

THE WINDERMERE GAZETTE

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE VILLAGE?

- **Windermere House** - Lots of things happening at WH. Stop in for a drink or meal at one of their lovely dining options.
 - **Windermere Pub & Patio** - Lunch & Dinner - patio open weather permitting. Reservations on Open Table
 - Until June 15th - 12pm - 10pm, weekdays
 - Weekends - 12pm - 11pm
 - After June 15th - 12pm - 11pm weekdays, Weekends 12pm - midnight
 - Live music - Fri.&Sat. 7-10pm
 - **The Rosseau**, upscale dining, beautiful setting 7 days/week - 5-9pm. As of June 26th - 7 days/week - 12 - 9pm
 - **High Tea** returns June 28th - a timeless tradition
 - **The Trading Post** - Artisanal goods & produce, charcuterie, souvenirs and more.
 - **Spa at Windermere** - Daily 9am - 6pm
 - **Windermere Marina** - Thur., Fri, Sat. 9am - 5pm.
 - **Windermere Golf Club** - Open to the public until June 25th. Open to all for lunch and dinner throughout the season at **Iron and Strings Restaurant**. - "**Wing Night**" - every Thursday with live entertainment.
 - **Windermere Garden Centre** Mon.-Fri. - 8 - 5, Sat - 9 - 5, Sun 10 - 4
 - **Taylor Farms** - Mon - Fri, 7am - 6pm. Sat. 9am - 5pm. Closed Sun. Great Cappuccino and Lattes at the cafe!
More details at taylorfarms.ca/market.
Or email strawberries@taylorfarms.ca
- **Windermere Lions Club** is offering a bottle drop off for your recyclables - this is part of their fundraising for all the great things they do for the community and beyond. Drop off at Taylor Farms.
- Ice Cream Scoopers and gas attendants WANTED**
@ the Windermere Marina!
A summer of fun!! Must be 16 years old.
E-mail Sherry @ windermere@muskokamarinas.ca
- **Christ Church Windermere** - services Sunday at 10:30am. Welcome all.
Strawberry Social - June 27th - 1 - 4pm
 - **Windermere United Church** - services Sunday at 10:30am. Check out "Upcoming Events" for Taize & meditation schedule.

The Lady of the Lakes: Mary Elizabeth Aitken and the Legacy of Windermere House

(Excerpts from *Windermere House* by Susan Pryke and with the help of AI)

Perched on the shimmering shores of Lake Rosseau in Ontario's Muskoka region, Windermere House has stood as a symbol of gracious hospitality since Thomas Aitken first built it in 1870. What began as a modest Victorian boarding house grew, across generations of family stewardship, into one of Canada's most celebrated grand resorts. But it was Thomas's granddaughter, Mary Elizabeth Aitken, who would prove to be the most visionary — and enduring — of the family's custodians. When Mary Elizabeth's mother died in 1950 and her father followed just two years later in 1952, she found herself the sole heir and proprietor of the sprawling estate at just the moment history demanded bold leadership. Many of Muskoka's historic grand hotels were closing their doors in the post-war years, unable to adapt to the changing tastes and expectations of a new generation of travellers. Mary Elizabeth refused to follow them into decline.

She never married, famously declaring herself "married to the job." Locals and guests alike remember her as a commanding, impeccably dressed presence who was almost never seen without her two standard poodles trailing close behind. That spirit of quiet authority defined her four decades at the helm. Her first major battle was social as much as it was commercial. In mid-century Muskoka, the sale of alcohol was a deeply contentious issue that divided communities and sparked fierce public debate. Recognizing that affluent, modern tourists expected the amenities of world-class hospitality, Mary Elizabeth navigated the considerable social pushback and successfully secured a liquor license for Windermere House — a move that immediately elevated the resort's appeal and profitability, and helped distinguish it from competitors still clinging to the past.

She was equally forward-thinking when it came to accommodations. Understanding that postwar guests no longer wanted cramped lodge rooms with shared hallway bathrooms, she launched an ambitious expansion: The Terrace, a contemporary building housing ten luxury bed-sitting suites. In a touch that blended national pride with high-end hospitality, she named each suite after a Canadian province, creating a sense of place that resonated with guests from coast to coast. Mary Elizabeth also recognized that Muskoka's strict seasonality was a commercial limitation, not an inevitability. Historically a two-month summer destination, the region offered little to draw visitors in cooler months. She addressed this by developing Settlers Bay, a cluster of winterized efficiency units built on an adjacent property. The initiative was years ahead of its time, laying the groundwork for the multi-season tourism model that defines Muskoka today.

UPCOMING EVENTS

If you have a community event to announce, let us know!

Muskoka Arts and Crafts at the Village Hall!

Open Weekends until the end of June, 10am - 4pm and then 6 days a week for July and August.

June 17th - Wing Night (every Thursday) - WG&CC

June 27th - "Strawberry Social" at Christ Church Windermere, 1-4pm at the church

July 9th @ 7:30pm @ Windermere United Church - Mindfulness Meditation in the traditions of Thich Nhat Hanh (also August 6th & Sept 6th)

July 13th - "Grand opening" of the Village Playground - All are welcome!! **Name the Bear contest...**more details coming soon!

July 15th @ 7:30pm @ Windermere United Church "Peace and Presence in Taize Tradition" - (also August 12th & Sept 16th)

August 7 - 16

The Muskoka Chautauqua Festival A great line up of music, art, literary and kids events - watch for their flyers. Stay tuned for additional details here....(a few of the events...)

August 8th - CHOIR! CHOIR! CHOIR!

August 9th - Caroline Marie Brooks

August 10 - Toronto All-Star Big Band

August 11 - Maggie's Wake

August 12 - Candlelit Taize

August 13 - The Muskoka Philharmonic Orchestra

August 14 - Beverly, Charlie & Friends

August 15th - Northern Lights Steel Orchestra

August 16th - Family Fun Day

June 21st and once per month for the summer, our two churches will be holding joint worship services - to be held @ Christ Church.

July 26th - The churches are holding a joint outdoor worship service at the Wharf.

Submissions, content, or to subscribe
windermeregazette@icloud.com

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Police - Non-Emergency 705-645-2211

Fire Department 705-765-3156

District of Muskoka Office 705-645-2100

By-Law Office Township 705-765-3156

Wharf Master 705-769-3611

Windermere Golf Club 705-769-3381

Windermere Marina 705-769-3661

Windermere House 705-769-3611

Taylor Farms 705-769-2368

Windermere Garden Centre 705-769-3238

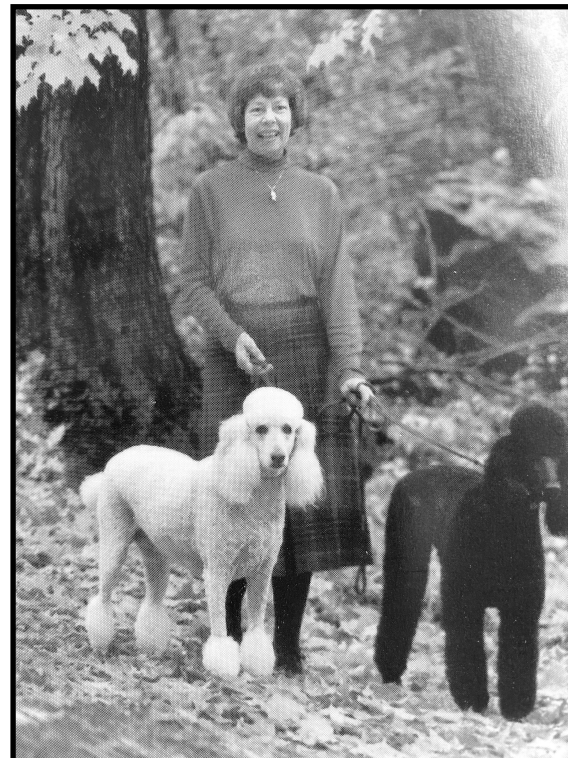
Archives windermereandareaarchives@gmail.com

Lions Club windermere@ar2lions.ca

Perhaps her most distinctive contribution, however, was cultural. Mary Elizabeth transformed Windermere House from a sports-and-leisure retreat into a hub for the fine arts, curating professional art exhibitions in the hotel's grand main hallways. The shows drew prominent Canadian artists, urban collectors, and socialites to the shores of Lake Rosseau, giving the resort an aesthetic identity that no competitor could replicate. Hart House at U of T would have had a dormant professional kitchen over the summer when students dispersed, making its chefs essentially available for seasonal hire. Mary Elizabeth tapped into the pipeline of Hart House at U of T, and hired the chefs for the summer, a shrewd move that brought city-caliber culinary talent to a resort catering to guests who expected sophisticated dining, while the chefs got summer employment. It would fit well with the broader picture of her as someone who was, as the sources describe, university educated and astute in business management — someone who knew how to leverage Toronto connections to elevate the hotel's standards

When Mary Elizabeth finally sold Windermere House in 1981, she had shepherded it through nearly three decades of transformation — from a Victorian boarding house into a premier, year-round destination worthy of its setting. She passed away in 1987, the last member of the founding family to have operated the hotel.

Her legacy endures in more than just the resort's walls. A memorial window in the nearby Windermere United Church



permanently honors Mary Elizabeth and the Aitken family for the indelible mark they left on Muskoka cottage country. In a region built on summer idylls and natural beauty, she understood that lasting success required vision, courage, and an unwillingness to be left behind — qualities that made her, in every sense, the true Lady of the Lakes.