

A journey well-taken

By Renee Levesque

At the May meeting of Nipissing Naturalists Club, author Marilyn Simonds talked about Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and her writing of Louise's biography, *Woman, Watching*. In her biography, Marilyn acknowledges Nipissing Naturalist Club's contribution to the memory of Louise.

Because new members may not know about our involvement, our contribution goes back 7 years ago, to September 2015, when Dick Tafel suggested to Nipissing Naturalists Club that an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque be erected in honour of Louise near her log cabin on Pimisi Bay. I completed the necessary application to Ontario Heritage Trust which included a biography of Louise by Joanne Zytaruk; an extensive bibliography, including material in Archives Canada; permission from the Ministry of Transportation, thanks to Dick, to install the plaque on land maintained by the Ministry; and agreement from Nipissing Naturalists Club to pay the necessary fees to make and install the plaque, thanks to Fred Pinto, then President of the Club, and the Club's Board of Directors.

Fund raising took place almost immediately. By January 2016, a contribution of \$500 from the Township of Bonfield for the plaque was received, obtained through the efforts Nipissing Naturalists Club member, Steve Pitt. Additional money for the plaque was collected by Dick and Fred as a result of their efforts in the Great Canadian Birdathon of May 2015.

By mid-January 2016, we learned that our application had been approved by Ontario Heritage Trust.

To raise more funds, Nipissing Naturalists Club held an online auction from March through to May 2015, one of the items being an original drawing by Louise, donated by Grant and Shirley McKercher. Many other fund-raising efforts ensued, including a jam session held at Bonfield Parish Hall, organized by Steve.

Then finally the day arrived. On August 18, 2016, Ontario Heritage Trust held a ceremony at the Bonfield Parish Hall to formally announce that the historical plaque for Louise de Kiriline Lawrence would be installed at Pimisi Bay. Light refreshments were served, the highlight being Swedish cookies cut into the shape of birds. It was Steve who came up with the idea of the cookies when his research showed that Louise served Swedish cookies to her guests when they came to visit. I supplied the bird cookie cutters and Monica Bessette of Bonfield baked the cookies. They were the most delicious gingerbread cookies I have ever tasted and many others agreed. Later I ordered more from Monica for our October Bird Wing meeting that year.

After the ceremony, all the guests and members of the Club who were present went off to Pimisi Bay for the installation ceremony and a tour of Louise's property and Loghouse Nest thanks to the then owner of the log cabin. (My photo below is of Pimisi Bay. Inset is my photo of the Loghouse Nest from 2016. The cabin is actually among the trees on the left side of the bay.)



From conception to installation it was a memorable time.

Following is a book review of *Woman, Watching* by Grant McKercher and an article by Grant on obtaining and donating a sketch by Louise and the coincidences involved therein, from the late Greg Boxwell, to Grant, to Nipissing Naturalist Club and through to Marilyn. I added to Grant's article a very short follow-up on Louise's sketch.

For those new members who were not involved in the project and may not be at all familiar with Louise, after Grant's review and rescued sketch article, are two articles from *The Woodland Observer*, one Fred and I wrote in January 2016 at the start of this journey and one Steve and I wrote in September 2016 completing the journey. There are other articles on Louise and our Club's involvement between these two dates if you wish to go through *The Woodland Observer* to read them, but for this package the two main articles should suffice. Thanks to Grant for the book review of *Woman, Watching*, and for his detective work in bringing the sketch full circle.

Book Review

Woman, Watching
Louise de Kiriline Lawrence
and the Songbirds of Pimisi Bay

By **Merilyn Simonds**

ECW Press, Toronto, 2022
403 pages

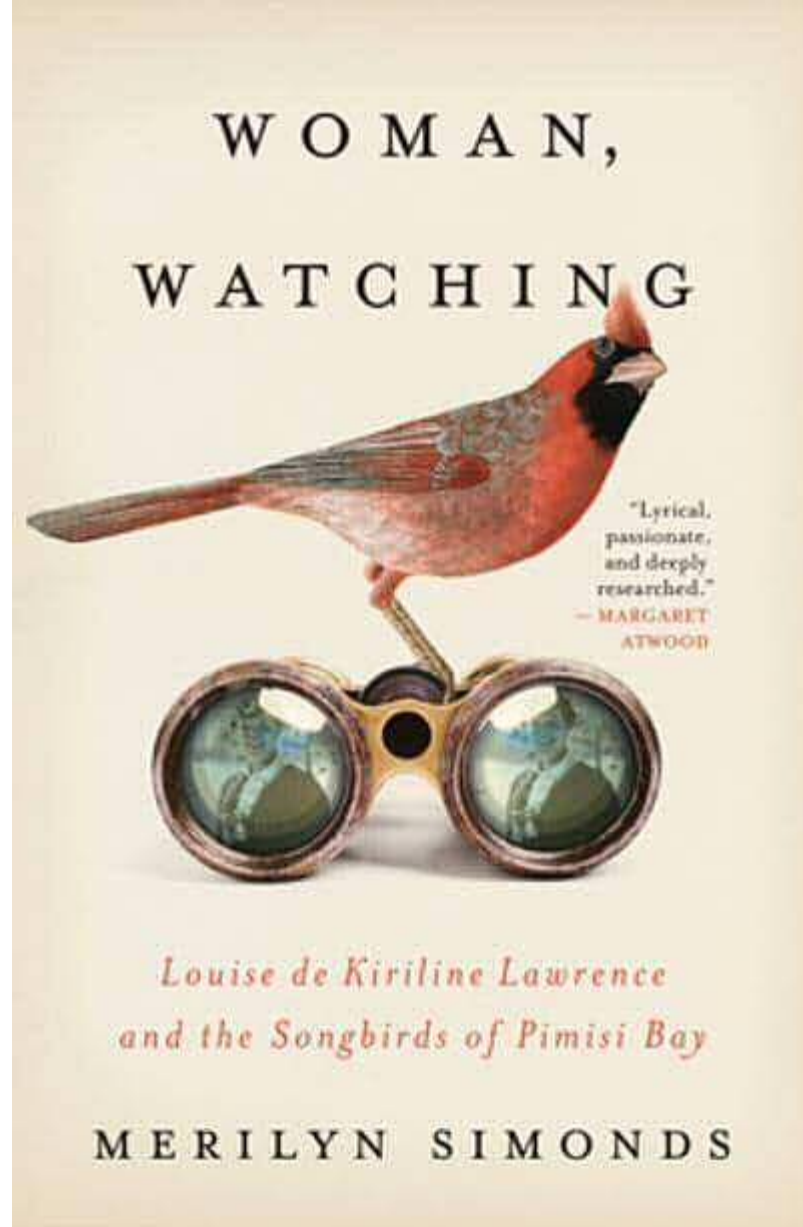
By *Grant McKercher*

Woman, Watching is the biography of an important and influential woman who lived most of her adult life on the shores of Pimisi Bay near Rutherglen, Ontario. Although she first became known for her work as the nurse to the famous Dionne Quintuplets, that was only one year of her professional life; it did not foreshadow her significant contribution to the field of ornithology, the study of which spanned more than fifty years.

Simonds has documented Lawrence's quite extraordinary life in this new book. The comprehensive research of source materials, including weekly letters to her mother and correspondence to colleagues and friends, provides us with intimate detail into the thoughts of this complex woman. Simonds also knew Lawrence personally, and one feels a strong connection between the two as she weaves some of her own personal narrative into the biography.

We are taken on a journey with Lawrence, from her privileged upbringing among Swedish nobility, to her escape from post-revolutionary Russia, and her subsequent decision to immigrate to Canada and settle in Northern Ontario where she initially worked as a Red Cross nurse.

Although she didn't take up an interest in birds until she was in her 40s, Lawrence became passionate about amateur ornithology and what we today might call "citizen science". Her meticulous observation and documentation of birds' behaviour in their natural habitat allowed her to make significant contributions to the scientific literature



and gain the respect of many professional ornithologists in Canada and the United States. Over her lifetime, she published five books, ninety articles, multiple nature anthologies, and over 500 book reviews on ornithology. In 1969 her book, *"The Lovely and the Wild"*, was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for nature writing. Lawrence was the first Canadian to receive this prestigious medal, and only the fourth woman to do so in its 40-year history. Her success, however, did not come without struggles within the publishing and scientific world where she, and other accomplished women, strived to have an equal footing with male colleagues.

Another theme flowing through the book is that of love: love lost, love found, and love enduring. After only a year of marriage, Lawrence lost her first husband, an officer in the White Russian Army, in the revolutionary conflict after WWI. After immigrating to Canada, she met and eventually married her second husband, Len Lawrence, who remained a steadfast support and companion throughout their nearly 50-year marriage.

Lawrence lived in her Loghouse Nest on the Pimisi Bay property until she was 92, faithfully taking morning walks and making daily notes about the birds she observed. When she died in 1992 at the age of 98, the property was inherited by close family friends. In 2016, an historical plaque commemorating her life and work was installed on the shores of Pimisi Bay just off Highway 17. The idea for this plaque and the subsequent fundraising was spearheaded by members of our own Nipissing Naturalists Club (see *Woodland Observer*, Jan/July/Sept 2016.)

In this book, Simonds has given us an insightful portrait of a remarkable woman, documenting the obstacles she overcame on the way to developing a deep passion for the natural world that is reflected in her important contributions to ornithology.

Editor's Note: For more information on Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's life, watch Astrid Mohr's production on YouTube based on *Woman, Watching*, written and narrated by Marilyn Simonds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mzKjgZEEgl>.

About the author: "Marilyn Simonds is the author of twenty books, including the non-fiction classic *The Convict Lover*; a meditation on bookmaking, *Gutenberg's Fingerprint*; and most recently, the novel *Refuge*. The founder and first artistic director of the Kingston WritersFest, Simonds is an influential champion of writers and writing. She lives with writer and translator Wayne Grady and divides her time between Kingston, Ontario and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico."

The rescued sketch

By Grant McKercher

At the Nipissing Naturalist Club's Annual General Meeting in 2015, I purchased at our silent auction an item donated by the late Greg Boxwell. It was a 1948 edition of *Audubon Magazine*, and in it was an article by Louise titled "Winter Birds at the Loghouse". Greg somewhat mysteriously said that it was "rescued from the Loghouse Nest".

I wasn't clear on what that meant exactly, but in Marilyn Simonds book, she describes that after Louise died the new owners placed a collection of furniture and boxes of books at the roadside for anyone to take. Perhaps this is where Greg "rescued" the magazine! (Photo of Grant's 1949 *Audubon* with Greg's note, signed by him, stating that he rescued the magazine in 1992 after Louise's death, is shown at right.)

In any event, inside the magazine there was also a small ink sketch depicting an altercation between a Blue Jay and a Hairy Woodpecker. In the lower right corner were the initials LL. (Photo of sketch is on the next page.)

In 2016, my wife Shirley and I decided to donate this sketch to the Nipissing Naturalists Club on-line auction which was fundraising for the Ontario Heritage plaque that now commemorates Louise on the shores of Pimisi Bay. I think the sketch raised about \$300.





Things seemed to have now come full circle. I recently corresponded with Marilyn Simonds about this, and she was quite excited by the story. In all her research into Louise's archives, she had never seen this specific sketch, but said that a similar one was published in Louise's 1966 monograph "A Comparative Life-History Study of Four Species of Woodpeckers".

If the 'rescued' sketch was an original, Marilyn thought it would be "priceless" and hoped that the new owners would consider bequeathing it to the de Kiriline Lawrence collection housed in the Library and Archives Canada.

Editor's Note: Since the writing of this article, Grant purchased Louise's out-of-print and rare 1966 monograph from an antiquarian bookseller in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and looked at the Blue Jay and Hairy Woodpecker sketch in the monograph, "a book on a single specialized topic, usually by one author in one volume, as opposed to a serial publication." Grant reports it wasn't exactly like Louise's sketch; however, Louise acknowledges in her monograph that the artist, Sylvia Hahn, made the sketch based on her (Louise's) drawing. This would certainly lead one to believe that the sketch Grant found in the *Audubon Magazine* is an original by Louise, and, therefore, "priceless", as Marilyn indicated to Grant.

- Renee Levesque

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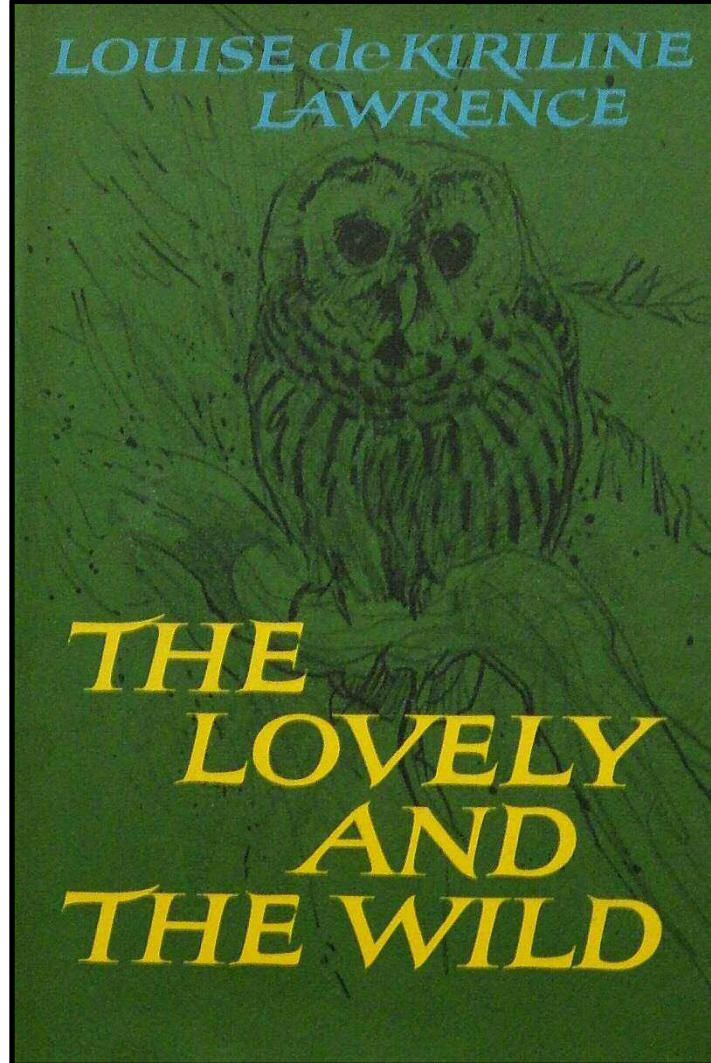
A provincial plaque for a remarkable woman

By Fred Pinto and Renee Levesque

As we drive the highways and byways of Ontario, we all have seen the blue and bronze plaques that mark historic sites. The installation of these plaques was begun by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario in 1956. Today the Board is called the Ontario Heritage Trust. The Trust works with community groups, corporations and local governments to tell the stories of this province. To date over 1,250 plaques have been erected.

In September, the Nipissing Naturalists Club applied to Ontario Heritage Trust to have a plaque installed in recognition of long-time resident Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, a writer and naturalist who was the first Canadian to win the prestigious Burroughs Medal for nature writing in 1969 for her book, *The Lovely And The Wild*. Although she was born in Sweden, she immigrated to Canada in 1927. ***"In time I came to another country on the other side of the earth. And because the new land was in possession of immense space and magnificent diversified solitudes, I felt that I could bear to live there."***

The Nipissing Naturalists Club appropriately calls its annual nature festival, hosted in Laurier Woods Conservation Area, the Louise de Kiriline Lawrence Nature Festival. The festival is held on the third Saturday of August each year.



The club's submission, spearheaded by Dick Tafel, with assistance from Renee Levesque and Joanne Zytaruk, included a biography of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence; an extensive bibliography, including material in Archives Canada; permission from the Ministry of Transportation to install the plaque on land maintained by the Ministry; and agreement from Nipissing Naturalists Club to pay the necessary fees to make and install the plaque. If our application is approved, the plaque will be installed at the provincial picnic rest stop off Highway 17 at Pimisi Bay in Calvin Township. From this spot, one can see Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's home which she called her Loghouse Nest (depicted at left).

A financial contribution of \$500 from the Township of Bonfield for the plaque has been received. This



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contribution was obtained through the efforts of a new member of the Nipissing Naturalists Club, Steve Pitt. Additional money for the plaque, yet to be received from Bird Studies Canada, was collected by Dick Tafel and Fred Pinto as a result of their efforts in the Great Canadian Birdathon held in May.

To raise more funds, Nipissing Naturalists Club will auction online an original drawing by Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, donated by Grant and Shirley McKercher, who have had it framed. The photo of the drawing below is shown unframed. (See next article for more details on the silent and online auction.)

We should know by mid-January if our application is approved. In the meantime, if you haven't read Louise de Kiriline Lawrence's books, you can order some of them online through Amazon.ca at:

http://www.amazon.ca/Louise-de-Kiriline-Lawrence-Books/s?ie=UTF8&page=1&rh=n%3A916520%2Cp_lbr_books_authors_browser%3ALouise%20de%20Kiriline%20Lawrence.

Pat Barclay wrote in *Books in Canada*: "*Lawrence was quite possibly the most remarkable woman in Canada. Certainly she was a remarkable nature writer.*"



A PLAQUE FOR THE AGES



LOUISE DE KIRILINE LAWRENCE 1894-1992

Louise Flach was born in Sweden and grew up on the scenic Baltic coast where she developed an interest in nature. Flach became a Red Cross nurse, serving during the First World War in Denmark, and then with her first husband Greb de Kiriline who died in revolutionary Russia. She immigrated to Canada in 1927, settled near Bonfield, Ontario and was head nurse for the Dionne Quintuplets. In 1935, she retired from nursing to study the flora and fauna – specifically birds – near her log home located at the edge of Pimisi Bay west of here. Her writing included five wildlife books, 17 scientific papers, over 500 reviews and an autobiography. Her papers and research are preserved at Library and Archives Canada and at the Royal Ontario Museum. Louise de Kiriline Lawrence was an early environmentalist and an internationally renowned ornithologist recognized by the American Audubon Society, the Society of Canadian Ornithologists, the American Ornithologists' Union and Laurentian University, and was the first Canadian to receive the John Burroughs Medal in 1969.

Ontario Heritage Trust, an agency of the Government of Ontario

Photo by Renee Levesque

By Renee Levesque and Steve Pitt

On the way to the plaque ceremony in honour of Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, a bird suddenly flew out in front of Steve Pitt's car, forcing him to hit the brakes to avoid hitting it. It was a

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Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a bird Louise featured in her book *Mar: A Glimpse Into the Natural Life of a Bird*. Steve reports, "I'm not one to believe in omens, but it was hard not to think that Louise was sending me some kind of sign, probably scolding us for making such a big fuss about her when we should be out enjoying nature."

Fuss there was, though, when approximately 100 local residents, nature lovers, history buffs and health care professionals gathered at Ste Bernadette Parish Hall in Bonfield on August 18 to unveil the Ontario Heritage Trust plaque in honour of Louise, internationally renowned as an ornithologist, nature writer and conservationist, and known locally as Nurse de Kiriline.

In attendance were three Ontario Heritage Trust employees: Beth-Anne Mendes, Coordinator, Plaque Programs; Dawson Bridger, Community Programs Officer; and Wayne Kelly, Manager, Public Education and Community Development. Wayne was Master of Ceremonies for the event and, with Fred Pinto, unveiled the plaque.

Also in attendance and speaking at the event were Anthony Rota, Member of Parliament for Nipissing-Temiskaming; Randall McLaren, Mayor of the Township of Bonfield; Fred Pinto, President of the Nipissing Naturalists Club; Dick Tafel, who spear-headed the whole enterprise and Chair of Bird Wing; Derek Day, Mattawa and District Historical Society; and Eloise Dewar, 90, who as a toddler suffering from rickets in 1929 came under the care of Nurse de Kiriline.



Photo courtesy of Ontario Heritage Trust

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Eloise (photo at right) credits Nurse de Kiriline's kindness and professional care with curing her rickets and ensuring that she would not only be able to walk normally as an adult, but would also be able to dance.

Not speaking, but in attendance, was the Mayor of the Township of Calvin, Wayne Brown, who also remembers Louise from long ago. He would often see her hiking along Highway 17 with notebook in hand, looking up into the trees and down into Pimisi Bay. He and others knew Louise as the Bird Lady. (From an article by Steve Pitt in the *North Bay Nipissing News*, September 3, 2015.)

Dick read from Louise's award-winning John Burroughs Medal book, *The Lovely and the Wild*, and thanked many who were involved in seeing the plaque come to fruition – Fred Pinto for asking Dick three years ago to speak about Louise at the annual general meeting of Friends of Laurier Woods; Renee Levesque who subsequently suggested applying for an historic plaque and for completing



Photo by Renee Levesque

and submitting the application to Ontario Heritage Trust; Steve Pitt (photo at left) who secured the Parish Hall and organized the refreshments; and the Ministry of Transportation who came through for us at the last minute. (That the Ministry acted so quickly and willingly is thanks to Dick.)

After the unveiling, guests were served delicious Swedish cookies, called Pepparkokar, cut into the shape of two birds. Steve Pitt was behind the idea for the cookies, baked by Bonfield resident Monica Bessette. Steve came up with the idea when he read that Louise served her loghouse



Photo courtesy of Ontario Heritage Trust

guests tea and cookies. The Swedish theme was completed with blue and yellow napkins, the colours of the Swedish flag - and more or less the colour of the plaque. The Swedish Ambassador to Canada had been invited by Ontario Heritage Trust, but he was on vacation at the time of the ceremony.

Steve also arranged to have coffee, tea and soft drinks supplied by Gagne's Red and White Store on Hwy. 17 in Rutherglen and arranged for

Elmer Rose, a local historian and a member of the band Rutherglen Jammers to provide the sound system for the ceremony.

Nipissing Naturalists Club was the sponsor of the plaque and raised \$5,000.00 through contributions and auctions towards its cost as was required by Ontario Heritage Trust. The total cost of the plaque was \$17,500.00, and was funded, minus the \$5,000.00, by Ontario Heritage Trust.

Many of the people who attended the indoor ceremony followed the plaque to its official location at Pimisi Bay Rest Stop where it was installed, thanks to the Ministry of Transportation for approving the location and for installing the post in a nearby spot on the shores of Pimisi Bay where Louise spent many decades reading, writing and observing nature.

In honour of the plaque's dedication, the current owner of Louise's loghouse nest opened her property to the public to see the log house and to wander along the trails, trails initially made by Louise.

A fitting tribute to Louise's skills as a nurse is that Eloise Dewar at the age of 90 was one of the people who was able to make that walk along the trail to the log house on a hot, muggy day. And a fitting tribute to Louise as a naturalist and conservationist is that the trails continue to be used today, faithfully preserved by the current owner. And now with the plaque installed on Pimisi Bay close to where Louise had lived and worked, she will once again deservedly become known for her contribution to nature and to the world of ornithology.



Ontario Heritage Trust members left to right: Wane Kelly, Beth Anne Mendes and Dawson Bridger. Photo by Renee Levesque