



## *Steeped in Tradition*

A History of Afternoon Tea (and regional tea room review).

"There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea." – Henry James

By Melody Wren

*A*fternoon tea: The words alone evoke images of relaxation, tranquility, and comfort.

Do you know that tea drinkers tend to have better overall health than non-tea drinkers? According to recent research, tea drinkers tend to eat more vegetables and fruit, smoke less, and exercise more.

Research proves that the social and psychological benefits of having tea are as beneficial to us as the tea itself. When we take the time for tea, we relax, our blood pressure drops, our blood cholesterol level lowers and we actually feel and are healthier. Add a dose of calm atmosphere, the gathering of friends or family, warm conversation, laughter, and afternoon tea becomes the

perfect prescription for health and well-being.

When tea first came to England in 1662, brought by Queen Catherine of Braganza, Portugal, it was only for the wealthy and elite. Queen Catherine started inviting her new-found friends in London over for afternoon tea, where music was often played and conversation was stimulating. As the trend became known, women all over England soon enjoyed proper afternoon teas in private homes, as there was nowhere else for them to go that was socially acceptable. (Remember, the coffee houses were for men only.) It wasn't until 1884 that the first public tea room opened.

Credit for originating afternoon tea,

that delightful hour so treasured by every English person and Anglophile, is given to Anna, Duchess of Bedford (1778-1861). As the 18th century gave way to the 19th, the gap between breakfast and dinner, the two main meals of the day, expanded considerably. Lunch at 1:00 or 1:30, at which servants were not in attendance and everyone had to fend for themselves, was more of a postscript to breakfast than a preface to an 8:00 p.m. dinner. The widening gap without food proved discomforting to the Duchess, who grew tired of her fainting spells and moved the tea ritual from after dinner to before.

At first, around 1840, she took afternoon tea in the secrecy of her boudoir, gradually inviting a few friends

to join her in "containing the pangs of hunger." The idea was captivating, and soon the novel social event was widely imitated. By mid-century, afternoon tea had moved out of the boudoir and into the sitting room. The simple bread and butter first served with tea was soon augmented by a range of foods.

The first pot of tea was usually prepared in the kitchen and brought into the sitting room in a silver pot, then switched to one of fine porcelain which matched the cups, saucers and plates. The second pouring was most often done by the hostess, with the addition of hot water held in a silver-plated kettle, heated underneath by a spirit lamp. A quilted tea cozy, made of silk or velvet, kept the teapot warm. The tea hour usually began at 4:00 or 4:30 and lasted just that long – one hour.

#### High and Low Tea

As afternoon tea was taken at low tables that rested beside guest's armchairs, it was at one time also called "low tea." It had traditionally been a very elegant meal, served on a table laid with a pretty cloth, the best porcelain or silver, and very dainty food.

High tea, by contrast, is a hearty, filling and nourishing meal that originated during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Workers were hungry when they returned home after a long, hard day in the factories, mines or workshops, so high tea was the main meal of the day. It did not change very much during those days, and usually consisted of savoury dishes, such as meat pies, cold meat, Welsh rarebit and salads, followed by generous loaves of home-baked bread with cheeses, pickles

and jams. Then came the cakes: fruit loaves, fruit cakes, sponges, pastries and biscuits. It is still a popular meal in many parts of Britain, especially for families with school-aged children who often need a filling meal once the school day is over. Tea rooms all over Britain are filled with parents and school children after school is out for the day.

If you enjoy a sharing a traditional afternoon tea with a friend, the Prince Edward County area has some delightful tea rooms to choose from.

#### Amelia's Tea Room

Ameliasburgh Historical Museum  
517 County Road 19, Ameliasburgh:  
613-968-9678; open May to  
September.

The highlight of this museum is Amelia's Tea Room which offers breakfast,

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lunch and homemade pies. It is run by volunteers and open only during special events on site. With wood floors, mismatched wooden tables and chairs, and pioneer artifacts decorating the walls, it makes for a rustic tea room.

**The Marshmallow Bakery and Tea Shop**

260 Main Street, Bloomfield  
613-393-1087

Hours: 8:30 to 5:00, closed Tuesdays

Tucked off of the main street in Bloomfield, this bakery and tea shop is located at the front of the Bloomfield Carriage House. The aroma of pastries baking, a wall of glass canisters filled with teas, bay windows, original woodwork and original wood flooring is a feast for the senses in this charming, delightful tea shop. The bakery offers artisan breads, ex-

perly done pastries, scones and a selection of over 120 loose-leaf teas, which makes this a worthwhile stop. Two-hour tea tastings are available for parties of six or more, by appointment only. Reservations are recommended.

Their teas and tea accessories are available at their online shop: [www.bloomfieldcarriagehouse.com/catalog](http://www.bloomfieldcarriagehouse.com/catalog)

**Duchess of Montrose Tea Room**

Montrose Inn  
1725 Old Highway 2 - R.R. # 2

Belleville, Ontario K8N 4Z2

Telephone: 613-966-1028

Toll free #: 1-866-466-6876

Website: [montroseinn.ca](http://montroseinn.ca)

Open: Thurs, Friday, and Sunday,  
12:00 till 4:00 by reservation only.

The stately Montrose Inn was built in 1916 as one of the best examples of Antebellum architecture in Ontario.

As visitors catch a glimpse of the magnificent mansion through the regal gates and stone fencing, they are lured to the sprawling grounds and verandas overlooking the Bay of Quinte. The beautiful wood-paneled tea room has cabinets bursting with china. The peaceful, elegant surroundings transport guests to another era. The impressive selection of delicate tea sandwiches, followed by a huge listing of squares, tarts, cookies, cakes and meringues, make it difficult to choose. Scones are served with preserves and Devon cream. An abundant collection of loose-leaf teas is available.

**The Apple Crate Tea Room & Café**

46 Prince Edward St. Brighton  
613-475-6565

Hours: Monday to Saturday, 8:30 to 4:00, Sundays 11:00 – 2:00

[www.applecratetearoom.com](http://www.applecratetearoom.com)



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This well-known tea room on the apple route has a bright, cheerful décor with whimsical paintings of apple trees on the walls. Antique tables and chairs lend a comfortable overall feel that, combined with the fabulous homemade food, keeps this tea room busy. Bread, scones and desserts are baked on the premises. Sandwiches, soups and salads round out the down-home afternoon tea menu. An impressive selection of loose-leaf teas is available as well as apple cider.

**Donna's Country Garden, Gift Shop and Tea Room**

522 Rosebush Road, R.R. # 3,  
Frankford, Quinte West 613-395-3231

www.quinte.on.ca/donnasgarden  
Reservations required. Open Thursdays and Saturdays in July and August and Saturdays in September.

After walking through the remarkable gardens along the shore of the Trent River, take tea in the gazebo, the four seasons room, or on the dock, and enjoy views of the river or the nearby fields. The morning menu includes hot-from-the-oven scones, baked with seasonal fruit, served with homemade jam and Devonshire cream. Cakes baked with local fruit and cream are also served along with teapot-shaped shortbreads. Elegantly served on silver, a special afternoon tea always includes tiny sandwiches, shortbreads and cakes baked with local fruit. The sumptuous cushions, delightful wicker furniture and floral décor make it so cozy and inviting, you will want to curl up, enjoy the elegantly served tea, mouthwatering home-baked goods and stay for a while.



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