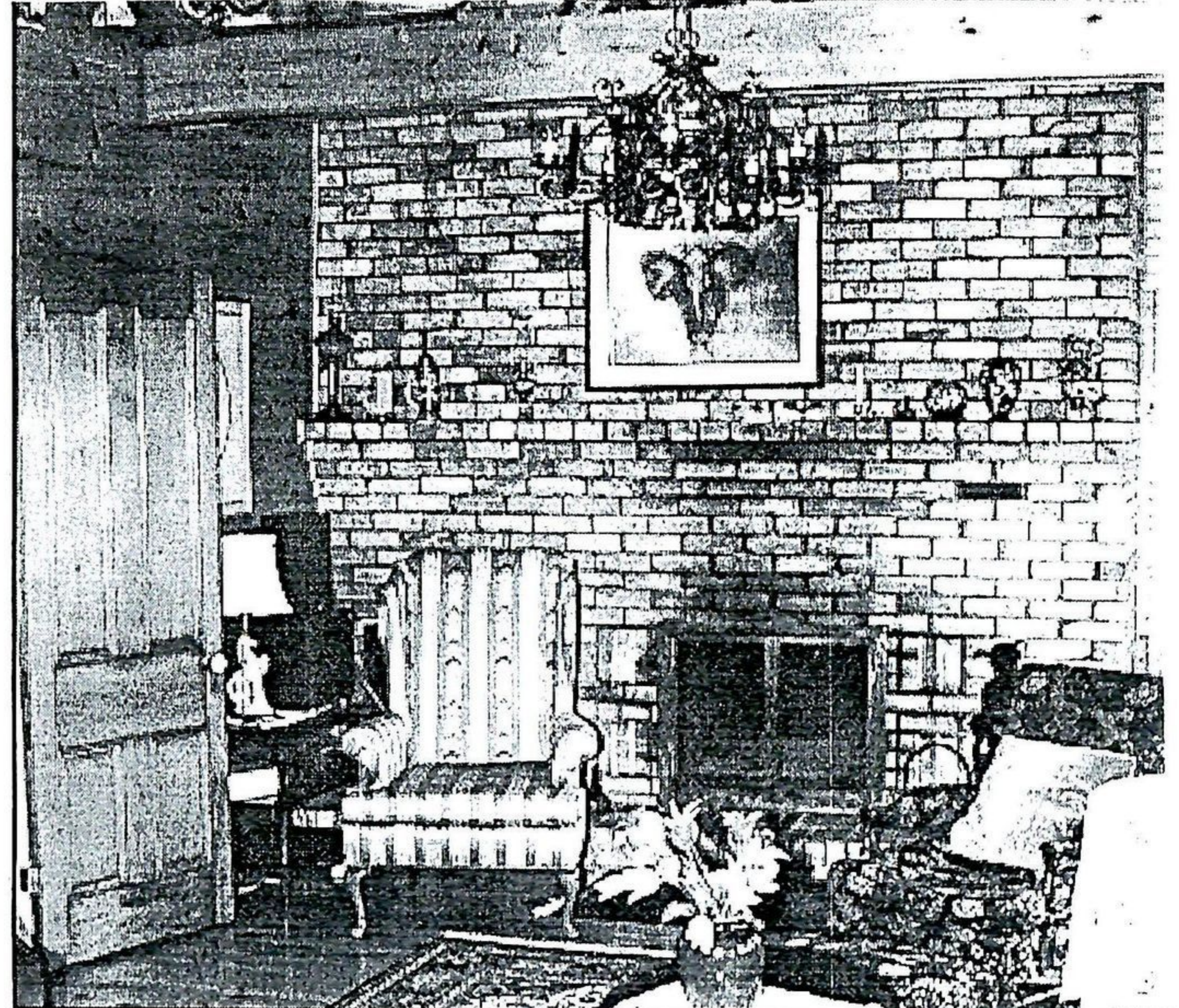


Childhood Home of Emily Guest was Reconstructed and Redesigned as a Beautiful Victorian Home in 1987



HOME SWEET HOME: Irene and Stephanie Demas stand outside Rosehill, a restored 19th century farm house in London Township. At left, a shot of the home's rustic family room shows one of three fireplaces constructed on the home's main floor.

Historic home has owners smiling

By Village News Staff

When Tony and Irene Demas bought an abandoned farm house near Lucan in 1987, prognosticators gave the home a slim chance of survival. After years of neglect, the Victorian-style farm home was in critical condition. Vandals had smashed windows and ripped off doors. Bats and racoons had taken up residence in the attic. Rodents had chewed the corners off doors and squatters had set a fire in the middle of the aging hardwood floor.

Today, nearly nine years later, Tony and Irene are still not sure why they decided to restore the historic brick home. But somehow, despite months of back-breaking labour and an undisclosed financial investment, their decision seems like the right one.

"When we bought the house everybody thought we had really gone off our rockers," says Irene.

"Nobody could see the potential because it was really in bad shape. Even I never pictured it to look like this," she says.

The resurrection of Rosehill (originally known as, Rosenan) began in 1987, about 120 years after its original construction.

Tony, a London restaurateur and real estate broker, had often talked of buying the home. But when he actually took ownership in the fall of 1987, the reaction from friends and family was one of bewilderment.

"I brought my family out here and they all thought Tony should be committed," recalls Irene.

"I don't think anyone ever believed we'd go through with it"

The restoration began with the daunting task of clearing out the loads of garbage that had accumulated in the house over the past 50 years. Old beds, chairs, refrigerators and stoves, even an empty casket in the basement's cellar . . . all were removed from the house, placed in a massive pile in the front yard and eventually hauled away.

"When we first started cleaning it up, we thought maybe we'd slap some paint on it and use it as a summer home," says Irene.

"But once we started doing a little bit of work, we decided we wanted to do the best job we could. At some point, the house just took on a life of its own."

Built in the late 1860s, Rosenan was constructed by John Guest, a Scottish immigrant who was granted 100 acres of crown land in

the area north of Birr, Ont. Positioned on a hilltop between Birr and Elginfield, Rosenan became a recognized landmark for travellers on Highway 4, a well-beaten thoroughfare formerly known as the Proof Line Road.

The home was also the birthplace of Emily Guest, an Oxford scholar and women's advocate who was a driving force behind the formation of numerous women's institutes in Ontario.

Today, the Guest House still displays a formal Victorian flavor that one would expect a 19th century home. Modern decor has been tastefully incorporated throughout the home, giving it a formal yet functional appeal.

Entering from the south side of the home, visitors step into a spacious sun room, one of two rooms that

were added during reconstruction.

The 9' x 25' sun room uses lean-to construction and has a series of windows on the south and west sides, making it a perfect spot to relax with a cup of coffee and enjoy the home's beautiful countryside view.

The other walls in the sunroom feature the home's original exterior brickwork which has been refinished in a white latex. The highlighted brick finish gives the room a rustic, country feel that leaves an immediate impression on its visitors. Irene has the sun room decorated with a variety of indoor plants, ferns and a few comfortable armchairs.

The other addition is the 12' x 25' family room, finished in knotty pine and 5" pine flooring. In one corner of the room, a brick fireplace (built with

reclaimed bricks) adds to the room's relaxed ambience. In the other corner, a baby grand piano waits to entertain guests. Overhead, a series of pine beams accents the open ceiling, creating a warm, yet airy appearance.

"We wanted the family room to be a little more contemporary . . . a little bit country," says Irene.

"It's a room to kick off your shoes and relax."

Between the two rooms is a spacious chef's kitchen area which includes a commercial-sized gas stove, commercial-sized sinks, a solid-wood butcher's block and enough cupboard space to leave most home-makers blushing with envy.

Facing the kitchen area is a spacious breakfast nook, which gives visitors a chance to chat and observe while Irene, a certified chef, prepares meals.

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