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Back in the old days, people "dined", and the way a Belleville resident and former owner of a popular downtown fine china store sees it, today they "eat".

"It's not the same. (Today) You have earthenware, and you throw on hot dogs and porkchops on your barbecue. You don't take the time to enjoy your supper. You eat and get up to do something else," remarked Peter Annis, who with his wife, Elizabeth, last owned the decades-old Stroud's once located at 206-208 Front St. and its Quinte Mall branch in Belleville. While the downtown store was closed in the late '90s, the mall location, which opened in 1978, was closed in 1988.

"It (dining) used to be part of the social aspect," he continued. "That was the way it was originally with fine bone china, crystals and silverware. You had all of that because you spend two to three hours at the table having your supper. People would come over for the whole evening and you'd do nothing but eat and then you'd have coffee and that would be it. That's why your china ware was so important."

And Stroud's was 'The' store that met the area customers' demands for such valued household treasure for many decades.

Originally, the store in Belleville opened as a tea importing business and general store in 1872 and was one of the six owned by the Stroud family of Montreal.

"How they started was they would give customers coupons with the tea that they bought at the store. One would bring that coupon back in to get a cup and saucer. That was the start and people liked the cups and saucers so much that Stroud's started to carry cups and saucers and then china. In the early '60s, the store began to sell jewelery items," said Annis, who, at the time an international buyer for the Woolworth Company, working out of its headquarters in Toronto.

Annis bought the store from the previous owner Joe Blackburn and his wife, Elsie, in 1976. Blackburn's father, Albert, had managed the Belleville store for the Stroud family for many years before even-

tually buying it.

The original store was located further up the Front Street on the east side, said Annis. It was moved to its last location by Joe Blackburn. When he bought it, 28 employees staffed the store.

The business, he recalled, was old style in appearance since the last time it was renovated was in the '50s after it was damaged by fire.



ELIZABETH  
ANNIS

"The store that you see now used to have a wall down the middle. So, the old store was actually two smaller stores located side by side. I took out the wall and changed the entire inside. I had a marble craftsman come from Toronto to put the marble out front. We looked like the Burke store and that

was quite a change for the downtown and for a number of years we did very, very well," he said.

Annis said he didn't know much about the fire in the store in the '50s but that he recalled being told a story about the damage that occurred when the fire department hose was turned on inside the store breaking the china and the crystal ware inside. But he saw firsthand the damage to the store when flood water filled up its basement up to approximately four feet in