

primary vehicle for his education is Lao Xu, the middle-aged scholar who serves as interpreter for the CBC news team of Eddie and Alex's father, Ted, and who, as part of his job, reports back to his Party bosses on the Canadians' activities. Lao Xu becomes Alex's friend, explains things to him (and thus the reader), takes him on tourist excursions, invites him to a Beijing tea-house where story-tellers recount tales from classical novels. Later, after Lao Xu is shot down in the square, Xin-hua continues Alex's guidance.

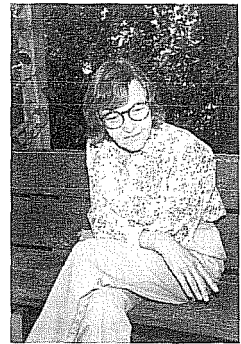
I said above that *Forbidden City* was inspired by emotion. I love to write stories, and the writing of a few of my books can best be described as fun. This one, though important and meaningful and rewarding to me, was not. During those awful days, a refrain could be heard time and time again from the students and citizens of Beijing: Tell the world what has happened. Aside from recounting an event that took place in a city and country where I had and still have close friends, I felt a deep responsibility to get the story right, and to tell it well enough that people outside China would know what really happened, for my friends and I knew that the government would lie. China's is a government which does not so much break human rights as refuse even to acknowledge them, and her official line, trade with Canada and the granting of an honorary degree to a Chinese government official by a Canadian university notwithstanding, remains that no one died in the Tian An Men Square on the night of June 4, 1989. But *Forbidden City* is published in ten countries outside Canada, and in eight languages other than English. Like Alex I have tried to tell the world, to honour the citizens and students, and the blood-stained radiance of their cause.

William Bell is an award-winning author of ten books for young people, among them *Forbidden City*, *Speak to the Earth*, and most recently *River, My Friend*, a picture book. He lives in Orillia, Ontario.

REBELLION: THE BACK OF THE TAPESTRY

Marianne Brandis

Résumé: L'auteur parle de la genèse de son dernier ouvrage, *Rebellion: A Novel of Upper Canada*, qui présente les choix difficiles que doit assumer un jeune Torontois en 1837.



Marianne Brandis

My latest book, *Rebellion: A Novel of Upper Canada*, presents a picture of a fourteen-year-old boy's difficult personal life and his involvement in the Rebellion of 1837 in Toronto. This is the "front" of the tapestry, the side that is meant to show.

The multiplicity of strands and colours really only appears on the back of the tapestry — a multiplicity that has made this book, of the five I have written about Canadian history for young-adult readers, the most complex and difficult to write.

At the time of the rebellion, Adam Wheeler, the fictional central character, has recently arrived in Toronto from England. His being an immigrant is important; Canada is and always has been a country whose population is largely made up of fairly recent arrivals. Canadians' links with other places often remain strong, as the current interest in genealogy demonstrates. Depictions of nineteenth-century Canada often disregard the portion of the newcomers' lives which had been spent elsewhere. In contrast, I have given Adam a past life because I wanted to remind readers that settlers, when they arrived here, were not blank sheets of paper. They drew on their earlier experiences and attitudes to interpret what they saw in the new world and to shape their lives here — and, inevitably, to help shape the world they came to. Children brought memories of their own, no less significant than those of adults: when I arrived in Canada at the age of eight, in 1947, I had lived through World War II in Holland.

The Rebellion of 1837 is treated by many historians as a comic-opera event. But wars are always frightening to the people who live where they take place, and especially to children. However the events are assessed by later historians, to the children who endure them they are violent, incomprehensible, and terrifying, the stuff of life-long anxieties and nightmares. Developing these ideas into a novel that would work as a story and at the same time give insight into history and human lives required much research, recollection, reflection — and revision. As always, I wrote for young readers but kept the older ones in mind; I did as little simplifying as possible because complexity was part of the message. The main characters, Adam Wheeler and the aunt and uncle with whom he has travelled, had in England been poor farm workers. Seven years earlier, in 1830, they had experienced the Captain Swing riots, when landless labourers in southern England destroyed the threshing machines and burned the haystacks of their employers. I researched these events and the impoverished and degraded lives of the people who were involved in the protest. When Adam becomes embroiled in the Rebellion of 1837, he sees the events through the mesh of the Captain Swing riots and the conditions which gave rise to them. I researched the conditions on board the ships that brought immigrants across the Atlantic — a journey which was also part of the settlers' experience. Shipboard life was, naturally, much less comfortable for steerage passengers than for cabin passengers like Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, whose accounts of the voyage are better known.

Once in Upper Canada, Adam finds work in the Eastwood & Skinner paper mill. This was an actual, historical mill in Todmorden, which was at that time a village a few miles from Toronto. I researched the appearance and life of Toronto and Todmorden, and the paper-making process. I researched the lives of working children — because in Canada as in England, most children worked from an early age, either with their parents, or as apprentices, or as regular

employees in shops and factories, on farms, and in domestic service.

In Todmorden, Adam meets Charlotte and Cornelia de Grassi, historical characters aged thirteen and fourteen at the time, whose family lived nearby and who acted as spies and messengers for the government side during the rebellion. I researched the de Grassi family, immigrants of a different social class than Adam's, bringing with them different experiences and attitudes — and strikingly similar expectations. All three young people become involved in the rebellion. In a variety of sources I found information about the de Grassi girls' activities; with their real experiences and the actual historical events I interwove incidents which might have drawn a boy like Adam into the action. I present the issues as seen by both of the opposing sides. Adam's Uncle Ted is one of the rebels, the de Grassi sisters and their father work for the government. Adam's employer, Colin Skinner, is a moderate. Adam comes to understand something of all the different points of view. He also reflects on what leads the working classes to rebel and the gentry to maintain and defend their own position.

These strands and many others, once researched, had to be woven together in such a way that all elements were balanced and properly proportioned. While presenting historical events as accurately as possible, I had to make sure that I did not lose sight of Adam's personal story, and that his angle of vision remained valid and believable. I showed what a boy of fourteen, with Adam's particular personality and experience, might see and think and feel. I constructed a plot that would bring him as close to events as was possible and reasonable, yet allow him to be sufficiently detached to reflect on what was happening. Like any eye witness, Adam sees only what any single pair of eyes could see. My aim in all my historical fiction is to suggest to readers how it might feel to be alive at that time, living and perceiving and acting as the main character does. I grab readers by their imagination and push them into the middle of events. I present the past as life-size, not miniaturized and trivialized by the gap of time separating us from it.

Finally, of course, *Rebellion* is not only about historical times but about human life in any time. Adam emigrates with his aunt and uncle because his own father and stepmother have rejected him. He is a young person from a broken family, uprooted from his home. He is compelled to take charge of his own life, to make decisions about the direction he wants to take, to make judgements about the new world and the people in it. He does this in specific surroundings and circumstances, but the core of his situation is the universal one.

Marianne Brandis is the author of the "Emma" trilogy — *The Tinderbox*, *The Quarter-Pie Window* and *The Sign of the Scales*, each of which was honoured with a "Choice" selection from the Canadian Children's Book Centre. *The Quarter-Pie Window* won a Canadian Young Adult Book Award, presented by the Saskatchewan Library Association, and also a national Chapter IODE award. In 1993 *Fireship* won a certificate of commendation from the Toronto Historical Board.