

CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Beth Powning

Article by [Charlene Davis](#)

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Beth Powning, writer, photographer (b at Putnam, Connecticut 15 Aug 1949). Powning majored in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. She moved to an old farm near Sussex, New Brunswick in 1972, where she ran a pottery business with her husband, artist and photographer Peter Powning.

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Beth Powning's writing is inspired by her life in rural New Brunswick, living in an 1870s farmhouse. On her website she describes her early years in NB: sharing an outgoing-only telephone line with twelve families, using a wringer washer and a wood cook stove, and having only an outhouse. Her family had a cow and hens, and cut and hauled all their own firewood from the forest.

Powning's eighth publication, *The Sea Captain's Wife* (2010), is set in New Brunswick in the 1800s. Within the novel Powning paints scenes of the seafaring life in the age of [sailing ships](#), and of the trials, fears, and joys of life in rural New Brunswick. Powning's characters are memorable and lasting: she draws the reader into the story with strength, making characters' experiences vividly alive. Throughout *The Sea Captain's Wife* Powning's detailed observations of the world her characters travel are an essential part of the story that unfolds. Powning's novel *The Hatbox Letters* (2004), which brought her much national recognition, features a woman living in a Victorian house in New Brunswick; while mixing the past with the present, the novel focuses strongly on the natural world. Powning uses descriptions of nature throughout *The Hatbox Letters* that record the changing of the seasons alongside the changes in her protagonist Kate's life. Powning's narrative is sensitive, thought-provoking, and a delight for the visual mind.

Beth Powning's memoirs, *Edge Seasons* (2005) and *Shadow Child: An Apprenticeship in Love and Loss* (1999), record memories of pain, growth and revelation while addressing the power of nature and the effect it has on a person's ability to perceive his or her life and place in the world. In Powning's book of essays and photographs *Seeds of Another Summer*, published in the US as *Home: Chronicle of a North Country Life* (1996), Powning uses photographs of the changing seasons to chronicle the interweaving of her life with the natural life that surrounds her.

Powning's works have been nominated for several literary awards. *The Hatbox Letters* was longlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (2006) and the Bookseller's Choice Award, Atlantic Book Awards (2005). *Shadow Child* was nominated for the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction (Wilfrid Laurier University) in 2000. The US-published *Home: Chronicle of a North Country Life* was shortlisted for the Calvin Rutstrum Foundation, Rutstrum Author's Award (2000) and was awarded the New England Booksellers Association Discovery Award (1996).