

Tea Time at the Alden Log Cabin Tea Room & the Tea Room Craze in America

"Afternoon Tea: Sandwiches, Cake, Tea or Coffee, served every day from 3 to 5 pm. 30 cents. Here you can buy refreshments of excellent quality and variety at reasonable prices. The Cabin is a duplicate of the original John Alden Cabin." - Alden Tea Room Menu, 1925

When manager Ruth A. Chandler opened the door of the quaint Log Cabin Tea Room, built in 1924 by Charles Alden, she welcomed customers touring the famous Pilgrim family home, a few yards away, and many others. Her menu featured "home cooking" and offered luncheon along with chicken and lobster dinners in addition to afternoon tea. Servers dressed in Pilgrim attire waited the tables. A massive stone hearth dominated the back wall of the building, which was furnished with antiques, while lanterns hung around the room and on the porch added to the "colonial" décor. At the counter, guests could purchase bags of home roasted peanuts as souvenirs.

Tea rooms were often owned, managed and patronized by women and played a role in encouraging women into business. As with the Alden shop, they often featured colonial themes. The Alden tea room was one of hundreds of similar establishments popping up around America in the 1920s, sparked by the arrival of the automobile, Prohibition (1920-1933), boosting eateries serving non alcoholic refreshments, and the beginnings of the women's independence movement.

There were twelve tea rooms operating in Duxbury, including the Alden's, according to Margery L. MacMillan, author of *Stopping Places: Along Duxbury Roads*. Dotting Tremont, Washington, out to High Street in the west and Bumblebee Lane to the south, these businesses – many run in family homes - "added to the pleasure of summer guests and were a genteel way for ladies to add to the family's income," she noted. Along with tea, there were gifts for sale. On Harrison Street, Josephine Hartwell Shaw operated a very successful tea room called the "Three Acres" overlooking a pond where guests enjoyed their tea from screened porches. Described as "frugal," Mrs. Shaw once chastised her waitresses for helping themselves to a piece of chocolate cake with green icing that had gone out to three or four different tables and returned untouched, MacMillan recounted.

The Alden's Log Cabin Tea Room flourished into the 1930s and was later used by the Alden Kindred for meals during annual reunions. It became a caretaker's cottage in the 1960s and was partially demolished in 1971 because of termites.

There will be a display about the Alden Log Cabin tea room on exhibit during the 2018 season. For more information about Alden House Historic Site or upcoming programs, please visit www.alden.org.