

Ann's Tea Room



A Perth Landmark (1924-56)

By
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Ann's Tea Room - A Perth Landmark

Mover, shakers, and royalty stayed there

Ann's Tea Room and Ann's Hotel that followed it in the same location are names that few under the age of fifty would recognize, but joined together they are part of the history of Perth.

Although the buildings had been gone a full decade by 1966 when Andover joined Perth in 1966 to become the new municipality of Perth-Andover, Ann McLaughlin's establishments are also a part of Perth-Andover history. Ann's Tea Room became reality in August 1924 when Ann (Armstrong) McLaughlin opened it at a location that is today directly across East Riverside Drive from the driveway into Perth Medical Clinic.

Because of the erosion of the riverbank over the years much of the land upon which the tea room and cabins sat is gone, but the memory of the travelers' destination is still firmly etched in the minds of older area residents.

Although Ann McLaughlin, who had been born Ann Armstrong in 1885, had never run a hotel or restaurant, she went into the creation of Ann's tea Room with enthusiasm but a certain amount of fear. In an essay she wrote for a local literary club just weeks before her death in 1967, Mrs. McLaughlin outlined the first appearance of the famous tea room. At the time her two children, George and Gertrude, were ages five and three.

She started the tea room in a closed-in portion of her veranda and used three of her own tables and twelve kitchen chairs for which she had paid a dollar each. '...using the house facilities,' she wrote, 'our own dishes, cutlery, glassware, and kitchenware, the 'tea room' was started. 'That morning our small sign was set in the front bit of lawn,' she went on, and said all the food was ready, but was she? 'Getting a bit panicky at my daring I was about to have the sign pulled up when the first guests drove in - the Kilburn Family (a wealthy family from which the community of Kilburn got its name). Of course there was no turning back.'

Decades of travelers and local people benefited from her 'yes' decision that was almost a no'.

Margaret McLaughlin of East Riverside Drive, Perth-Andover was the daughter-in-law of Ann Armstrong McLaughlin and remembers her as a quiet, kindly woman. Interviewed by the Star on Wednesday, Jan. 11, Margaret McLaughlin, the widow of Ann and George Brown McLaughlin's only son, George, remembered Ann as 'very pleasant, such a nice person and it just came through, she was kind. I couldn't have asked for a nicer mother-in-law. And she loved her grandchildren and her family. They were a big part of her life.' As to what she looked like: 'A good height, she wasn't thin at all, she was a little on the rounded side. People say she 'looked like an Armstrong'.

Further confirmation of Ann Armstrong's pleasant character seems to be found from anyone who knew her, and one written one, kept by Margaret McLaughlin from an article written a month after Ann's death for a Long Island, NY newspaper, expands on that theme: Referring to Ann McLaughlin as 'that gracious lady', Dr. Charles A. Tonsor, a retired high school principal who had visited Ann's Tea Room and later Ann's Hotel every summer for two decades wrote: 'All were treated as if they had been known for years.' He said that prominent guests such as the Earl of Athlone (Governor-General of Canada 1940-46), Anglican Bishops, and John McNair, New Brunswick's premier of the

day, all met 'on the level and carrying out the spirit of friendly association that characterized the hostess.'

'Everything he says about George's mother is very, very true,' said Margaret McLaughlin last week. 'Dr. Tonsor was a little adrift on some of the names (calling the Earl of Athlone the Duke of Athol) but he was right about Ann.'

One modern day Victoria County resident remembered working at Ann's Tea Room in the late 1930s. Irma Irving of North Tilley said she worked in the kitchen in the summer of 1939 when she was sixteen. 'Her daughter got married while I was there and I had to open the door and receive them. I was scared to death,' Mrs. Irving told the Star last week. 'But I had to open the door anyway because she wanted me to. She was nice to work for, I thought she was. She was nice with me I know. I worked in the kitchen, I was cook's helper. They had a man who did the pastries. I don't remember their names of course. It was a nice dining room. I had to butter all the rolls but he chef made them tiny and they'd open just part way. I had to melt the butter and butter them with a brush. It went pretty good once I got started. It was fun I thought.'

Prominent Guests

The fishing, hunting, beautiful scenery as well as the other recreation available in the St. John and Tobique Rivers drew travelers and tourists as well as business people like a magnet. Among the many dozens of prominent names signed in the guest books were those of Donald Fraser, Viscount Alexander of Tunis, (Governor-General 1946-1952), NB's Lieutenant-Governor Larry Clark, Anglican Bishops Richardson and Morehead, many high ranking federal and provincial politicians, and K. C. Irving.

Margaret McLaughlin remembered the industrialist as an Ann's Hotel guest. 'He was a very forceful man in his business life,' she said last week. 'As far as creature comforts were concerned though, I don't think it bothered him one bit. It was a place to stay and he had business.'

In addition to the famous names of business and politics, there were leading sports figures of the day and many well-to-do people from all over eastern North America and Britain. The guest books Margaret McLaughlin keeps cover the 1920s in the first years of Ann's Tea room but are only a fraction of the guest books that must have existed from 1924 to 1956 when Ann's Hotel was forced to close because the new Beechwood Dam was to be on line the next year.

Interviewed by the Telegraph-Journal in December, 1956, Ann McLaughlin, by then almost eighty, said she wouldn't reopen. The hotel had been bought by NB Power because it was on the riverbank as were a dozen other Perth and Andover businesses. The paper quoted her as saying the hotel 'would not open again under her'.

'The sub-basement was right down in the river and there was no way they could protect it so they had to take it out of there,' said Margaret McLaughlin, née Margaret Chapman, who had arrived in Perth in 1954. 'At that time the hotel had been up and was a going concern.' Ann's Tea Room had become Ann's Hotel in the early 1950s and boasted five cabins for guests.

In her book '*Footprints in New Brunswick*' Emily Mae Earle referred to the business. 'Ann's tea Room was a popular hostel. Tourists and travelers always made it

an effort to reach Ann's. During World War II it was used as a military hospital for Company B of the 140th which was stationed in Andover and Perth..." In 1952, Oct. 5, the new Ann's Hotel opened with a banquet. It was popular for private parties, weddings and conventions and the traveling public. 'It's true,' commented Margaret McLaughlin. 'There were a lot of social events that took place in the tea room. It was very much needed. Anniversary parties, wedding receptions, the Dale Carnegie group met there, sports dinners, afternoon teas - Mrs. McLaughlin was very hospitable and she was quiet. She knew just what to do and say.'

Ann Armstrong McLaughlin died in May 1967 in Evanston, Illinois while visiting her daughter Gertrude. Her funeral took place May 26 at the United Baptist Church in Andover. She left having created a good portion of the history of Perth-Andover.