

Nellie Randall

1892-1983

"Nellie Randall was born in Motherwell, Scotland in 1892, a suburb of Glasgow. She came from a large Catholic family. When asked why she came to America at age 17, she mentioned having to clean sooty ceilings in an older sister's house. She also mentioned



the dust-catching ruffles women wore on the bottom of their long, black skirts. She landed in America in 1909 and settled in Homer, New York. She married Leo Randall but this marriage lasted only 6 months before Leo wandered off.

Her first restaurant was in a storefront in downtown Homer. Cars were new at this time and driven by the wealthy carriage trade, who were her customers. Route 11 ran north and south through Homer, a highway from Canada to Florida. As years went by Nellie's restaurant moved into what she called Braeside Inn, a beautiful colonial building. It had once been known as "Wisdom's Gate" because

its proprietor ran his tavern as a place where liquor was not sold.

When World War II broke out, Nellie went to Washington, DC to see what she could do to help out. She was put in charge of the dining services for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Possibly, when Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt had traveled to Skaneateles, New York summers to visit his relatives, they had stopped in at Nellie's restaurant in Homer, NY.

Imagine serving President Franklin D. Roosevelt, General George Marshall, Admiral Nimetz, and probably Generals Eisenhower and McArthur all at the same table. She told many stories for all of us on her experiences with these men of American history. One of Nellie's proudest possessions was a large photograph of President Roosevelt which was autographed by F.D.R. to Nellie Randall. I was talking to a close friend of Nellie's last



night and found out that someone had asked Nellie for this memento she cherished so much, and that Nellie gave it to them. Now I guess that this experience of giving away something that she did cherish so much was a good example of the life that Nellie led.

Even though she spent most of her life here in America, she never lost her Scottish brogue. It was always a pleasure to listen to Nellie as she told you a story about any of the many great happenings in her life. She would talk on with her delightful brogue, gaining in intensity and with a twinkle in her eyes, and a smile on her face. Many a time when we have been together at the high rise buildings, I would find that all of the sudden everyone had become quiet to listen to Nellie as she told a story."

Nellie ran restaurants in several places in Homer and Tully before WW II. After the war she ran a small restaurant called The Penguin in Skaneateles, New York. This was a small lunch counter type of place with only 12 stools. She worked with her partner, Mary Schemerhorn, and served lunch and dinner. There were generally 10 or 12 people in line behind all the stools, according to a 1950's benefactor, probably the public relations director for Carrier Corporation of Syracuse. He printed up a cookbook of Nellie's recipes, each of which included verbatim directions. Nellie also had a loose leaf notebook of recipes from which she cooked. Nellie closed up The Penguin in 1958, when her partner, Mary Schermerhorn, died. She moved back to Scotland in the late 1950s or early 1960s. However, near Glasgow the air was so polluted that she was advised by her doctor to move away. She returned to America. At times she stayed with her sister in law, Anna Randall Erhard at the south end of Skaneateles Lake. They both often spent winters at the home of their niece, Katherine White in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Nellie spent most of her final 10 years in senior citizen housing at 51 Port Watson Street, Cortland, New York. She lived to be 90 years old.

She had one story about life in the World War II White House that I recall. One day she was consulting about menus in the Map Room, with Mac who was in charge of the Map Room. She said to him, "I really should not be in here." He replied, "Never mind, Nellie; if you were a spy, we would surely know it by now." Nellie's 90th birthday was celebrated by her friends at a restaurant in Cortland, The Community. A telegram came from an old friend from WW II days, Edie Jones. Edie had been Admiral Leahy's secretary during WW II. Edie congratulated Nellie on her 90th and signed her telegram as follows:

Grace Kirby, Polly Draper, General Dean, Jessie Dowdy, Mac from the Map Room, Jennie Pratt, Herbert Smellie, and in Absentia: General Arnold, General Marshall, Admiral King, Admiral Leahy, Duke of Windsor, Winston Churchill, Frank and Eleanor, Edie Jones."

Nellie was a beloved local figure who kept her community, and famously her country, well fed. Nellie's table was always open, and her service to this country will always be remembered with a fond smile and a full stomach.

"Serving the Military Brass: In charge of Dining Room for the Joint Chiefs of Staff", by Catherine Frail published in Cortland County Historical Society Publication No. 28, 2018, with the first five paragraphs from the homily at Nellie Randaall's funeral, by Deacon Richard Dwyer.