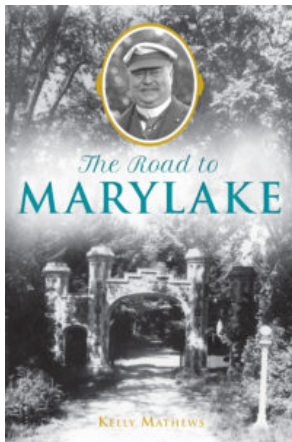


'The Road to Marylake' paints a picture of King's past

By Mark Pavilons



The evolution of an iconic King Township property comes to life in historic fashion.

'The Road to Marylake,' by author Kelly Mathews, provides the only comprehensive story about the creation and continued use of the former country estate of one of Canada's richest men. The history of Marylake and Sir Henry Pellatt is as much a story about Canadian heritage as it is about King Township and one of our founding fathers.

Mathews, who serves on King's Heritage Advisory Committee and the board of the King Township Historical Society, is consumed by local history. She brought us the highly detailed account in her first book, 'Eaton Hall Pride of King Township,' published in 2015.

The legacy of the Pellatt family, like the Eatons, forms an intricate and fascinating fabric of early Canadian life. It's the stuff legends are made of. And Mathews's attention to historic accuracy makes her books the definitive accounts of that era.

It was no easy task to condense some 100 years of Canadiana into this new book, published by Arcadia Publishing & The History Press. Mathews spent roughly 18 months researching Pellatt and the Marylake property, located on Keele and the 15 Sideroad. The more she delved into the past, the more she was drawn into the magical stories and unique aspects of Canadian heritage.

Pellatt is best known for building Toronto's 'Camelot' Casa Loma, the House on the Hill. Sparked by his family motto - 'Foremost If I Can' - Pellatt became one of the richest men in the country, with interests in mining, insurance, real estate and electricity. He took his fortune in 1910 to build his dream castle.

Not too far north, in the bustling village of Eversley in King, Pellatt acquired some 1,214 acres of land for his rural retreat. Eversley included a number of stores, a post office, a sawmill and a blacksmith shop. This land was conveniently located and even had a rail spur access. Pellatt's weekend lodge became something quite grand.

Along with the luxurious fishing lodge was the largest brick barn in Canada, which still remains on the property. Costing millions of dollars more than 100 years ago, it's a testament to Pellatt's wealth, vision and architectural eye. Every barn on the property was more elaborate than the next. The brick barn at the time boasted the most advanced technology available in the agricultural industry. Pellatt decided to turn the property into a working farm, to help contribute to the local economy. This opened up a whole new social circle among the agricultural elite of upper society.

He loved his King retreat and Mathews explained it was his last stronghold, remaining in his family until shortly before his death. Four hundred acres were sold to the Eaton family in 1922.

Pellatt raised and bred show-winning horses on the lands. You could say he began King's equestrian tradition.

The jewel of the property is the 35-acre glacial kettle lake, formed some 17 million years ago. Pellatt named it Lake Marie, after his first wife Mary Dodgeson (Lady Mary Pellatt). At its deepest, Marylake reaches 100 feet to the bottom.

Pellatt entertained the political and economic elite in Canada at his hunting and fishing lodge for many years.

One can't help but be taken by the marvellous architecture used on the property. The stone foundations, turrets and roof lines resembled a feudal manor. Even the dairy building was the best Edwardian architecture could offer.

In 1935 the property became part of an agricultural farm school. As part of the 'back to the land settlement scheme,' people impacted by the First World War, Depression and Second World War were given the opportunity to live and farm in rural Ontario, in co-op-type arrangements.

The first group were Basilian fathers, a community of impoverished families, priests and students. They remained on the land until 1942. This group of Basilians is responsible for renaming the property as 'Marylake.'

The current residents 'the Augustinians' made the estate their monastery and retreat centre.

Mathews said one of the aspects that she enjoyed the most was recreating the long lost Pellatt Lodge on the property, and comparing how the venue was used when it was converted from Pellatt's comfortable and luxurious abode into the monastery and with cells for the Augustinians.

On Aug. 15, 1943, 12,000 people attended the dedication of the chapel and blessing of the statue of Our Lady of Grace. On Nov. 11, 1961, the Augustinians were given the care of Sacred Heart Parish in King City. In 1964, a new monastery and shrine were dedicated.

In November of 1965, the provincial headquarters of the Canadian Augustinians was transferred from New York to Marylake. They are marking their 75th anniversary this year.

The current property, consisting of just over 800 acres, is split between the Archdiocese of Toronto, the Augustinians and Villanova College.

Only the picturesque gate and gate house have received heritage designation.

Mathews pointed out the log cabin on the property, currently used as a gift shop, is the oldest continually used building in King Township. Built in the late 1700s or early 1800s, the structure is still very sound.

Mathews devoured books, files and images found at the Ontario Archives and the City of Toronto Archives. She learned so much during the process that she's amassed even more history for future publications.

As a purist, Mathews wanted to uncover the true history of Marylake and tell its story. Almost every chapter in the book could be expanded to become a novel on its own. The entire process, from research to publishing, has been simply 'amazing.'

The Road to Marylake will be released Oct. 23. Mathews promises some local presentations and book signing events, so stay tuned.