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## Charlotte Matilda MacLeod

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About this Person

**Born:** November 12, 1922 in Bath, New Brunswick, Canada

**Died:** January 14, 2005 in Lewiston, Maine, United States

**Nationality:** American

**Occupation:** Novelist

**Other Names:** MacLeod, Charlotte Matilda; Craig, Alisa; Hughes, Matilda

Updated: Sept. 27, 2005

### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born November 12, 1922, in Bath, New Brunswick, Canada; died January 14, 2005, in Lewiston, Maine; immigrated to the United States, 1923, naturalized citizen, December 10, 1951; daughter of Edward Phillips (a contractor) and Mabel Maude (a homemaker; maiden name, Hayward) MacLeod. **Education:** Attended School of Practical Art (now Art Institute of Boston). **Politics:** Liberal Democrat. **Memberships:** American Crime Writers League (cofounder; president, 1989-91; editor, beginning 1991), Crime Writers of Canada. **Addresses:** Home: R.R. 1, Box 475E, Pitts Center Rd., Richmond, ME 04357. Agent: Dominick Abel Literary Agency, 146 West 82nd St., Suite 1B, New York, NY 10024.

### CAREER:

Writer. Stop and Shop Supermarkets, Boston, MA, staff artist and copy writer, 1945-52; N. H. Miller and Co., Inc. (advertising firm), Boston, began as copy chief, became vice president, 1952-82. Library trustee, Sundbury, MA, 1976-82.

### AWARDS:

Bouchercon convention, guest of honor, 1988, lifetime achievement award, 1992; Malice Domestic convention, guest of honor, 1991; five American Mystery Awards; two Edgar Allan Poe Award nominations, Mystery Writers of America; Nero Wolfe Award.

### WORKS:

#### WRITINGS:

#### "PETER SHANDY" MYSTERY SERIES

- *Rest You Merry*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1978.
- *The Luck Runs Out*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1979.
- *Wrack and Rune*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1982.
- *Something the Cat Dragged In*, Avon (New York, NY), 1984.
- *The Curse of the Giant Hogweed*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1985.
- *The Corpse in Oozak's Pond*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1987.
- *Vane Pursuit*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1989.
- *An Owl Too Many*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Something in the Water*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Exit the Milkman*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1996.

#### "SARAH KELLING" MYSTERY SERIES

- *The Family Vault*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1979.

- *The Withdrawing Room*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1980.
- *The Palace Guard*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1981.
- *The Bilbao Looking Glass*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1983.
- *The Convivial Codfish*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1984.
- *The Plain Old Man*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1985.
- *The Recycled Citizen*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1988.
- *The Silver Ghost*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1988.
- *The Gladstone Bag*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1990.
- *The Resurrection Man*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1992.
- *The Odd Job*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1995.
- *The Balloon Man* (Mystery Guild selection), Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1998.

### "MADOC RHYS" MYSTERY SERIES; UNDER PSEUDONYM ALISA CRAIG

- *A Pint of Murder*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1980.
- *Murder Goes Mumming*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1981.
- *A Dismal Thing to Do*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1986.
- *Trouble in the Brasses*, Avon (New York, NY), 1989.
- *The Wrong Rite*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1992.

### "GRUB-AND-STAKERS" MYSTERY SERIES; UNDER PSEUDONYM ALISA CRAIG

- *The Grub-and-Stakers Move a Mountain*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1981.
- *The Grub-and-Stakers Quilt a Bee*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1985.
- *The Grub-and-Stakers Pinch a Poke*, Avon (New York, NY), 1988.
- *The Grub-and-Stakers Spin a Yarn*, Avon (New York, NY), 1990.
- *The Grub-and-Stakers House a Haunt*, Morrow (New York, NY), 1993.

### JUVENILES

- *Mystery of the White Knight* (mystery novel), Avalon (New York, NY), 1964.
- *Next Door to Danger* (mystery novel), Avalon (New York, NY), 1965.
- (Under pseudonym Matilda Hughes) *The Food of Love*, Avalon (New York, NY), 1965.
- (Under pseudonym Matilda Hughes) *Headlines for Caroline*, Avalon (New York, NY), 1967.
- *The Fat Lady's Ghost*, Weybright (New York, NY), 1968.
- *Mouse's Vineyard*, Weybright (New York, NY), 1968.
- *Ask Me No Questions*, Macrae Smith (Philadelphia, PA), 1971.
- *Brass Pounder*, Little, Brown (Boston, MA), 1971.
- *King Devil*, Atheneum (New York, NY), 1978.
- *We Dare Not Go A-Hunting*, Atheneum (New York, NY), 1980.
- *Cirak's Daughter*, Atheneum (New York, NY), 1982.
- *Maid of Honor*, Atheneum (New York, NY), 1984.

### OTHER

- *Astrology for Skeptics*, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1972.
- (Under pseudonym Alisa Craig) *The Terrible Tide*, Doubleday (New York, NY), 1983.
- *Grab Bag* (short stories), Avon (New York, NY), 1987.
- (Editor) *Mistletoe Mysteries* (anthology), Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1989.
- (Editor) *Christmas Stalkings* (anthology), Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Had She But Known: A Biography of Mary Roberts Rinehart*, Mysterious Press (New York, NY), 1994.
- *It Was an Awful Shame and Other Stories*, Five Star (Waterville, ME), 2002.

Contributor of short stories to anthologies. Contributor of short stories and articles, some self-illustrated, to magazines, including *Good Housekeeping*, *Yankee*, *Edgar Wallace Mystery*, *Criminologist*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery*, and *Cricket*.

A collection of MacLeod's manuscripts is housed at the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University, Boston, MA.

### Sidelights

Charlotte MacLeod wrote a variety of mystery novels over the past thirty years, ranging from young adult mysteries to novels featuring the series characters Sarah Kelling and Peter Shandy. Jane S. Bakerman and Helen M. Francini, writing in the *St. James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writers*, observed that MacLeod's "best-known fiction emphasizes the orderly world vital to cozy mysteries. Moreover, her stories reveal that sweet dispositions, good food, and loyalty are the basic necessities for a happy marriage. Coupling this philosophy with clever plots and plenty of humor has netted her a host of fans and a sound reputation. No matter what setting, characters, or plot twists appear in her books, they all provide the reader with good, solid, escapism and fun."

MacLeod's books featuring Sarah Kelling have been particularly popular with readers. Kelling, a member of an old and prominent Boston family, is a widow whose family connections lead her into privately investigating murderous mysteries. During the course of the series she is courted by Max Bittersohn, a specialist in art theft, marries him, and has a child. The Kelling adventures are filled with disguises, well-meaning "do-goodism," and Sarah's many eccentric relatives.

The "Peter Shandy" series features a professor at Balaclava Agricultural College who is world-renowned for developing the Balaclava Buster, a new kind of rutabaga. Shandy's adventures take place in the academic circles of his profession. "As in the Kelling series," wrote Bakerman and Francini, "the Balaclava saga is as crowded with love stories as it is with fun." In *Exit the Milkman*, for example, James Feldster, the head of the dairy management department at Balaclava, disappears. His wife is later found murdered. Shandy finds himself trying to sort out the reasons behind the murder, which left Feldster the recipient of the family fortune. "MacLeod again demonstrates her skill and with incomparable whimsy makes her bucolic puzzles great fun," noted a critic for *Publishers Weekly*.

Bakerman and Francini concluded that all of MacLeod's characters are "memorable; all are interesting, and their expected foibles, actions, and reactions provide ample amusement and escape. Their peculiarities distance readers so that the emotional cost of eavesdropping on these murderous adventures is very low whereas the profit--entertainment--is very high."

#### OBITUARY:

Born November 12, 1922, in Bath, New Brunswick, Canada; died January 14, 2005, in Lewiston, ME. Author. MacLeod was an award-winning author best known for her "cozy" mysteries. Brought to Boston from Canada with her family when still an infant, she attended what is now the Art Institute of Boston and became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1951. During the late 1940s and early 1950s she worked as a copy writer and staff artist for Stop and Shop Supermarkets in Boston. In 1952 she took a job as copy chief for the advertising firm N. H. Miller & Company. Here she eventually rose to the position of vice president, retiring in 1982. While still working her nine-to-five job, MacLeod began writing fiction, beginning with short stories and books for young readers. Her early books for children include *Mystery of the White Knight* (1964) and *The Fat Lady's Ghost* (1968), as well as some titles under the Matilda Hughes pen name, such as *Headlines for Caroline* (1967). Her first mystery series for adults featured the character Peter Shandy, a horticulturist who solved crimes on the side. Shandy made his debut in *Rest You Merry* (1978) and was featured in nine additional novels. MacLeod also wrote a mystery series featuring Sarah Kelling, a widow who ran a boarding house on Beacon Hill, and two other series under the pen name Alisa Craig: the "Madoc Rhys" series and the "Grub-and-Stakers" series. MacLeod's crime stories have been characterized as "cozies"; that is, they are not hardboiled mysteries of detection but rather very proper, often funny tales that emphasize dialogue and clever resolutions rather than violent plotlines. Though not as well known as the likes of Agatha Christie, MacLeod was widely praised as an outstanding writer. She received a Nero Wolfe award, two Edgar Allan Poe Award nominations, and five American Mystery awards, as well as the Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992 from Bouchercon. In addition, she cofounded the American Crime Writers League. Among her many other books are *The Withdrawing Room* (1980), *The Curse of the Giant Hogweed* (1985), *The Resurrection Man* (1992), *Exit the Milkman* (1996), and the children's book *The Balloon Man* (1999). She also edited two anthologies and authored *Had She but Known: A Biography of Mary Roberts Rinehart* (1994).

#### FURTHER READINGS:

#### FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

#### BOOKS

- *St. James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writers*, 4th edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1996.

#### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, September 15, 1998, GraceAnne A. DeCandido, review of *The Balloon Man*, p. 203.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, November 1, 1998, review of *The Balloon Man*, p. 1565; May 15, 2002, review of *It Was an Awful Shame and Other Stories*, p. 708.
- *Publishers Weekly*, January 31, 1994, p. 78; March 21, 1994, p. 59; March 6, 1995, p. 61; July 1, 1996, p. 45; November 2, 1998, review of *The Balloon Man*, p. 73.
- *School Library Journal*, April, 1999, review of *The Balloon Man*, p. 161.

#### ONLINE

- *Bookbrowser.com*, <http://www.bookbrowser.com/> (October 7, 1998), Harriet Klausner, review of *The Balloon Man*.\*

#### OBITUARIES AND OTHER SOURCES:

#### PERIODICALS

- *Chicago Tribune*, January 17, 2005, section 4, p. 9.
- *Houston Chronicle*, January 17, 2005, p. 6.
- *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 2005, p. B9.
- *New York Times*, January 23, 2005, p. A26.

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