

Diana Bayley: A Grandmama's Tale

• Elizabeth Waterston •

Résumé: L'on croit que Madame Diana Bailey (? - 1868), auteur de *Henry; Or, the Juvenile Traveller* (1836) est la première personne au Canada à avoir écrit des oeuvres pour la jeunesse. Épouse d'un administrateur britannique, elle s'est établie au Bas-Canada en 1832 et a publié, de 1833 à 1834, des récits dans *The Montreal Museum*. Elle est la mère ou la belle-mère de Frederick W. N. Bailey, prolifique auteur pour la jeunesse de la seconde moitié du dix-neuvième siècle; après son retour en Angleterre, elle a poursuivi sa carrière de romancière. L'article explique son absence du *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*.

Summary: Mrs. Diana Bayley (b.?, d. 1868), author of *Henry; or, the Juvenile Traveller* (1836), is believed to be the first resident of Canada to write for children. The wife of an English administrator, Assistant Commissary-General Henry Addington Bayley, Diana Bayley came to Lower Canada in 1832. She wrote for a juvenile periodical, *The Montreal Museum*, from 1833 to 1834, when it ceased publication. She is either the mother or the step-mother of Frederick W.N. Bailey, later a prolific writer for children. Mrs. Bayley wrote other novels after returning to England. This article explains how she got dropped from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, due to uncertainty over her death date.

In the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada*, published in 1965, Mrs. H. Bayley is named by Marjorie McDowell, in her chapter on "Children's Books," as "the first resident of Canada to write for children" (624). When Sheila Egoff replaced McDowell as the authority invited to write for the 1976 revised edition of the *Literary History* a new chapter, significantly re-titled "Children's Literature (to 1960)," Mrs. Bayley disappeared from the influential survey. I believe she deserves a little revival of interest.

Writing in the mid-1970s, Professor Egoff naturally had to make room for the innumerable new writers in the genre, such as the "distinctively Canadian" fantasist Catherine Anthony Clark (141) and Farley Mowat, with his "toughness and gusto" (142). Furthermore, without naming Diana Bayley,

Egoff questioned the “Canadianness” of books of her early period, “since they were published abroad and were written by visitors and by a few writers who had not even set foot in Canada” (134).¹ Diana Bayley’s 1836 book, *Henry; or, the Juvenile Traveller*, though indeed published in London England by Simpkin, Marshall & Co., was nevertheless created by a woman living in Canada. Her gentle “Little Henry,” though not in the same league of toughness as Mowat’s boys, nevertheless moved through distinctively Canadian scenes, treated as a launching-pad for moralizing rather than fantasy.

Diana Bayley, the wife of Assistant Commissary-General Henry Addington Bayley, set foot in Isle Aux Noix, Lower Canada, in 1832. Working from this garrison island in the Richelieu River, near the American end of Lake Champlain, Mrs. Bayley at once became established as one of the contributors to *The Montreal Museum*, a literary journal founded that same year by “Two Ladies.”² The third number of *The Montreal Museum* included an article “Politely sent by a lady, author of *Tales of the Hearth, Scenes at Home and Abroad* and other literary works” (I, 3, February 1833). Their new contributor, the editors noted in a later issue, was “A lady well known in the literary world . . . employed in completing a series of Moral Tales she is about publishing in New York, or in writing prose and verse for the London Literary Periodicals” (I, 6, May 1833). Like the Strickland sisters, Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, Diana Bayley had brought to Canada an expertise in writing and a familiarity with publishing possibilities.

Mrs. Bayley had begun her work as a children’s writer with two books, *Tales of the Hearth, for the Improvement of the Mind*, and *Employment, the True Source of Happiness, or, The Good Uncle and Aunt*, both published in 1825 in London by John Harris. (Harris, incidentally, had in that same year also published *Northern Regions, the Voyages of Uncle Richard toward the North Pole*, an important early children’s book on Arctic travels.³)

An explanatory note on the title page of *Tales of the Hearth* clarifies Mrs. Bayley’s intention: “Written by a Mother tenderly interested in the morals and happiness of her children, whose education she personally superintends.” As for *Employment*, “written to combine amusement with instruction,” its informative tales include lessons on the West Indies, on shipping, on botany (and incidentally on the beaver).

The Bayleys had set out with their family for the British West Indies in 1825. In “A West Indian Sketch,” published later in the *Montreal Museum*, Mrs. Bayley wrote of moving from “Barbadoes” to St. Vincent, an island troubled by rebellions. While in the West Indies, Mrs. Bayley wrote a third book, *Scenes at Home and Abroad*, published this time by Henry Stokes in London, in 1827. The scenes include some lively stories of West Indies life.

Meantime, Mrs. Bayley, having reached a point not too far south of Montreal, began sending a steady stream of stories, sketches and poems to

the *Montreal Museum* from 1833 on. This nicely-printed little magazine, founded in 1832, in its third number referred to "the Canadian Magazine," and (perhaps in a competitive spirit) proudly announced that the next issue of the *Museum* would contain "an original article, politely sent to us by a lady, author of *Tales of the Hearth, Scenes from Abroad*, and other literary works." The article, published March 1833, and signed "D.B.," was titled "The Young Soldier, A Sketch from Life." Set in the Island of St. Vincent in the West Indies, it featured "an English bride," in a happy marriage. Settings in Devonshire or Kent appeared in the stories appearing in succeeding issues of the *Museum*, signed "D.B.," or "by a Lady (of Isle aux Noix)" and finally, in the eleventh issue of volume 1, "by Mrs. H. Bayley, author of *Tales of the Hearth, The Widow and Daughter*, etc." Canadian scenes and references to childhood began to appear in poems such as "On a Little Orphan," and "To a Dear Little Boy" (I, 12).

The *Museum* also published two poems, by F.W.N. Bayley, "composed near Portman Square," in London. Mrs. Bayley does not appear in the *British Dictionary of National Biography*,⁴ but Frederick W.N. Bayley does, in an article that throws a little oblique light on his family. Born in 1808, "he accompanied his father to the Barbadoes," returned to England four years later, in 1829, at the age of 21 (when General Bayley was sent to Canada). Frederick later became a very well-known author of travel books and of stories for children. Presumably Mrs. Bayley forwarded his early poems to the *Montreal Museum*.

Her own work continued to appear there. "Honesty the Best Policy," a travel tale drawn from memories of a tour of the United States and the Canadas, introduces an English gentleman, who finds Canadian landscape ideal: he hopes to improve English scenery so that it can look like Lake Champlain. "Female Education" by Mrs. H. Bayley, and "A West Indian Sketch," by a Lady (of Isle Aux Noix), both appeared in II, 3, March 1834 — which turned out to be the final issue of the ambitious little magazine.

Mrs. Bayley, however, had been simultaneously working on larger enterprises. In 1833, Simkins of London published her *Improvement, or, a Visit to Grandmama*. Grandmama preaches "the happy consequence of industry." Mrs. Bayley's industry was rewarded by kindly reviews in English papers. The London *National Standard* called it "a sweet little book for children and one really adapted for their holiday reading."⁵

So, at last, to 1836, and to *Henry, or, the Juvenile Traveller*. The explanatory note on the title page runs: "A faithful delineation of the voyage across the Atlantic in a New York packet, a description of part of the United States; a journey to Canada." The book dates the voyage as beginning on the 25th of July, 1832. Henry, aged nine, comes with his parents and baby sister, leaving an older brother behind in England. He travels through up-state New York to Isle aux Noix, where his first impression is of bull frogs, "whose appalling

note renders ... a dismal annoyance."

Industry and improvement are major themes. There are gardens, English-style, to be admired, a minister, the Reverend Mr. Baldwin, to be respected. Henry is not impressed by French Canadian villages: St. Valentine's, inhabited principally by Canadians, who speak a sort of Patois French, in appearance very poor and seemingly destitute of all regard to cleanliness and comfort... The women are dark, and when young very pretty, but soon look squalid and unhealthy, which may perhaps be attributed to ... ardent spirits, which are so cheap as to be within the grasp of every individual in the country. The men are addicted to drinking, and appear to be no great lovers of labour.

Similarly, La Prairie has few charms: "This place is perfectly Canadian; the inhabitants speak very little English, the streets are narrow, and can boast of little attraction."

Henry by-passes these places and goes, more happily, to Montreal by steam-boat. He sees Mott's hotel, four convents, a review of the troops, Roscoe's Hotel, St. Helen's Island, and the mountain. He is impressed by the warmth of the houses, which have central heating by flues. He admires the maple trees, which produce both vinegar and table beer. His final impression of Lower Canada is of a "beautiful and prolific" country. The book contained verses by F.W.N. Bayley, and ended with the promise of a further book on Toronto and Niagara.

The Canadian section of this book consists of twenty pages only, but the writing (like the prejudices displayed) is vigorous. Yet, curiously, *Henry; or, The Juvenile Traveller* is not listed in Morgan's *Bibliotheca Canadensis*, although Morgan does list all her other works, including the pieces published in the *Montreal Museum*, and notes that she "wrote for the English and American literary press." Perhaps the omission of *Henry* reflects the common dismissal of children's books by bibliographers; it is not listed in Watters's *A Check List of Canadian Literature* either. The little book bears the attribution "anonymous" in the British Museum lists, and in Canadian Archival lists such as Gagnon, Sabin, Staton and Tremaine. Only in the catalogue of *The Osborne collection of Early Children's Books, 1566-1910*, by Judith St John, is it properly attributed.

At this point, Mrs. Bayley disappears (to my knowledge) as a creator of Canadian literature. How close she came to finding a new market! In 1838 John Lovell established the *Literary Garland* in Montreal. It would have been a good successor to the *Museum* as a vehicle for her writing. But Mrs. Bayley was back in England. She is listed as "Mrs. Bayley of Kensington" in the copy of *Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them*, (1840?) in the Osborne Collection in Toronto.

Poor *Henry, or, The Juvenile Traveller*, has disappeared from the tally of

major Canadian books for children. Diana Bayley, his creator, has suffered a similar disappearance. In 1972, when Volume IX of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* was projected, I was asked to prepare an entry on Mrs. Bayley. I read all her works with interest, those held in Montreal and Toronto, and also the earlier works in the British Museum in London. But then a problem emerged. I could not establish her death-date in the 1861-70 period, the time frame to be covered in the *DCB* volume then being readied for publication. Entries in the *DCB* must include a documented death date; otherwise the entry appears with the note "floruit" in an earlier volume, covering the time the person in question "flourished." The Bayley biography was moved, scheduled now for volume VII (1836-1850); she would appear there as "floruit."

Mrs. Bayley certainly flourished in the 1830s. The proof was in the charming stories and sketches in the *Montreal Museum*. But when did she die? The original assumption on the part of the *DCB* that she had died in the 1860s was based on the fact that a Mrs. Henry Bayley was known to have published elegiac verses in 1807, and that Frederick W.M.N. Bayley, son of General Henry Bayley, was born in 1808. It had seemed probable that the same Mrs. H. Bayley was the author of *Henry*. Presumably she would have been born before 1790, if she gave birth when she was eighteen or older. But a search for her dates of birth and death proved fruitless.

Then Mme Huguette Filteau, in Quebec city, produced from the *DCB* archives there an almost illegible obituary from the *London Times*, for a Mrs. H. Bayley, who died (if we were reading the blurred copy correctly) in 1868 at the age of 73. Born in 1795, then; most unlikely that she could have published those elegiac verses in 1807 at the age of twelve, or, even more improbably, have given birth to Frederick in 1808 at the age of thirteen. I assumed that she was a second wife of General Bayley, and that Frederick was a stepson. But assumptions aren't good enough for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and the search went on.

Miss Judith St. John, Librarian in charge of the Osborne Collection at Boys and Girls House, where the collection of Bayley materials was housed, became intrigued. She had mentioned *Henry*; or, *The Juvenile Traveller* in her 1965 article in *The Beaver* on *A Peep at the Esquimaux* and other children's books on the north. Miss St. John went to Somerset House during a 1974 research trip in England. She found nothing on Diana Bayley, but did find a death certificate of F.W.N. Bayley, dated 1852 (contradicting the other authorities who gave 1853). Next, Professor Lorraine McMullen, of the University of Ottawa, in the British Museum while on sabbatical in 1978, went through the original *London Times* "obits" and came up with a clear copy. The obituary did indeed report the death in Bridport, Dorset, on March 24, 1868, of "the beloved wife of Deputy Commissary General Henry Addington Bayley, aged 73."

Finally, Mme Paulette Chiasson, historical editor (Rédactrice-

Historienne) at the Quebec offices of the DCB, re-reading volume VII for publication in 1986, decided to have one more try at settling the life-dates of the flourishing Mrs. Bayley. She wrote to the Dorset County Record Office. From them she heard that their records showed Mrs. Bayley, wife of Henry Addington Bayley, as having died in March 21, 1868, from “decay of nature and bronchitis,” at the age of 79. Seventy-nine! Born in 1789, then, if the Dorset records were right and the *Times* obituary was wrong! Mrs. Bayley, by this reckoning, was quite capable of publishing poetry in 1807, and giving birth in 1808 — though I still harboured a sneaking suspicion that this was a second Mrs. Bayley we were dealing with, and a stepmother of Frederick.

At any rate, when the Commissary-General had moved his wife and baby son home to England and then to the land of the beaver, the older brother was left behind according to the account in *Henry; or, the Juvenile Traveller*. Frederick Bayley was preparing to publish his own account of *Four Years in the West Indies*. This book was accorded the honour of a favorable review in the respected *Fraser's Magazine* (1830, II, 1) — pretty satisfying for a twenty-two-year-old author!

After Diana Bayley returned to England, she had (perhaps) the pleasure of watching Frederick emerging as a major producer of children's stories. Many of these were frightening: his *Blue Beard*, first published in 1842, was followed by many other scary little books (many in the Osborne collection). Most frightening, perhaps, is his version of *Red Riding Hood* (1843), complete with a terrifying wolf in the role of grandmama. The gentle, didactic grandmama of Mrs. Bayley's story had been swallowed by a new style of children's books.

As far as Canadian scholarship is concerned, poor Mrs. Bayley suffered the same consuming fate. The slow search for her death date had ended with proof that her story belonged, not in the volume to which she had been assigned, but in another volume, already in print. Mme Chiasson eventually wrote me, “Although we have now succeeded in clearing up some of the mystery surrounding Diana Bayley, I am sorry to say that this new information leaves us no choice but to drop the biography from volume 7 and hold it for an eventual re-edition of volume 9.”

Ah well, we can only hope that someday Little Henry, and Mrs. Bayley herself, like Little Red Riding Hood, can step forth to a happy ending.

Notes

- 1 In this group she included Catharine Parr Traill's *The Young Emigrants* (1826), published before Mrs. Traill came here in 1832, although noting that this book has “a ring of truth as actual letters received from Canada were used as source material” (135).

- 2 The complete run of this interesting magazine is held at the Lawrence Lande Collection, McGill University, Montreal.
- 3 A facsimile of *Northern Regions* was reproduced in the 1970s by Johnson Reprint; its end-papers contain an advertisement for *Tales of the Hearth* and *Employment*.
- 4 See "Frederick William Naylor Bayley" in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.
5. Quoted in Henry J. Morgan, "Mrs. H. Bayley," *Bibliotheca Canadensis* (Ottawa: Desbarats, 1867).

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