



A COUNTRY MANOR FOR  
*Everheart*

History embodies everything  
about Everheart Country Manor on  
Queenston Street in Queenston

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRIS MILLS

An award-winning renovation turned this historic gem in Queenston into Everheart Country Manor, a bed-and-breakfast on the Niagara River. Its front exterior is true to the 1905 original; its charm is highlighted with Christmas decorations.



**P**OISED ON A TWO-acre rise of land dotted by centuries-old trees almost in the shadow of the Niagara Escarpment, the construction of Everheart dates to the turn of the last century, but its history extends well before that.

Queenston dates back to about the same time as its close neighbour, Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), which dates back to the 1776 American Revolution. That's when a group of guerrilla fighters called Butler's Rangers elected to remain loyal to British King George III and moved their families to Niagara. It later became the capital of Upper Canada before it

was burned to the ground when Americans withdrew just before the winter of 1814. This was described in the Summer 2014 issue of *Niagara Escarpment Views*.

Upper Canada and Queenston in particular were settled by people like The Honourable Robert Hamilton who operated the Queenston docks, which in the 19th century was the single most important land connection to every traded good that came into and out of Upper Canada (Ontario) and points west.

One of his four sons, Alexander, built himself a palatial example of Classical Revivalism and Picturesque combined. It's now called Willowbank Estates where

students learn to repair and maintain heritage homes in the materials and style they were originally constructed. It still stands on a magnificent crest of hill overlooking the town on the edge of the Niagara River.

According to records from the Toronto Archives, an old Presbyterian church was constructed on a portion of the property about 1857, which in turn was torn down for a house constructed in 1875 by Major James Sheppard.

In 1905, Sheppard built the Queen Anne Asymmetrical Victorian style home at 137 Queenston Street for his three spinster daughters. School pictures dating to this era show about seven Sheppard children, presumably not

the spinster daughters, in front of the original stone Laura Secord School.

They lived there until 1936. Rumours are they also had property in the southern U.S., from where they returned one year to find the home invaded by vandals and heartbreakingly damaged. They virtually abandoned it and never returned.

Thus opened the door for the family of Aubrey Dickson to purchase the home for one dollar (\$1) in 1950, putatively because he married into the Sheppard family. School pictures dating to this era show about seven Sheppard children and a half dozen Dicksons.

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▼ With its key position on the Niagara River, Queenston was a vital location for trade in the 19th century. Everheart is situated close to the river.



In 1905,  
Sheppard built  
the Queen Anne  
Asymmetrical  
Victorian style  
home at 137  
Queenston St.

► At twilight, Everheart  
is welcoming with cheery  
Christmas lights.

▼ The front entrance room has period  
pieces and flooring combined with  
modern spotlights and floor tile.





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Another occupant held it from 1985 to 1988 at which point it was purchased by the Arnold Van Vliet family to home school their seven children. They undertook modifications for the home, including the addition of an enormous main floor classroom in the rear portion, plus an indoor swimming pool.

**Perfectionist Renovation**

But the house had become tired after more than 100 years. So in 2002 when Joyce and Doug King acquired it, they faced some serious renovations. However, they also knew exactly what they were going to do with it: a bed and breakfast called Everheart.

“For a home that’s ever in your heart,” says Joyce.

They hired a father/son team of German carpenters/contractors from Welland, who launched into every floor, every wall, and every moulding.

“Perfectionists,” says Doug with only a hint of exasperation. “They showed up here five days a week for two years.”

The inside of every exterior wall was removed in order to install insulation. Then the interior walls were removed in order to turn the multitude of tiny rooms into larger modern-sized versions.

On the second floor, for instance, five bedrooms, a storage area and single bathroom were torn out entirely to make room for just two large bedrooms and two bathrooms.

◀ (Top) A gas fireplace replaced the old wood-burning version in the main-level living area overlooking a lovely garden patio that is buried in snow over winter.

◀ (Bottom) The main-level living area also looks onto the rear in-ground pool and side patio.



▲ Willowbank Estates is down the road from Everheart, on a hill at the edge of Niagara River, overlooking Queenston.



▲ Laura Secord School was attended by children of the man who built the nearby Queen Anne house that became Everheart.



▲ Signs of history enrich the village of Queenston, home of Laura Secord's original 1813 homestead and William Lyon Mackenzie's 1824 Printery.



▲ An original stone cottage with a plaque dating it to 1810, still stands down the street from Everheart.

## “We didn’t want to put up anything that didn’t pay respect to the house.”

A large attic at the top of a narrow staircase became a third bedroom, bathroom and sitting area with a delightful little dining room in the home’s front turret. The rear main level classroom became Doug and Joyce’s master bedroom.

They made one concession to comfort by replacing all radiators with forced-air gas and central air conditioning.

Throughout the process, Doug, a stone mason who operated a successful gravestone business in Etobicoke, commuted to Toronto every week and stayed in a little apartment over his business. Joyce made more than her share of executive decisions in his stead; many of them ensured the house would stay true to its historic pedigree.

“We’re actually sitting on three lots here,” says Joyce, who monitored and executed every step of the way. “We had to buy the southern lot to save the two acres intact.”

The dilapidated stone wall across the front of the property had to be completely reconstructed, but the iron railing was replaced. Joyce says they contracted a company to replicate it exactly. Parts of the original rail can be found in the garden, pathway and trellis.

“We couldn’t replace the driveway gates because we had no picture record of it,” says Joyce. “We didn’t want to put up anything that didn’t pay respect to the house.”

### Award-Winning

Since the renovation, they’ve filled the home with antiques and period furniture from their families, including a grandfather clock. They accede

that pretty well only the outer walls and floors remain original. Mind you, they also hired a Welland wood finisher to manufacture a rotary bit to match the 10-inch baseboards.

The Kings’ renovation won not just an Ontario 2005 Outstanding Contribution to Heritage Preservation Award, but also the Peter J. Stokes Heritage Commendation in Recognition of the Preservation of the site.

Situated on the same road as the original William Lyon Mackenzie Printery dating to around 1824, an original stone cottage dating to 1810, and Laura Secord’s original 1813 homestead means something.

Joyce says “In autumn 2012, they had a re-enactment of the battle of Queenston Heights.” This is where Lieutenant-General Sir Isaac Brock died in battle; the re-enactment included the ceremonial return of Brock’s funeral wagon to Fort George in NOTL. “I watched those soldiers in their uniforms, the ladies in their long dresses, and the wagons and horses, then they started playing. And the sight and sounds gave me goose humps, then tears. It was pretty amazing.”

History, especially the kind you have to work to protect, will do that. **NEV**

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*For a Queenston resident’s description of her village, see Jane Calver’s Aug. 14 essay and photos at [NEViews.ca](http://NEViews.ca).*