

**Visit our wildflower
garden at the
Lambton House**



ABOUT US

The Lower Humber River Interpretive Centre at the Lambton House is the last remaining in situ building from the 19th century milling/industrial era on the Humber River.



the Story of Canadian Artist



Heritage York

HER BEGINNINGS

Agnes Dunbar Moodie was the first child born in Canada to artist and author Susanna Stickland and St. John Dunbar Moodie, on a farm in Hamilton Township, north of Cobourg, June 9th, 1833. The baby, Agnes, is mentioned in

Susannah's book: *Roughing It In The Bush*. "A beautiful but fragile child, she loved to spend time in the woods visiting the delicate wildflowers, despite her being prone to the ague."

While Susanna recovered from a severe illness, a young married woman, Mrs. Haig, having no child of her own, entertained Agnes in her home by the Otonabee and encouraged Agnes' love of Nature. Agnes and her sister were taught by a Governess in 1841 after the Moodies moved to Belleville.

Susannah wrote and made Floral paintings.

On her fifteenth birthday Agnes met a young Lawyer, Charles Fitzgibbon, the son of Col. James Fitzgibbon, military commander of Fort York and Toronto. They married August 21st 1850 and located in Toronto, where Charles received an appointment as Registrar of the Court of Probate for Canada West. They had six children in the following decade. Baby Eliza died the day after her Christening in 1856 and they buried her in St. James Cemetery.

Charles led an active social life, playing cards evenings with his colleagues, while Agnes sewed and embroidered, continued to draw and, with sporadic help from a succession of young Irish girls, cared for their children.

Charles died suddenly on February 22nd 1865, and tuberculosis would claim their five year old son within a month. It being winter and the ground frozen, Charles and five year old John Wedderburn lay in the crypt at St. James awaiting Spring burial; Agnes had to buy more plots. October 18th 1866, a second son died while Agnes nursed her eldest daughter, Mary Agnes.

Earlier, when her aunt, Catherine Parr Traill, seeking a publisher for her botanical writings, had asked Agnes to illustrate her text, Agnes had agreed. Now, they both needed to make some money.

LITHOGRAPHY & FAME

Lithography was the cutting edge of illustration so Agnes took instructions from Mr. Ellis, a lithographer at Chewetts and acquired litho stones. She illustrated each plate with a series of plants by season.

A limestone litho stone such as she used weighs 22 – 24 pounds and must be kept meticulously clean, drawn on, stored and treated with acid readying it for printing.

Agnes pursued her personal contacts - from Osgoode Hall Justices to small town Solicitors - selling 500 subscriptions for the book at \$5.00 per copy, before the Publisher, John Lovell of Montreal would publish it.

The lithographs Chewetts printed were black and white.

Agnes took five hundred copies of each of the ten plates, and with the help of her girls, now 11, 13 and 15, hand coloured them to be bound into the book. It was a success.

Agnes and Catherine produced a second edition at a higher price of six dollars. A third edition sold for six fifty. In all, they sold fifteen hundred copies – text by Catherine and all of the Litho illustrations hand coloured by Agnes and her daughters.

During her travels Agnes met Lieutenant Colonel Brown Chamberlin, Member of Parliament and Queen's Printer. They were married on June 14th 1870. Their only child, Agnes Gertrude, was born April 7th, 1871. Agnes became a social presence in Ottawa, attending State Balls with her husband and spending family summers in Lakefield.

She continued painting and illustrated her aunt Catherine's book "Plant Life" which was published in 1884.

Agnes was commissioned by the Geological Survey of Canada to produce a series of studies of the edible Fungi of Canada. As packages of Fungi arrived, she would open the package, take out its contents and do drawings of the Fungus standing vertical, then views from the top and from the bottom and then she cut it open to do a vertical cross section. Finally, the Fungi being edible, she cooked them. She had a large Ginger Cat, very particular about what it ate, so she would put a sample down for the cat and if eaten with gusto, they had it for dinner; if it didn't pass the cat's taste test the family did not eat it either.

LEGACY

In 1875 Agnes was elected a member of the Art Society of New York. Her paintings were shown in the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition (1876) and in the Earls Court Exhibition in London (1886). In 1895 a fourth edition of *CANADIAN WILDFLOWERS* was published. In the summer of 1897 Col. Brown Chamberlin died and was buried in Ottawa.

Agnes continued to draw and paint, spending summers in Lakefield and winters in Toronto with her eldest daughter, writer Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon.

Agnes produced several Papers for the Toronto branch of the Women's Canadian Historical Society.

She also designed and illustrated a calendar. Mary Agnes was living in and managing a Welcome House, for young women coming to Toronto, under the auspices of the Eastern Star. Agnes died there, May 1st 1913.

Agnes Dunbar Moodie Fitzgibbon Chamberlin is buried with her first husband and children in an unmarked grave in St. James Cemetery, beneath a towering Sugar Maple.

