better comparison of Frost's poetry. Such wonderful insights! His photographs were really wonderful too. All our people felt fortunate to have heard his talk."

## Caxtonians meet in London for birthday bash



Caxtonian and club Secretary, Susan Hanes (r), club President Jim Tomes (seated, c), and Josie Tomes met at the Goring Hotel in London this past September to celebrate Josie's birthday. The photograph above was taken on that occasion.

## *In the land of Walter Scott — discoveries in a medieval castle*

Edward Quattrocchi

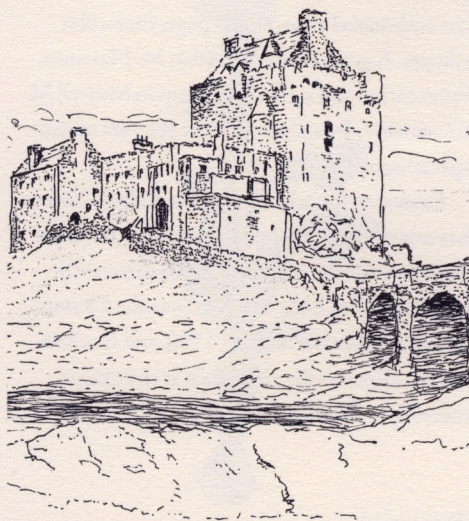
Our vacation in Great Britain this past May had the right mix of intellectual stimulation, sybaritic diversion, and genealogical discovery. After our delightful visits to London, Windsor, and Stratford-on-Avon in England, my wife Carolyn and I anticipated that our trip to Edinburgh, Scotland, would be anticlimactic. Her maternal ancestors had come from Scotland, but it was so long ago she has no known close relatives living there.

In the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century her mother's family, representatives of the MacRae clan, came to North Carolina, from where their descendants later scattered through most of the Southern states. Carolyn's family settled in El Dorado, AR, where she was born.

In planning our vacation, Carolyn hoped to add a trip to her mother's ancestral homeland to our itinerary, but she had few clues to go on. She knew that Kintail was the place of origin of the MacRae clan, but Kintail did not show up on any map of Scotland we could find.

Having put the idea of a side trip to Kintail on a back burner, she read in a guidebook as we flew to London a description of the Eilean Donan Castle in the Scottish Highlands, which excited her curiosity. One of the most photographed castles in Scotland, it became more famous as the setting for the motion picture, *The Highlander*. Located on an islet named after a 6<sup>th</sup> Century Celtic hermit, it was built in 1220 by Alexander II to give advance warning of Viking raids. In 1719 the supporters of the Stuarts entrenched themselves in the castle with 300 Spanish soldiers, who had come to support the Jacobite cause. Two months later, three English frigates bombarded the castle. It was nothing but ruins when, in the 1920s, Farqhar MacRae and John MacRae Gilstrap began the task of restoring it to its former glory.

In that brief description, Carolyn's mother's maiden name caught her eye. Could Farqhar MacRae be a distant relative? After much discussion and procrastination, we decided to cut short our stay in Edinburgh and visit the



Sketch of Eilean Donan Castle by Truman Metzler

Eilean Donan Castle to find what we could of interest or genealogical significance. The day before leaving Evanston, we had searched for Kintail on the Internet and produced several attractive inns and lodges with fetching invitations to visit the fabled places made famous by Sir Walter Scott.

We called the Glenelg Inn. Christopher Main, the proprietor, answered the phone and was so charming and hospitable that we put aside our apprehensions about driving perhaps 12 hours for a 16-hour visit. He immediately responded to Carolyn's mention of her MacRae heritage with the assurance that she would be welcome among her kin as one of the family. And he was right.

We pulled out of the car rental agency at 8 a.m. as a steady rain added an element of uncertainty to our quixotic quest for the treasures in the Kintail mountains. Some five hours later, we reached the Kintail Lodge, which we had been told is some 13 miles from the Glenelg Inn, our final destination. The tortuous route we had taken since leaving the four-lane highway about an hour out of Edinburgh was a cakewalk compared to the final, 13-mile leg of our journey. The one-lane meandering road up hills and down valleys made passing a vehicle coming in the opposite direction a harrowing maneuver. Alternately I had to take turns with

oncoming vehicles to drive off onto a by-pass to give my friendly opponent the right of passage.

But our stay at the Glenelg Inn and the afternoon's visit to the place of Carolyn's genealogical discovery made the motor trip worth the effort. After lunch, we made our way back over the one-lane road to the Eilean Donan Castle, the goal of our six-hour journey. In the souvenir shop, Carolyn asked a clerk, who looked like a retired history professor — and talked like one — about the Farqhar MacRae, who had rebuilt the castle in the 1920s. He gave us an update on its recent history and informed us that Mrs. MacRae and her daughter now lived part-time in the castle, in an apartment apart from the ceremonial main rooms frequented by tourists. When Carolyn mentioned to another clerk that her mother was a MacRae, whose ancestors had come from Kintail, she smiled and remarked, "Oh! I should curtsy."

Upon crossing the bridge on our way to the castle, we came upon two women standing beside a car in the courtyard. The older woman's striking resemblance to Carolyn's aunt prompted her to introduce herself. To our surprised good fortune, they were Mrs. MacRae and her daughter. After a brief exchange of family histories, Mrs. MacRae took my card and promised to be in touch.

Back at the Glenelg Inn that evening, we were elated to be served a salmon dinner fresh from the ocean, a gourmet meal that rivaled any we had eaten in London or Edinburgh.

At the next Caxton Club meeting after our return, we compared notes on our trips with Truman Metzler, Dorothy Anderson, and Jane Rosenthal. As a serendipitous capstone to a marvelous, sentimental journey, Truman presented us with a sketch he had made of the Eilean Donan Castle, which he had visited a few days before our pilgrimage. It is indeed a small world peopled by friendly Caxtonians. ❖