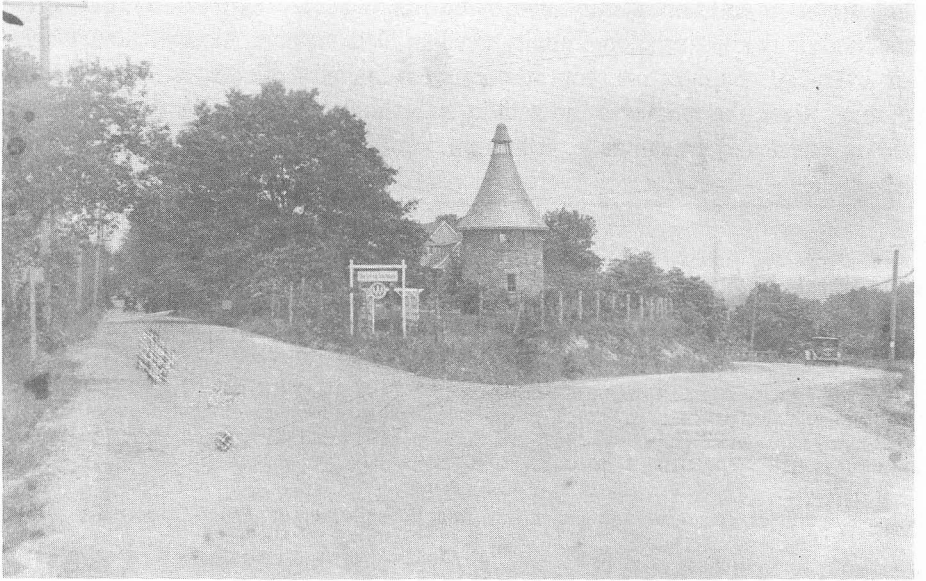


The Little Tea House was a popular gathering place for Arlingtonians. See the story beginning on page 45.



The tower near the Little Tea House, July 4, 1927.

The Little Tea House

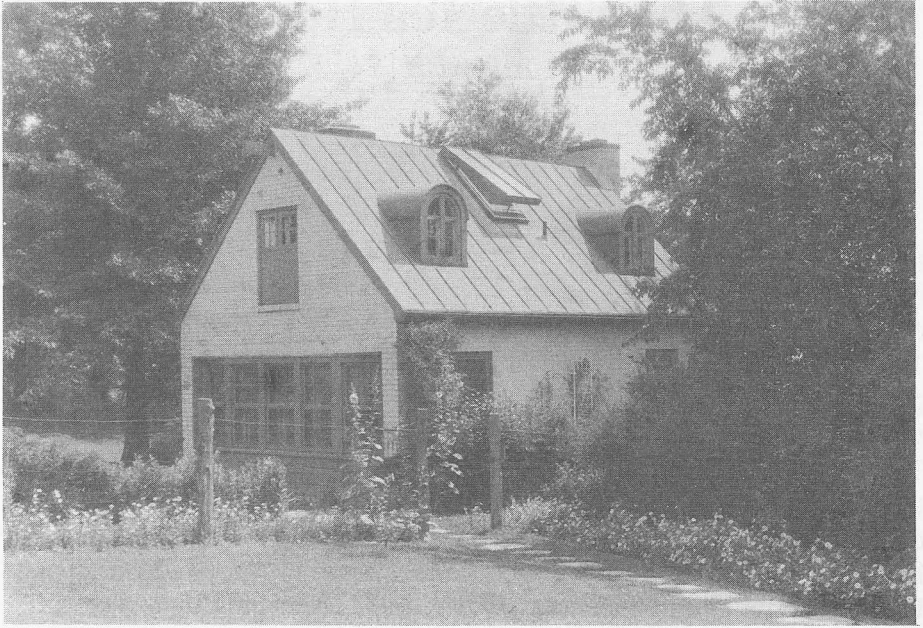
A Revisit

BY SARA COLLINS

Who among our readers remembers the Little Tea House on Arlington Ridge Road not far from our Arlington Historical Museum? Some may remember special events and meals at this popular restaurant; others are familiar with articles, and particularly one by Eleanor Lee Templeman in our *Arlington Historical Magazine* (Vol. 5, No. 2, (1974) pp. 44-46), and others may have learned about the popular dining spot through curiosity about the tower at the end of Arlington Ridge Road. The Little Tea House had its beginnings in the early 1920s (about the time the county had a name change,) when Gertrude L. Crocker acquired some of the undeveloped Philip Campbell property. This site had been part of the Prospect Hill estate of James Roach. Ms. Crocker built the restaurant, home, cottage, tower and other buildings. The Little Tea House served during four decades as a gathering place of notables as well as local residents, and under a later owner became known as



Gray Gables, the family home, in the mid-1920s.



A converted garage, this quaint cottage had a bedroom and bath upstairs and a living room and kitchen on the main level.

Allison's Tea House until it closed in 1962 to make way for an apartment building.

In July the Museum received the kind of letter that gladdens the heart of any historical society. The letter contained four photo images and was from Ms. Ellen C. Puterbaugh of Rustburg, Virginia. She wrote:

...I went to school there in the early 40's and know the area well since my mother Gertrude L. Crocker owned The Little Tea House.

The reason I'm writing this is just to find out one piece of information. Is the Tower still standing or has it been demolished along with our 2 residences and the Tea House?

I have hundreds of these pictures back to when Arlington Ridge Rd was a dirt road.

Would you let me know about the tower?

I have such happy memories of my childhood on those acres. I also am sad to think that those buildings are no longer there. Progress destroys so many lovely things.

Thank you for reading this.

P.S. I sent you the original ink sketch of the tower quite a few years back.

Answering for the society, my response to Ms. Puterbaugh was:

Your letter and postal views of the Little Tea House came to us as a delightful surprise. What a pleasure to hear from the daughter of the renowned Gertrude L. Crocker and to know of your familiarity with our area and, I take it, our building, the former Hume School. Our society has recently compiled a photographic album on Arlington in which the Little Tea House is depicted twice. This book should be available in October. [ed.: November 2000]

Yes, the tower is still standing and serves our community as a reminder of the happy family gatherings, great meals, and important meetings held at this popular restaurant. I recall some memorable receptions and special occasion meals, and it was such a treat to go to the Little Tea House. Enclosed are articles that may be of interest to you: one is a copy of an article from our publication, *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, written by local historian Eleanor Lee Templeman in 1974 and titled, "The Little Tea House;" The other, from the 1930 edition of *The Book of Washington* (Washington Board of Trade), "'The Little Tea House' in Old Virginia," with pictures of the building and garden.

The postcards are marvelous views and we certainly treasure these. I believe the one may be our only view of the interior. You mentioned having hundreds of photos of the area and we hope you will consider having these housed in Arlington where they would be accessible to you, your family and the community. The society has a photographic archives and another



The brick dining area had a beautiful view; the main dining room was to the right.



The main dining room had several windows that served as natural light and a fireplace which added ambiance.

source might be the Community Archives in the Virginia Room of Arlington's Central Library (1015 N. Quincy St., Arlington, Va. 22201). I would dearly love to visit with you, record your recollections in an oral history interview, and see the pictures. May I call you to discuss this? Many thanks for your letter and the postcards. I hope to talk with you soon.

You can imagine our thrill when we soon received a reply from our new-found friend enclosing another four dozen postal views of the restaurant, buildings and area. This reads as follows:

I cannot tell you how surprised and overjoyed I am to get your letter & the enclosed articles. It means so much to me to know the tower is still standing. It was a fun place in which a Ms. Ethel Greenburg lived for many years. My mother charged her rent of \$40.00 a month. A Ms. Mary Backer who was a Kellogg employee rented the 1 bedroom small brick cottage. Upstairs was a large bedroom with skylight, 1 bathroom & a large closet. Downstairs was a large pine panelled living room with fireplace & a small kitchen with eating area. Very charming.

My mother kept adding on to the large house known as Gray Gables. My bedroom was a sleeping porch which I loved. In the end the house had 9 bed rooms & 5 baths with a basement apartment also with a skylight on the east side built in from under ground. My Mother & her architect were always doing new ideas. I have forgotten his name but it is on the sketch (original) I sent to my 6th grade alma mater, HUME. The teacher's name was Virginia Gardner. It was a fun year. I would ride my pony to school & turn him loose to go back home where the chauffeur/gardener would put him back in his paddock. My mother did not drive but she worked every day from 8 am to after the dining room closed for orders at 8 pm. Of course there were menus to plan & bookkeeping to do each night after closing. She was a workaholic in the true sense & an incredibly smart business woman.

Days back then were so much more pleasant than now. The Tea House grounds were so very beautiful. I lived in a world of beauty.

I hope you find some of these postcards interesting & of some value. I also hope this letter has not bored you.

Thank you again for your letter & the articles. They are so very much appreciated.

If there is anything else you would like to know please call me.

This last group of postcards will probably be placed in the Virginia Room of the library due to current storage limitations at the Museum, but it is possible that they could be scanned for use in the Museum. I have made arrangements to visit this very knowledgeable correspondent for an oral history interview for the Virginia Room. I wonder what other such treasures might reside with former Arlingtonians?