

My husband was about to leave for work. “Oh, by the way,” he said, “a guy will be stopping by today to assess the house because I am changing insurance companies.”

“No problem, I’m home all day.”

Sure enough, a young man stopped by, introducing himself as a historian. When houses are this old, he informed me, they usually send a historian because it’s being assessed for replacement value. He spent most of the day walking around evaluating the house. By about 4 p.m. he had finished his work, found me in the kitchen, and asked if I would be interested in knowing anything about the house.

I wasn't particularly interested since we didn't purchase it for historic value. We bought the 6500 sq. ft. house hopefully to accommodate my husband's mother and her sister in England when they needed care in their old age. We thought that 20-25 years hence, we might be able to give them a whole floor.

He told me that as a historian, he had found a number of very interesting details. I was somewhat intrigued to learn that my house was one of the few in the city with two grand staircases.

He explained that a home's first floor has a "grand staircase", but usually the second-floor staircase changes in size and materials and most often is used by the servants. Our two staircases were identical, and that was unusual he said, and it told him "how" the people in the house had lived.

He went on to describe how two of the third-floor bedrooms at some time had been one ...a dancing room!

Needless to say, I was flabbergasted, mostly because in our renovations we had made certain there was no remaining evidence of that. He was correct that there had been an arched doorway between the rooms, though we had closed over the arch meticulously. He was very good at his work!

He ended by advising me that if I had any further interest in the history of the house I should visit the Manitoba Archives, as it

was listed in their inventory...thank-you Mr. Historian!

Unbeknownst to Mr. Historian, for the last couple of years I had been attempting to write a fact/fictional book about the house. The factual part would be the physical trappings of the house itself, along with silly little stories I might conjure up for the fiction part.

Now knowing where to look up information, I took myself down to the Archives in hopes of simply finding a picture of the original house. I was brought a 5" x 7" card with the address of 5 East Gate at the top, the name of the architect, the owner and the date the house was built...disappointing that there was no other information, but amusing for sure.

As it turned out, the name of the owner of the house was Thomas Ryan.

I actually laughed a bit when reading the card because as luck would have it, I had named the owner of the house in my book, "Thomas"! How cute was that!

At dinner that evening I told the family the story of my daytime adventure to the Archives. We all laughed and thought it was a sweet coincidence and a cute story to relate in the future.

These events occurred within the first five years of our being in

the house, 1997 – 2002.

Many years later I was still plodding along on the book endeavour - we were so heavily involved in renovations, work, raising kids, and just trying to keep our entertainment life afloat whenever possible - when one year in the beginning of December I was pre-cooking for a dinner party, and my doorbell rang. I went to find a female stranger in the doorway, holding a ceramic house that looked very much like my house. My first odd feeling was that the lady was about to give this to me, but no...she wished to come in to chat.

As we sat in my living room she looked around, and then asked was it possible her family might have a tour of our house? I agreed to that, but wondered why. Her husband was “obsessed” with this house, she replied, because his grandfather, Thomas Ryan, had built it. This was a surprise, but of course I knew it was so, after my visit to the Archives.

Since I was in the middle of preparing for a party I suggested we give her family a tour another day. She agreed to call me and make arrangements, which she did, but she did not come by.

A couple of years passed, and again Christmas was upon us. I was talking with my daughter in Calgary, when the doorbell rang. My husband went to answer, and when he returned to the

family room about half an hour later, I was off the phone.

He asked me, did I remember coincidentally naming the fictional builder of the house in my book “Thomas”, the actual name of the man who had built the house?

“Yes, of course I remember.”

Had I named other people in the book? What name had I given to Thomas’ s wife?

I laughed, “I can’t believe you are going there! What do you think, that I have something going on with the house? Is this a serious question?”

I explained to him my process in naming the characters. First off, in choosing “Thomas”, I had been writing about his running home at lunchtime, imagining that he passed two elderly ladies on the street who were strolling and carrying parasols. As he ran, one of them bid him, “Good Day” and it was at that moment I realized I had not yet given his character a name.

In that instant, imagining I was that elderly lady, I had said out loud, “Good Day, Thomas” (cringing slightly the very moment it came out of my mouth, because I’m not really fond of the name “Thomas”) but as I was using Word, could change anything at any time, so I just let it go.

When I came to name his future wife, I was describing an afternoon garden party. You see, in my storyline, Thomas was one of the City's most eligible bachelors, so his mother was having many events for Thomas to meet young single ladies - tea parties, church gathering parties, garden parties, and anything else she could think of for Thomas to meet young ladies.

On this particular afternoon, Thomas and his friend Charlie were getting annoyed at this continuous barrage of introductions and they were just about to leave the party when his mother tapped him on the shoulder.

Now, as a novice writer, describing his future wife as a pretty girl, I reasoned that if I gave her a soft, pretty name, maybe it would help my written description of her.

“If you want to know what I supposed the name of Thomas's wife might actually have been,” I told my husband, “I was “feeling” it was probably “Margaret”. I even think they called her “Maggie.”

But once again, in the moment of writing this I imagined I was Thomas's mother. I had even put my hand in the air as though I were actually tapping him on the shoulder. “Thomas, have you met Annie?” It just came out as smoothly and spontaneously as

the name “Thomas” had done.

He continued, “So what did you name her, Margaret or Annie?”

“I couldn’t name her Margaret because it wasn’t a soft name, so I chose Annie.”

“How crazy is that!” was his response. Her name *was* Annie!!”

“How do you know that, because that’s not funny, in fact it’s very creepy!”

That’s what the lady whose family wanted to tour the house had just told him at the door, he replied. “She said it was Thomas and Annie Ryan!”

*I was speechless.*

“Did you give her a last name?”

“Yes, of course I did, because she was single. I knew a good historical writer would also give her an Irish name because once I learned the family name was Ryan, that would have been correct. One hundred years ago, Irish married Irish, Germans married Germans, Italians married Italians...but I wanted a soft, pretty name, so when introducing him to Annie at the garden party, I said, “Thomas, have you met Annie Anderson?”

“April! You gave her a Danish name?”

“I didn’t really care about the kind of name I gave her, but it had to be a soft name.”

“Well how crazy is that! Her name *was* Annie Anderson, because the Ryan family have her birth certificate!!!”

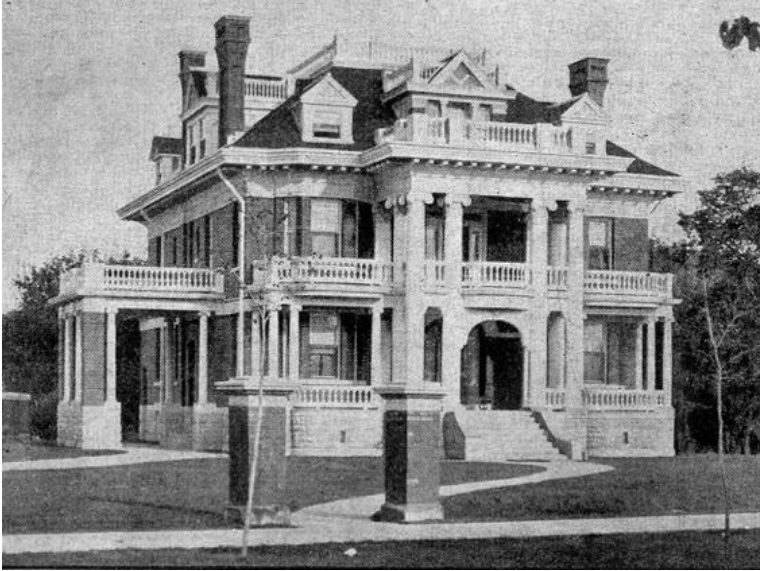
*I must say, I was stunned.* I was then, and am now, still searching for something in records somewhere that might point to my having seen their names together but have not had any luck so far.

I have even called a historian, Randy Rostecki, who wrote a book about all the original owners of the houses in Armstrong’s Point, asking if he could confirm the name of Thomas Ryan’s wife. When he got back to me, it was with the information that he had found her married name on an old census, but nowhere could he find her family name.

Well, it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks about this story but it certainly matters to me... I still hope that someday I will discover that I saw their names somewhere, and just filed it away subconsciously... but until then it continues to aggravate me as I cannot explain it... *not even to myself!*

April Kassum, 5 East Gate





Thomas Ryan residence, 1906: architect William Wallace Blair