

Elisabeth Ogilvie, 89, Maine Author, Is Dead

By Dennis Hevesi

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Elisabeth Ogilvie, the author of 46 books, most of them tales of romance and mystery set on the craggy islands off the coast of Maine, died Saturday at her home in Cushing, Me. She was 89.

The cause was a stroke, said Barbara Mosher, Ms. Ogilvie's niece.

Fans of her work, said Karin Womer, her editor at Down East Books, "love the characters and the settings: the remoteness, the oceans, the skies, the storms; islanders canning their food, sewing netting for lobster traps."

As a young woman with no college degree but a passion for writing since childhood, Ms. Ogilvie made her mark in the mid-1940's with what became known as the Tide trilogy, about the Bennett family, who return to the lobster-trapping life on a barren island that bears their name. Stories of their descendants continue in later books in the series.

Elisabeth May Ogilvie was born in Boston on May 20, 1917, the daughter of Frank and Maude Ogilvie; she had three older brothers. The family lived in Quincy, Mass., and Ms. Ogilvie graduated from North Quincy High School in 1934. She took a writing course at Harvard.

Summers with her family in Maine became the source of her work. On Gay's Island, she recalled, she spent her time beachcombing, boating, bird-watching and writing. In her first novel, "High Tide at Noon" (Crowell, 1944), the Bennetts' daughter, Joanna, returns to the unoccupied island, soon followed by relatives, then strangers. With royalties from that first book, Ms. Ogilvie bought an old house on Gay's Island. In her next nine books — called the Bennett series, which includes the Tide trilogy — she recounted loves, feuds, storms and sea tales on her imagined island.

Of Scottish descent, Ms. Ogilvie also wrote a series of novels based on her travels in the highlands of Scotland. She also wrote 14 books for young adults, focusing on two new generations of the Bennett family. In her last novel, "The Day Before Winter" (Down East Books, 1997), a new family of outsiders arrives on the island.

She leaves no immediate survivors.