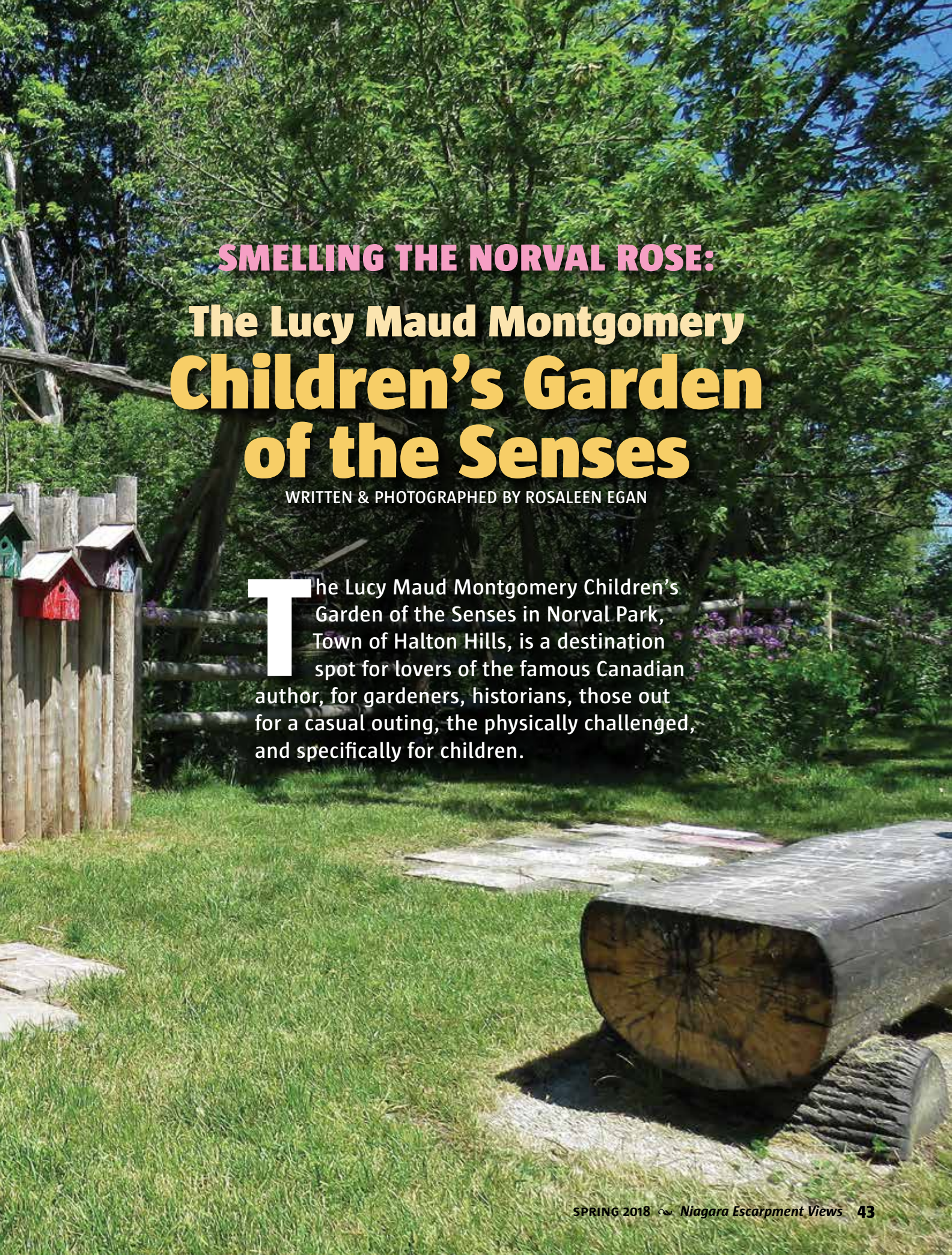




▲ LM Montgomery Heritage Garden and Children's Garden of the Senses in Norval offers both passive and interactive experiences. This is one of two hopscotch areas, with the colourful palisade wall with bird houses in the background.



SMELLING THE NORVAL ROSE:

The Lucy Maud Montgomery Children's Garden of the Senses

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROSALEEN EGAN

The Lucy Maud Montgomery Children's Garden of the Senses in Norval Park, Town of Halton Hills, is a destination spot for lovers of the famous Canadian author, for gardeners, historians, those out for a casual outing, the physically challenged, and specifically for children.

The garden is dedicated to L.M. Montgomery, who vividly describes in her writings the experiences of being in nature, gardening, and the impact on the senses. The author of *Anne of Green Gables* and many other works, was married to a minister and lived in the Presbyterian manse in Norval from 1926 to 1935.

Working with the Norval Community Association (NCA) Eileen Foley, landscape architect and project manager, designed the garden to be “a fun-filled interactive sensory garden for children to regain contact with nature through the use of the human senses. As well, the garden is intended to be a restorative garden for individuals of all ages and abilities that will promote human well-being through sensory experience.”

Foley continues, “Sensory experience is achieved through journey and exploration and by providing for both passive and



▲ Each of the sensory nodes in the garden includes a bronze sign indicating the sense most likely to be stimulated. Signs include an image of the body part, words in standard English and in Braille.

▼ This sign for the Montgomery Heritage Garden has faced Guelph Street for many years before the Children's Garden of the Senses was added. The long border includes traditional plantings of peonies and flowering bulbs.





◀ This sculpture was donated to the NCA by the family of Ted and Ruth Thompson. The waterfall garden stimulates both sound and touch.

▼ People portraying LM Montgomery's famous character Anne Shirley and her friends played checkers in the children's activity area.

interactive activities.”

The garden is accessible and includes Braille signage, making it a place for everyone. Visitors are welcome to explore through a main pathway that interconnects secondary pathways, allowing entry into each of the five nodes. Easing into a node, visitors experience the garden around them.

The nodes vary in shape including a keyhole design, a semi-circle and a spiral. Material underfoot changes to subtly stimulate senses and indicate change particularly to visitors with sight challenges. Each node features a particular sense or senses. There is a sign at child/wheelchair height suggesting what sense may be most scintillated. A nose on the sign indicates smell, for instance.

Choosing the plants and their placement in the garden was a huge task, says Foley. Beyond suitability for the particular sensory node, other things were considered such as sunlight and soil needs, size, colour and aesthetic when used in combination with other choices.

Over 4,900 plants and 450 plant genus/species/cultivars are planned for the



garden as it continues to grow, providing a diversity of colour, form and texture, as well as scents, sounds, and tastes.

Foley explains the garden is a public destination park of the Town of Halton Hills, but its creation and development as the Children's Garden of the Senses, is an initiative of the NCA.

The official opening of the garden was in September 2016. Children's and senior's programming had already

begun in June of that year.

“We had approximately 1,200 children in June, primarily JK and SK school children,” Foley says. “The children learn about the edible garden and taste some plants, pot up their own bean seeds to take home, explore the sensory gardens including the woodland and waterfall gardens, role-play designing and building their own garden as a team, and enjoy playtime in the activity area.”

Activity Area

This area includes rocks to read or climb on, a checkerboard table and stools, two hop scotch areas, a palisade wall with bird houses, a log bench for sitting or balancing on, and an accessible sand box. There are children's planter boxes with edible gardens, a children's garden shed and accessible picnic table with colourful yellow umbrellas.

In 2017, the NCA launched a horticultural therapy program/garden herbs program for seniors. “This program encourages active and passive physical activity and being engaged in the garden,” says Foley, “enjoying the sights, fragrance, sounds, textures and tastes, and making a herb craft.”

Norval Park and the gardens include an interpretive gazebo, benches, and two statues donated by community members, of a girl reading a book. It also has a working analemmatic sundial, which is designed to let a person’s shadow fall on the hour marker. This sundial was dedicated in 1997 to honour Norval’s men and women who served Canada in time of war. There is also the original school bell from the Norval Public School, as the three-acre property once belonged to the Esquesing School Board.

Foley says, “It is really wonderful to see young families, children from the adjacent daycare centre, seniors, and community residents at the garden strolling through the sensory gardens, relaxing in the plaza, hopping through the woodland, exploring the waterfall, and playing in the activity area.”

In 1992, with the help of a Canada 125 grant, the NCA introduced the L.M. Montgomery Heritage Garden in Norval Park. The Heritage Garden included popular flowers introduced to Canada by 19th-century settlers, flowers and shrubs from some of the village’s gardens, and many of L. M. Montgomery’s favourites.

Kathy Gastle, president of the NCA says, “As all gardens do, the L. M. Montgomery garden remains a work in progress. Visitors to the



garden can learn much about its heritage plants. The heritage plants are interspersed within the new plants and many more plants still need to be planted.”

Norval Rose

A perfect place is yet to be found for what is known as the Norval rose, a rare specimen of great age sometimes called the Steeple Rose. In March 2017, the Lucy Maud Montgomery Society, an umbrella committee of the Heritage Foundation of Halton Hills, purchased the former home of Montgomery, and created a brand for the





▲ The bell was rescued by the Norval Women's Institute on demolition of the school that originally stood on this property. A cairn was built in 1967 to hold it, and housed a time capsule that was opened in 2017. Other memorabilia was added, and it was resealed.



◀ As the summer progresses, the spiral garden erupts in red, yellow and purple Cone Flowers, Salvia and more to stimulate the sight, while the sound of grasses swaying and the crunch of the gravel under foot stimulate hearing. This garden incorporates the vertical sundial, an existing feature of the LM Montgomery Heritage Garden.



◀ Under a row of Norway spruce trees planted by Norval Public School students in the early 1940s stands the LM Montgomery stone with the following quotation: “Norval is so beautiful now that it takes my breath. Those pine hills full of shadows - those river reaches - those bluffs of maple and smooth-trunked beech - with drifts of white blossom everywhere. I love Norval as I have never loved any place save Cavendish. It is as if I had known it all my life - as if I had dreamed young dreams under those pines and walked with my first love down that long perfumed hill.” From *Selected Journals of LM Montgomery Volume 3 1921-29*, ed Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, Oxford University Press, 1992.

▶ At the Canada 150, Norval-on-the-Credit event on June 3, 2017, Kathy Gastle (left) and Carolyn Martin of the Norval Community Association received recognition for their outstanding volunteerism. They were presented with a Canada 150 pin by MP Michael Chong, and a certificate of thanks from MPP Ted Arnott.

future LM Montgomery Museum and Literary Centre which includes the Norval Rose. Gastle expresses the ongoing need for community volunteers to maintain the gardens. The NCA will plant a tree in memory of lifelong resident and dedicated volunteer, David Carter, this spring to honour his “unwavering dedication to village life.”

There are other opportunities to volunteer with NCA special events, art shows and the annual Montgomery Christmas, by calling 905.877.7059. Monetary donations specific to the Gardens can be made through the Town of Halton Hills.

Norval Park, including The Lucy Maud Montgomery Children’s Garden of the Senses, is situated on Guelph Street, or Highway #7 in the Village of Norval, Halton Hills. The park entrance is off Mary Street. The park is a destination in itself. Other sites of interest in Norval include the Credit River, Willow Park Ecology Centre, and the Presbyterian manse.

*Rosaleen Egan is an independent journalist, photographer and playwright near Alliston whose last feature for Niagara Escarpment Views was “Orangeville’s Street Art: Enhancing Community,” Summer 2017. Rosaleen blogs on her website: rosiewrites.com. **NEV***



▶ Made of Credit River stone, this Analemmatic Sundial was completed in 1997 to honour men and women from Norval who served their country during war. When you stand on the appropriate month inscribed on the stone slab, your shadow points to bronze numbers representing watch time and true Norval “sun time” on the low elliptical wall.

