

View from the Little Tea House

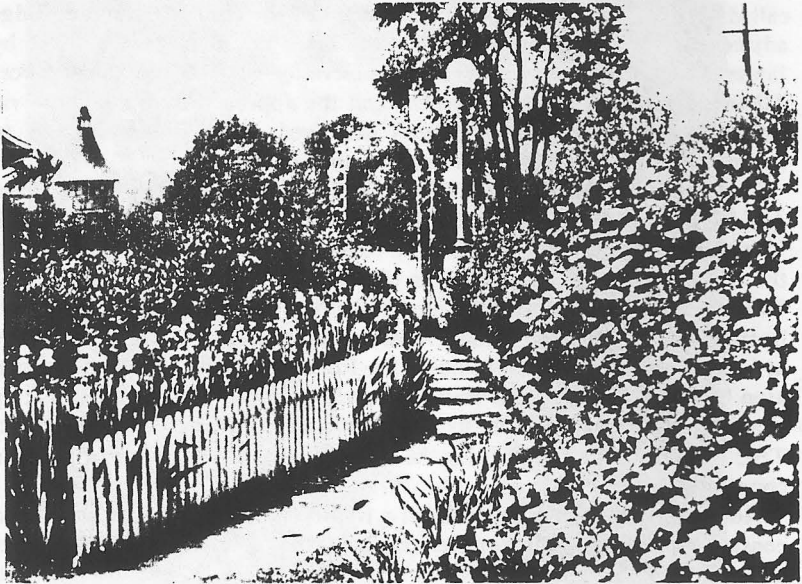
THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE
By
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“Once upon a time” in Arlington, there was a famous restaurant in a tree-shaded garden, with a magnificent view of our Nation’s Capital. It was called THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE. It occupied the crest of Arlington Ridge adjacent to Prospect Hill, the handsome brick mansion built in 1841 by James Roach. Down the north side of the elevation were the remnants of Fort Albany, constructed in 1861 to command the approach to Washington via Columbia Turnpike. All have been destroyed, their sites sacrificed to mounting land values for high-rise apartments.

The view from THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE was matched only by that from ARLINGTON HOUSE, THE ROBERT E. LEE (NATIONAL) MEMORIAL which stands upon the same Arlington Heights, less than a mile and a half to the north. But before the destruction of THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE in 1963 for an apartment site, some of its view had already been restricted to the east, by the erection of the River House Apartments. At the present time, there are at least five gourmet restaurants in the Rosslyn area of Arlington County, atop high-rise motels, office buildings and apartments, with breath-taking views of Washington with its handsome monuments, but none can replace THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE for the sylvan charm of the peaceful Virginia countryside.

How long does it take to establish a tradition; something that we should consider part of our Arlington Heritage? As long as our county has borne its present, proud and distinguished name of ARLINGTON, (previously named Alexandria County). It received its present name in 1920, while THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE was under construction, to open its doors on the first day of the following June. Its popularity was immediate, as it graciously filled a long-existing need of a discriminating clientele of Washingtonians and visitors from all parts of the world, to escape the commercial atmosphere and hectic pace of the city. Here they found Southern hospitality, fine food, and a magnificent panorama.

For more than four decades, THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE remained a world-famous gathering place of distinguished personages. Grandparents of today first visited it in the early 1920’s when they were children, perhaps as guests of their own grandparents for family parties. Over the years, one would find Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Mrs. Morgenthau at lunch, Mrs. Harding entertaining cabinet wives at tea, Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes enjoying dinner. Diplomats and Ambassadors found it ideal for quiet relaxed dinners where world affairs could be discussed. Amelia Earhart would come directly up from Hoover Airport (the present site of the Pentagon



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Lagoon), to discuss plans for an improved and enlarged National Airport for Washington. The passing years witnessed an increasing number of national and international figures besides celebrities in the fields of art, literature, drama and stage. A noted columnist said that probably more important world decisions were consummated over the tables of THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE than in Washington.

The final years of the landmark overlapped the establishment of the Hume School Museum of the Arlington Historical Society, a short distance to the south on the same Arlington Ridge Road. The picturesque little stone wellhouse of THE LITTLE TEA HOUSE is all that remains of the lovely garden, but it will never be erased from the happy memories of those who enjoyed its hospitality.