

## A FAMOUS MOUNTAIN WOMAN

Across the mountain the topic of famous women may engender names like: **Janet Lee** and the Women's Institute, or **Belle Summers** of mountain brow theatrical fame, or **Clementina Fessenden** and Empire Day. But most enduring has to be **Margaret Clark** of Mount Hope's Glanbrook Township.

At first glance you may say, "Never heard of her!" but I bet you have. Ever since her death 150 years ago this month, she has been the subject of one of the world's best known love ballads performed by all the great male singers such as: John McCormack, Bing Crosby, Perry Como and today's John McDermott. She is the subject of a provincial plaque at the Glanbrook Municipal Centre on Binbrook Road. The world knows her as "Maggie" from the popular sentimental song title, "**When You and I Were Young Maggie**".

The heart warming lyrics of the song suggest a long life of romantic memories. In fact, it is a dream born in pending tragedy. Maggie, only 23 years old, died on **May 12, 1865**, less than a year after her marriage to George Washington Johnson, a resident of Binbrook and her former senior school teacher. Maggie suffered from tuberculosis and as her health deteriorated, George, in a state of melancholy, composed a poem about their lengthy courtship and their romantic walks to her father's mill on the banks of Twenty Mile Creek near her home on Nebo Road. To lift the pall of gloom, he wrote the poem as if looking back from their old age which they had hoped to share together.

"I wandered today to the hill, Maggie,  
To watch the scene below;  
The creek and the rusty old mill, Maggie,  
As we used to, long, long ago."

In 1866, a year after Maggie's death, George visited an American friend, J. A. Butterfield, who set the poem to music. Hence, the American claim to the song's origin. Then the United States totally hijacked the ballad by putting up a plaque beside a mill in Springtown, Tennessee, claiming it to be the locale of the song.

Although Maggie was his first love, George Johnson married three times and had a lengthy career in education. He became principal of Binbrook School, a teacher at Stoney Creek and Bartonville, the principal of Hamilton's Central School in 1875, a teacher at Upper Canada College 1891-96 and a professor of Languages at Toronto University. He died in 1917 and is buried in Hamilton Cemetery.

The song was recently inducted into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame.

He claimed to be related to Indian poetess, Pauline Johnson for whom a mountain school is named.



Source: HAMILTON Famous and Fascinating, Bailey & Carter 1972  
An old photo enhanced to show "Maggie" Clark as she may have appeared 150 years ago.



Source: WeLoveOntario.com  
Maggie is buried in the White Church Cemetery family plot on White Church Road just west of Hwy 6.

*Mountain Memories*, written by historian **Robert Williamson** on behalf of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly in the *Mountain News*. Visit the Society's website ([Hamiltonheritage.ca](http://Hamiltonheritage.ca)).