

Ethel Tucker 1874-1962  
Catherine F. (Kate) Tucker 1879-1970)

**The Little Green Door**  
**A retrospective Look at the Work**  
**of**  
**Ethel and Kate Tucker**

The history of Bermuda's first commercial artists begins at "Lane House" in Paget, the home of Mr. And Mrs. Roberts R. J. Tucker. The Tuckers had eight children: four boys and four girls, two of whom were Ethel and Kate.

The girls were raised by a mother who instilled in them the nobility of hard work, and frugality. From the time they were toddlers, they watched their artistic mother sew clothes, and design wall paper and Christmas cards. Ethel was the first to follow her mother's example; while attending Miss. Eliza D. Williams School for girls on Reid Street, she played the piano in exchange for painting lessons, and painted Christmas cards to sell in a shop below the school.

"Greatly daring in an age when young ladies, however gifted, stayed home to pour tea in her late 'teens Ethel ventured to New York to study art." Staying alone at a select boarding house she began to study at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. When she returned home for a visit, her younger sister Kate decided to accompany her back to the States. For the next two years the girls studied art by day, and made Cotillion favours in their rooms at night to meet their living expenses.

Ethel's first commercial position was as a designer for Art Embroideries where she designed linens and tea cosies. She then worked briefly for the New York interior decorating studio of Ralphael Tuck of London; after which time, both sisters returned to teach at the art school that had trained them.

After an absence of eleven years, the sisters finally returned to Bermuda. Ever the independent type, they opened The Little Green Door tea Garden in 1910 on the waterfront of Barr's Bay. The Tea House itself was an ingenious arrangement of old army huts, originally built at Prospect for the Crimean War, and was accessed by French doors salvaged by Lindley's Junk Shop from the Military Barracks at Prospect.

An early brochure advised:

Go through this door down the red brick  
steps and follow the path to the Tea House  
Where you will be served with  
Afternoon Tea  
Under the bamboos by the side of the water,  
Or within the Tea House.

Strawberries and Cream in Season

And from a later flyer:

The Original Bermuda  
Tea House  
Special Room for Bridge Parties  
"Where friends meet and worries end"

During its 29 years of operation, The Tea Room, "not only became a social rendez-vous but held the very essence of old-world Bermuda charm compounded by decorum, gentility and peace." Throughout the December to May season many a famous traveller found his way down the sloping

brick walks, and through the maze of ferns and exotic plants to the serene atmosphere of The Little Green Door. This garden setting was the favourite haunt of many writers including Mark Twain, William D. Howells, John Martin, Rudyard Kipling, Eugene O'Neill, and Charles Evans Hughes. So famous was the Tea Room, that Ethel put a plaque on Mark Twain's bamboo and packing case table and many people came to tea just to have their picture taken at that table.

The Menu, displayed on little green cards, was always the same:

Tea, Buttered Toast  
Cinnamon Toast  
Nut Bread and Marmalade  
Strawberries and Cream In Season

In one season alone the sisters served over ten thousand visitors, and only once was the "serene atmosphere" of the Tea Room disturbed. Kate never allowed any gentleman to enter in shorts. When the Governor's A.D.C. appeared for tea in his football attire, Miss Kate politely but firmly asked him to leave.

When the property at Barr's Bay was eventually sold, the sisters moved their operation to the property of "Scarborough". Taking with them the original building, the Tea Room operated for several more years before it was finally closed down.

In 1911 the sisters opened their first Little Green Door Shop on Queen Street in Hamilton and became Bermuda's first female shop keepers; "pioneers [who] opened the field of business for many later entrants from the ranks of the "fairer sex." Their first shop housed the building below what was once the children's library, was only 14 sq. Feet but it was an immediate success. The demand for their Bermuda water colours proved to be so great that the sisters decided to have the first, of what became a series of over 100, post cards created in Germany from Ethel's painting entitled "Oleanders and water in Somerset". In this manner the Little Green Door became the first establishment in Hamilton to sell Bermuda souvenirs.

In 1914 the sisters moved their business to a bigger shop in the Perot post office building. At this time they also began to produce Christmas cards to meet the demands of the Garrison troops stationed at Bermuda.

During the summer months the sisters continued to go abroad. In 1915 they opened the Little Green Shop of Bermuda and Tea House on Lake Muskoka in Ontario Canada where they painted pictures of Muskoka with great success. The following summer they travelled to Lake Placid New York where they opened another Tea House on the shore of the lake, serving breakfast, lunch and tea. In the fall of 1917 the German submarines were active off the coast and Ethel and Kate were unable to return to Bermuda. They travelled, instead, to St. Augustine Florida where they operated yet another Little Green Shop until the end of the war.

In 1920 the Tucker's artistic abilities were recognised by the Prince of Wales who bought 20 of their paintings during a visit to Bermuda. Upon his return to England, her Majesty Queen Mary greatly admired their work and wrote to Bermuda asking for a series of paintings of her own. A number of these were eventually shown at an exhibition of the Queen's collection of watercolours in Kensington.

Over the years the sisters created and produced countless original items to sell in their shops including: a series of hand painted scarves which were produced on the finest quality silk by an artist at the Academy des Beaux Arts in Paris, booklets, playing cards, baskets, native cedar items, jewelry, hand bags, place cards, embroidered linens and brass bells.

Between 1928 and 1938 Ethel and Kate also operated two antique shops. The first, known as the Tower Antiques Shop, was at the corner of Reid and Burnaby Streets. The sisters were the first shop

keepers in the Island to display antiques, and travelled every year to buy for the shop. They were particularly interested in antique silver. At some point during this time period they also operated a small antique store at the Castle Harbour hotel which they were forced to close when the Hotel shut down during the Depression.

In February of 1958, after 43 years of operation, the little green Door on Queen Street finally closed and the sisters went into semi-retirement. Among their countless interests, the sisters also participated in the annual floral pageant, and were among the founding members of the Bermuda Historical Society as well as the St. David's Island Social Club.

Throughout the course of their lives, Ethel and Kate Tucker proved;

“That ladies are capable of being ‘in trade’ in Bermuda, at the same time maintaining a dignified position in the community and the respect and friendship of the many people all over the world whom they served.”

### **Beyond the Little Green Door**

Beyond this little door you'll find  
A quiet spot where worries cease  
Beyond this door the heart and mind  
Dreams on in aimless peace

A welcome murmurs in the trees;  
The little water weave a rhyme  
Of Merry mocking, as the breeze  
Scoffs laughing at the Time.

Come, bide a while, and dare to let  
Sweet nature pay the keeper's score!  
Let's drink our tea, dream and forget  
Beyond This Little Door!

John Martin

Hamilton  
May 14  
1916