

Mazo de la Roche

BENARES - IS IT JALNA??

In 1927, Mazo de la Roche (1879-1961), who had been living on what was part of the original Benares estate, in a building known as Trail Cottage,-- near the present day corner of Jalna Avenue and Ravine Drive--won the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine \$10,000 prize for fiction with her novel, *Jalna*.

In that year she furnished her publisher with a sketch of Benares to be used in the design of the book's jacket. She also stated that "*there is an old house which partly suggested Jalna. It too was built by a retired officer of the British Army in India, and it was named Benares.*"

it is interesting to note that both Jalna and Benares had been the location of British military garrisons in India. Readers from around the world began to travel to Clarkson in search of sites described in *Jalna* and subsequent novels. For many it became a goal for literary-minded tourists; for the family it proved to be a nuisance.



Over the next 30 years, Mazo de la Roche wrote a total of sixteen novels based on the trials and tribulations of the fictional Whiteoaks family of Jalna. Over 12 million copies were sold world-wide. When the Whiteoaks area of Clarkson was developed in the mid 1950's, the developers capitalized on this public interest and many place names now reflect the Jalna connection.

The Harris family remained friends with the author. In 1957 perhaps to ease the burden of the Harrises she stated in her autobiography *Ringling the Changes*, that "*no house in particular was pictured, no family portrayed*". The novels had been inspired by the traditions of the different army and navy officers and their families which had settled in the area.

In April 2008 Parks Canada and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board unveiled a plaque at Benares, honouring Mazo de la Roche as a person of national historic significance.

<http://www5.mississauga.ca/museums/plaqueunveiling.html>. To find out more about the intriguing life and work of Mazo de la Roche go to www.mazo.ca.