

Grey Owl...Enigma of the North



The tall pines in Finlayson Park cast long shadows. Set deep among them overlooking the grey-blue water of Lake Temagami, is a plaque to a man who was a legend in his time, and in this era of ecological awareness a man ahead of his time.

Grey Owl was both mysterious lover of the wilderness and a renegade Englishman, sometimes known as Archie Belaney. It was Grey Owl who tamed the beaver, and in poetic yet virile prose made the city aware of the vanishing glory of the virgin forest.

The controversy over Grey Owl will never die, and as time progresses there is an increasing appreciation of what he was, and what he was trying to do. But as Grey Owl grows in stature, his books reissued and his memory refurbished by the kindly light of time, in the little village where Archie Belaney first became an Ojibwa, there is another memory preserved.

The Temagami people adopted Grey Owl, and gave him his name. They saw him desert them, taking with him what he had learned, and leaving little behind but a legend and a plaque.

While men, burdened by a sense of guilt as wildlife disappears and the native people of Canada struggle to adjust to modern society, take another look at Grey Owl, the people remember his wife, Angele, the girl who made Grey Owl an Ojibwa.

It was Angele who taught him woodcraft, who taught him to speak the Ojibwa tongue, who made his first buckskins. It was Angele who showed him how to make cooking utensils out of bark, to make simple medicines from herbs, how to track down the deer and moose, and set traps for the beaver. It was by these means

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