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Famous Mississauga woman

Sept. 20 - 89 HW

# Mazo de la Roche: write on about Jalna

How does a woman living in the late 1920s in what was to become Mississauga become famous and wealthy, as well as give a small community a heritage and a country pride?

She writes a book. The woman to do all this was Mazo de la Roche and the book is Jalna. This one book changed the Clarkson community as well as gave Canada literacy recognition in the United States.

Mazo Roohe (later to add the de la herself) was born in Newmarket, Ontario in 1879. She was a bookish child with a vivid imagination which was illustrated by her childhood games. These games consisted of plays which she and her cousin and lifetime companion, Caroline Clement, dramatized. As they became young adults, Mazo and Caroline continued with their play activity at became more intensive.

These plays fueled Mazo's imagination and inspired her to write inventive stories.

Eventually she and Caroline moved to a farm near Bronte. Here she joined literary clubs and her stories were being published more and more regularly. In 1920 they bought land in the area and built a small home to be later called "Trail Cottage."

It was there that Mazo would become inspired by a house and a family, and her success would begin in Jahaland.

In 1927 Mazo entered Jalna in a contest held by a New York magazine called "Atlantic Monthly" and won \$10,000 for her story, a very large sum of money in the late 1920s. It was quite an accomplishment for a Canadian to win this prize in an American contest, let alone a woman.

Jalna was published in this magazine over the period from May to October of that year. She was acknowledged in the "Contributing Column, which mentioned the 1,100 manuscripts which were entered in the contest and the unanimous vote for Jalna. The word was out and publicity was hot. Too hot maybe, as Mazo with her companion Caroline fled to Europe in 1928.

Her fans wanted to learn more about the fictitious Whiteoaks family who lived in what is now known as Clarkson.

The majority of her audience was the housewives in the pre-television era, who needed excitement to escape their daily routine of ordinary housework. This was who Mazo thought of when she wrote her series on Jalna. The Jalna series in the 1930s was the soap opera solution; the Falcon



**Bethany  
Brown**

Crest type of fantasy needed during the Great Depression.

The Jalna series centers around a British grandmother and her family who settled in southern Ontario. The family was full of disrupted marriages, sorrowful moments, forbidden passions, and romantic interludes. Yet these books are more than just idle gossip manuals, they have an effective method of story telling as well as recognizable landscapes so fresh you can smell the Jalna sables. These stories were methods of escape into fantasy, an imaginary world of reality.

Adding to the mystique of the novels is the controversy behind them. The controversy of a house, Benares, and a family who lived in it. Some people would claim Mazo wrote about the family and the house in which they lived. Others think she described the house and was merely inspired by the family. Mazo herself in her memoirs claimed that the characters and the house were purely fictitious. "No house in particular was pictured, no family portrayed. From the very first the characters created themselves." Still many versions of the story are believed and retold.

In Mazo's lifetime she wrote 16 books for the Jalna series and numerous other books and plays. The Jalna series would only conclude with Mazo de la Roche's death in 1961.

For 30 years Mazo was Canada's best known writer. She did not portray social issues nor literary realism. Mazo de la Roche simply wrote for the purpose of entertaining an interested audience who constantly demanded more. Mazo gave this pleasure to millions of readers around the world, a significant accomplishment to Canada and a sense of pride to today's City of Mississauga.

Bethany Brown is a 21-year-old freelance writer living in Mississauga. She's a Clarkson Secondary School graduate with a degree in history from Brock University. With the help of the Zonta Club and Bradley House Museum, she has researched the lives of six women who played an integral role shaping Mississauga's history.