The Secret of the Stone Circle
by Judith Silverthorne

Reviewed by Donna Gamache

The Secret of the Stone Circle is part of the “From Many Peoples” series by Coteau Books. The book is also the third of Judith Silverthorne’s trilogy with 12-year-old Emily Bradford as the main character.

In the previous books (The Secret of Sentinel Rock and The Secret of the Stone House), Emily learned to use a special stone at her grandmother’s prairie farm to time-travel back to the early 1900s, where she met her grandmother and great uncle as pioneer children. In the present time frame, Emily discovered a mysterious box hidden in a secret compartment in the fireplace of her grandmother’s old stone house. When she eventually managed to open the box, she found a beautiful carved hand mirror with inlaid stones, in which she could sometimes see faces from the past.

In this latest novel, Emily is heading to Scotland for a holiday with her father. Emily wants to learn more about her Scottish ancestors, and also hopes to think of a way of getting her parents, who were divorced a few months earlier, back together. At the last moment, she feels compelled to take the mysterious mirror with her.

In Scotland, Emily and her father visit places from their family’s past, near an intriguing stone circle of massive rocks. They meet a number of people who are distantly related to them, including the Earl of Glaslyn, who lives in a large castle-like home with his housekeeper, Mareid, a woman with gypsy connections. Emily realizes that she can use the mirror to slip briefly into the past. There she encounters the apparition of a strange woman with whom she communicates in her mind. “Find her. Quickly,” the weeping woman begs her. Emily also watches, horror-stricken, as men die in the Battle of Aikey Brae raging around the stone circle, and women and children run in terror from burning straw-roofed huts.
There is intrigue in the present, too, for the cottage where the Bradfords stay is broken into and ransacked, as though someone is searching for something among their belongings. There’s also a charming older boy who interests Emily, though she doesn’t quite trust him.

This book can be enjoyed without having read the previous books in the series, though young readers might prefer to read the others first. As an adult reader, I found the explanation of the origin of the word gypsy interesting – from “Little Egyptians,” for having spent time there – though apparently this is under dispute. I was also interested in the different view of the Scottish Bruce clan (famous for Robert the Bruce.)

Author Judith Silverthorne is the author of seven children’s novels and has twice won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Children’s Literature. Besides her previous books about Emily, she has also written four books in a time-travel adventure series about dinosaur times.

Donna Firby Gamache is a writer/retired teacher from MacGregor, Manitoba. Her newest work is Sarah: A New Beginning, a novel for children, loosely based on the coming of her great-grandparents to Canada in 1891.

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