A House named "Tearmann"
96 years at 46 Bonaventure Avenue, St. John's, NL

The Neighbourhood

Georgestown, St. John's first suburb, began to be developed in the early 1800s, starting in the Hayward Avenue/Fleming Street area, followed by subdivisions in the Hayward/Mullock Ave and Catherine/William St. areas. The suburb eventually extended the "Old Town" of St. John's from Military Road north to Empire Avenue, including Bonaventure Avenue.

46 Bonaventure

Mary (Minnie) Aylward McGrath, prominent Water Street business woman, had the house built (for $5,000.00!) in 1917. Her businesses included the Tremont Hotel, one of the City's fashionable hotels in the late 1800's and early 1900's, and the nearby Osborne House.
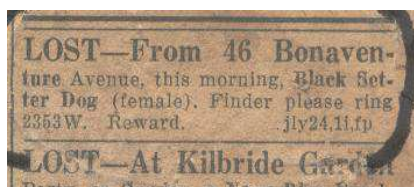
At the time of its construction, 46 Bonaventure was on the northern fringe of the city. Belvedere Orphanage, convent and farm lay across the field to the west and development was proceeding to the east, but land to the north was largely rural and agricultural.

20s ~Mary McGrath
Jim's mother

Mary was the third wife of James Francis McGrath (1859 – 1902), politician and Governor of the Newfoundland Penitentiary. They were married in 1896 and had three children; Margaret, born in 1897, who died of polio at the age of nine, Elizabeth Anne (Betty), born in 1900, who married Lawyer James O'Neil Conroy and later became Newfoundland's second female lawyer, and James Michael Francis (1902-1975), medical doctor and politician, who raised his family, first in the town of St. Mary's, then at 44 Bonaventure Avenue.

Mary finished rearing her children at 46 Bonaventure and remained there until her death in 1942 (in her late years, the dining room became her bedroom). Her daughter Betty lived for a time next door with her in-laws at 50 Bonaventure Avenue (now home of the

Evening Telegram, July 24, 1935

Presentation Sisters). Following the death of her husband James in 1931, Betty, at the early age of 33, passed her law exams and took over his law office. She then lived for a short time at 46 Bonaventure with her two children, Charlie and Margie.

Both Charlie and Margie would distinguish themselves as missionaries abroad (and Margie continues to do so). Charlie became a Franciscan Reverend and served in South America for six years. He was Mayor of Monsefú in northern Peru before his untimely death at age 38 in a motor vehicle accident, in 1966. Margie has served the under-

privileged as a Religious of the Sacred Heart Sisters in Uganda and Kenya, remarkably, since 1971 through very trying times that have seen repressive regimes and civil wars. At age 82, she has vivid memories of 46 Bonaventure Avenue, despite having lived there for only a few of her early years.

Margie's first cousin Margaret (Conroy) Henley lived at 46 Bonaventure during WWII with her three small children while her husband Ted was serving overseas. Their youngest child, Peter, died of tuberculosis during this time. After living in Gander for a period, they returned to St. John's, bought 44 Bonaventure from the McGraths and finished rearing their family there.

46 Bonaventure was sold to Robert and Douglas Templeton in 1947, and they lived there for the next 28 years, rearing their 4 daughters. During this time, Robert was co-owner of R.A. Templeton's Ltd, the long established Water Street business. He was also an avid gardener and collector of rare books on Newfoundland and Labrador, some of which were unfortunately burnt in a fire at the Water Street premises.

The Templetons sold the property to Rosalie Fowler and Ian MacDonald, Memorial University Professor, in the mid-1970s. Ian died on Christmas Day, 1978 and Rosalie subsequently moved to Corner Brook. In 1979, she sold the property to Dennis and Susan Knight.

Seventeen years earlier, in September, 1962, Susan (Dyer) Knight was preparing to move to Montreal to attend the Royal Victoria Hospital School of Nursing. The evening before her departure, her friend Kathryn Templeton hosted a surprise going away party for her at 46 Bonaventure. In 1979, Susan returned to the house as the owner.

Over the next 34 years, Susan and Dennis raised their family in the house. They named it *Tearmann*, Irish for Refuge. Dennis operated a consulting business there and Susan went back to school, starting at Memorial University, then St. Paul's University in Minnesota and finishing with her doctorate at the University of London. She was a music teacher, founded Shallaway and Festival 500 and, in 2012, was appointed the Chancellor of Memorial University.

Ninety-six years after its construction, Mary McGrath's creation stands proud within an extended neighbourhood which includes The Rooms, Memorial University and the historic downtown. It has been a refuge for six families and stands ready for the next chapter.

D. Knight
26 May, 2013