

## New Perry Hotel Biography 1830 through 1994

Travel anywhere, nationally or internationally, and chances are great that someone there will share pleasant memories of a visit to the New Perry Hotel in the remarkable little city of Perry, Georgia. Indeed the reputation of this landmark tourist attraction has become legendary.

The origin of the first Perry Hotel is hazy, but public records indicate that it is very nearly as old as the town itself, for Deed Book E, Houston County, Georgia, 1831-1834, testifies that Phenias Oliver sold the Tavery known as The Perry Hotel to Benjamin Fudge on January 1, 1833. Other entries recorded in 1833 describe the contents: "16 feather beds and 16 pine bedsteads, 32 cotton counterpins, 30 sitting chairs, 7 pine tables, 1 being burch, 1 dozen looking glasses, 3 dozen wine glasses, 3 dozen tumblers, 10 dozen breakfast and dining plates, 5 iron pots, 2000 pounds of bacon, etc." Enough facts to assure us that there was indeed a thriving accommodation for drummers and others who came in on the stage. Perry was a logical place to offer such hospitality, for here the north-to-south and east-to-west stage lines crossed.

The oldest hotel picture is dated 1893 and was given to Yates Green by Mrs. Aubrey Anderson. Furnished in Victorian style, it had eighteen rooms for rent as well as an office, parlor, dining room, and kitchen. In 1934 Warren Grice edited a history of Houston County, compiled by Mrs. H.P. Dobbins and Mrs. C.B. Andrew. Chapter 20, *A Stroll Through Perry Sixty Years Ago*, deals with Perry in 1873. The ambler begins his stroll from the old Perry Hotel, reportedly built in 1870 and obviously the one in the 1893 picture:



In 1873 one who some years previously had moved away, returned and was a guest at the Perry Hotel, formally Cox's Inn. It was a large two story frame structure painted white with a wide front veranda from which two low steps led directly to the sidewalk. It was immediately south of the courthouse and occupied the ground between the location whereon the New Perry Hotel was later built and the street. The old sign, swaying with every wind, on which was painted, "Entertainment for Man and Beast," had long since been taken down.

Having shaved with an old fashioned razor which he "honed" on a long leather "strop," the lather being made of ordinary soap and cold water, the fumes of coffee arrested his attention. Presently, at the sound of the bell rung by Bill Harrison, he went into the

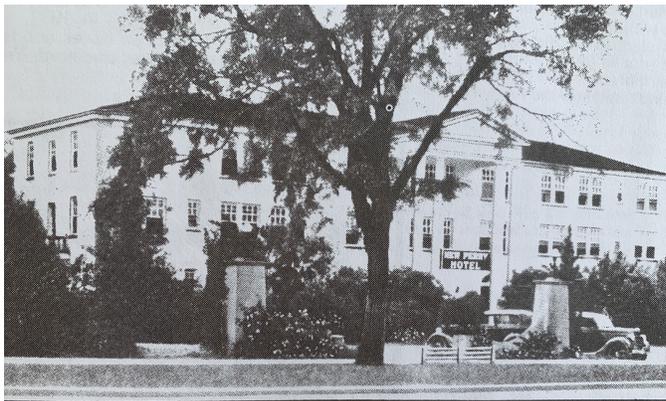
dining room for breakfast, fried bream from Houston Factory was the piece de resistance.

The chapter later mentions “James M. Tuttle. “Tutt” afterwards so well remembered as “Mine Host” of the Perry Hotel.” Notes from the Houston Home Journal describe his remodeling of the hotel: “Perry Hotel Improved. Twenty well furnished rooms available for use of guests. Mr. and Mrs. James N. Tuttle managers.” (HHJ, Feb. 18,1886).

Tradition says that although the dining room was then becoming well known among travelers and was a gathering place for local townfolk, there were no printed menus. Guests were invited to sit at long tables and were served family style. Like the ambler, they were called to meals by the old bell ringer who walked down main street clanging his dinner bell. Shop keepers locked their businesses and came. Even Court at the Houston County Courthouse across the street was discontinued until after lunch. All adjourned and met again at the long tables in the Perry Hotel.

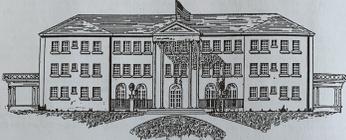
Following Mr. Tuttle as operators were Mrs. Clifford Burnham Davis, Major Milt Cooper, Tom Anderson, and Rochelle Cheves Skellie.

In 1924, the owners realized that mass production of automobiles combined with paved state and federal highways had created a potential new market of travelers. The Odom Realty Company of Macon was contracted to build a grander, more stately tourists on their way to Florida. Mrs. Skellie named it The New Perry Hotel and the name has stuck through the years.



The New Perry Hotel celebrated its formal opening on June 17, 1925. Three hundred guests enjoyed a buffet dinner and danced to the music of the Southern Serenaders from Macon, according to the Houston Home Journal June 18, 1925.

**HOUSTON HOME JOURNAL**  
JOHN L. BULLOCK, Publisher      DEVISED BY ERIC WELLS, PRINTER AND DESIGNER      ESTABLISHED 1910  
100, 1st      PERRY, BOSTON COUNTY, GA., TERRACE, COR. W. 100      No. 13



**Perry's Newest and Most Modern Hotel  
 Formal Opening**

Wednesday, June 17th  
 Opening Dance at 9 p. m.  
 Parties from vicinity please write, wire or  
 phone for reservations.

**ESTABLISHED MORE THAN  
 100 YEARS AGO**

This exquisite New Hotel is three stories high and is  
 modern in every sense of the word. Everything is new  
 throughout and the best of service will be rendered at all  
 times. It is located on three highways, making it con-  
 venient for everyone.

<b>40 Rooms</b> Heat and Running Water in Every Room
<b>CONNECTING BATHS</b>

**NEW PERRY HOTEL**

To answer why it's still called "new" seventy years later, columnist Doris Lockerman invented the most credible answer when she wrote in 1964, "People here know that The New Perry Hotel is their claim to apparently unending international fame, and they are willing to concede it eternal youth in payment." ([Atlanta Constitution](#) 4/10/64)

When the old hotel was demolished, Mrs. Skellie continued to operate the New Perry Hotel until 1929. Her successor, J.J. "Jimpy" Rooney, refurbished the hotel throughout, and added air cooling and floodlights. When he began billboard advertising from Chattanooga to Jacksonville, tourists soon discovered that Perry was indeed an ideal stop. The New Perry Hotel's reputation for good food and southern hospitality spread quickly, earning the recommendation of Duncan Hines and the American Automobile Association.

Mr. and Mrs. Rooney successfully operated the New Perry Hotel until a young couple came shopping for a hotel. Yates and Nannette Green had met through their work with the Stiles Hotel Chain when she worked as dining room hostess and he as hotel clerk in the Baldwin Hotel in Milledgeville. After their marriage in 1937, they were sent to DeFuniak Springs, Florida, as co-managers of the Walton Hotel, and later to Fair Forest Hotel in Union, South Carolina. In 1941, when war was declared, Yates was inducted into the Army at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina.



Honeymooners, Nannette (Dial) and Joe Yates Green stopped at the New Perry Hotel in 1937 on their way to Florida. They returned as owners in 1944. A dream come true!

The story of their coming to Perry is best told through Nannette's memories.

*On Sunday, the day of the big ice storm in January 1944, Yates and I left the Georgian Hotel in Athens where we had worked since his discharge from the Army, (Uncle Sam's Infantry could not find a place for a soldier with such unusually flat feet.) Since November we had been traveling with John Stiles, Yates' uncle, who had formed The Stiles Hotel chain. We were looking in the area for hotels that might be for sale.*

*This night we were traveling alone to Americus, Georgia, for we had accepted jobs with Howard Dayton at the beautiful old Windsor Hotel. (This hotel has recently been restored and is once again a showplace of English architectural design.) We remembered that as we were leaving the Georgian Hotel, the desk clerk called to us, "If you are on your way to Americus, you will be passing through Perry. The hotel there might be exactly what you are looking for."*

*We knew about the New Perry Hotel because we had spent one night of our honeymoon there and had often said it would be an ideal place to work...we'd never dreamed of owning it. We debated all the way whether to stop, but when we finally reached Perry, our car wheels seemed to turn in that direction. "Remember we left our security at home," I said to Yates...meaning Uncle John...and we laughed wondering how our adventure in business would turn out.*

*To our amazement Mr. and Mrs. Rooney were really interested in selling. When the Rooneys spoke of financial arrangements, our hearts were pounding. We were totally insecure without Uncle John to back us. After fumbling for words and looking at me, fearful of what I might say, Yates said he thought financing could be arranged. We weren't sure how. We had used up most of our savings; we owned the 1941 Chevrolet we were driving and the contents packed in its backseat: a lamp, a table, a chair, a clothes hamper, and a magazine rack.*

*We called Yates' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Green, and his Uncle John. In two months all arrangements had been made; we turned in our resignations at The Windsor and took over the New Perry Hotel operation on April 1, 1944. We will always be indebted to Uncle John and to Pap and Mama Green for their encouragement, their faith in our hotel management ability and their investment which made our venture possible.*

*We spent our first week observing Mr. Rooney's operation. He had been so successful that we didn't want to change anything at first. Yates and I had fun working as a team. He managed the desk and made the business decisions while I concentrated on the kitchen and dining room. It was truly a dream come true. We built our own apartment on the ground floor and lived there for many years.*

The kitchen and dining room training Nannette had received under Henry Thornton and Lucille Diamond at Balsam, North Carolina, hardly prepared her for some of the realities of restaurant business in wartime.

Keeping the pantry stocked wasn't a matter of picking up the phone and placing an order. Commodities such as sugar were rationed and others such as coffee and chocolate were often unavailable. Most of the vegetables were fresh, bought from local farmers or grown in the victory garden on the premises. She laughs now to remember her own naivete at vegetable gardening. Thinking to plant a small patch of turnip greens, she ordered three pounds of seed at Andrew Hardware, enough for acres of turnips.

Chickens and turkeys were kept in a coop where the Hotel gazebo is located and were slaughtered as needed. Once this rather unpleasant task was assigned to some young boys who were told simply to "dress the turkeys for dinner tomorrow." When their puzzled looks told her that they didn't understand, Nannette explained that "to dress" meant "to pluck out their feathers." Horrified, she later realized the inexperienced boys were doing exactly that. She had not thought it necessary to say, "*First, you kill the turkey!*"

Cooking was done on wood stoves and since most of the men were still in the armed services, keeping the woodbox filled was quite a chore. To experience Georgia in July is to understand how welcome gas stoves and air conditioning could be after a few summers of wood stove cooking.

Nannette continues her story:

*Mr. Rooney was an avid gardener with rows of vegetables and flowers for the dining room. Yates had no interest here so the flowers became an important part of my life and how thankful I am for them! With Pat Cartledge, I have enjoyed developing Hotel gardens that our guests can look forward to visiting with each changing season. Lucille Diamond instilled in those of us who worked for her at the Balsam Hotel the importance of fresh flowers on the table. She sent us into the mountain woods each morning to collect wild flowers for our tables there. When Mr. Rooney had his row gardens, we grew our own flowers for the tables. Eager to show that I knew how to decorate the tables on our first morning, I sent someone to pick the beautiful blue iris. He did...just below each bloom. With no stems to arrange them, I had to plop one beautiful iris atop each bud vase.*

Nannette lived down that first flower fiasco by not only keeping fresh flowers on the hotel's white starched tablecloths, but also winning numerous awards for the attractive landscaping and

decorations. Christmas 1944 remains an outstanding decorating memory. This was Yates' and Nannette's first Christmas away from home and family.

They found themselves surrounded by military people and others who were also stranded and homesick. Determined to have a happy celebration for themselves and their guests in spite of the war imposed restrictions, they found a Georgia pine in the woods and enlisted the creative efforts of hotel guests. Because tree decorations and pasted paper chains, angels, lanterns, and bells and were well pleased with their festive results.

During the past fifty years, Christmas decorations have become more elaborate and are indeed a tourist attraction in themselves. Even so, the picture of that first homemade Christmas tree, shared with other friends who couldn't travel home for Christmas, still evokes a special smile of remembrance for her.



Nannette and Yates as the gracious hosts of the New Perry, were also Perry's unofficial publicity chairmen, for they worked diligently to promote tourism in the town of Perry. In 1968, the Perry Business Women's Club elected Nannette "Woman of the Year." In making the presentation, Harriet Houser began with, "Shakespeare said, 'Beauty lives with kindness' and unknowingly made a capsule description of this lovely lady." Nannette was thanked for her work in the beautification of Perry, her generosity in caring for others. In 1969, the Perry Kiwanis named Yates "Man of the Year," complimenting his public spirited leadership in promoting Perry through the Automobile Association and 41 Highway Association. In a tribute to them in the Houston Home Journal Ruby Hodges dubbed them, "Mr. and Mrs. Perry."

But all of her memories are not humorous. She remembers the scariest night of all.

*In 1947 our dream almost became a nightmare when two guests discovered a fire on the third floor of the hotel. All guests escaped safely with their clothes and valuables. We were certainly thankful for that even though no one stopped to pay. When morning came we were left with a very blackened, water-logged hotel. We considered rebuilding, but chose to remodel and update our facility. That meant reroofing, replastering, repainting, recarpeting, refurnishing--adding a new heating system, private*

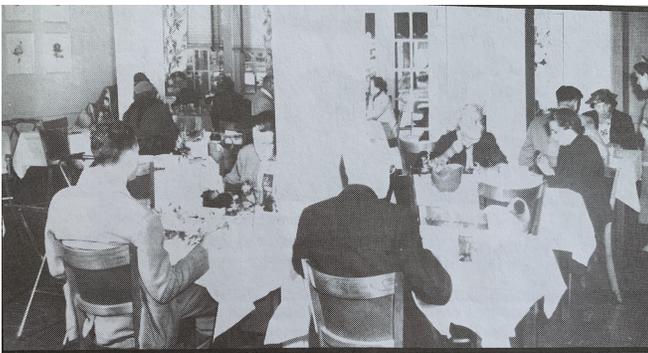
*bathrooms (the old hotel had only four and guest were beginning to ask for this luxury,) telephones in the rooms (the hotel had only one) and gas stoves to replace the old hot wood stoves in the kitchen.*



The Hotel was completely remodeled in 1947 after fire destroyed the upper floor. Everyone was invited to an open house reception of the reopening of the New Perry Hotel.



Stainless steel counters and modern gas appliances replaced hot wood stoves in the remodeled kitchen.



The decor of the reopened Coffee Shop included original camelia paintings by Marshallville artist, Louise Turner.

*That turned out to be a wise decision, for with the end of World War II, people had found more time and money for travel and could once again buy gasoline. By 1956, we needed more rooms and so contracted with Dennis and Dennis of Macon for the New Perry Motel to be built where Mr. Rooney's garden had been. We began with eight rooms and added others as the budget would allow.*

*In 1957 we asked Yate's brother, Harold Green, to join our hotel staff and were thankful when he agreed. He came with his wife, Elaine, and daughter, Marsha, from Tallahassee where he had worked in hotel management with the Stiles Hotel Chain. Harold's coming gave us freedom from the seven days a week responsibility and allowed Yates to pursue other business interests.*



With the end of World War II and gas rationing, America was traveling again. Highway 41 brought prosperity to Perry as a revitalized tourist industry flourished. The New Perry Motel answered the need for more rooms to rent.

*Harold's contributions during these thirty-seven years have been invaluable. He has kept everything running smoothly, and we could not possibly have managed without him during these past few years of Yates' illness and death. I shall always be grateful for his loyalty to us and his steady management.*

*In 1981, Marsha also joined our hotel staff as Hostess. She had helped out part time as desk clerk through her teenage years and we welcomed her back as a full time staff member. Now as Bookkeeper and Secretary, she assists her father in the overall operation, continuing the fifty year Green family tradition of Southern hospitality at the New Perry Hotel.*

Harold and Marsha make a good management team; he remembers the past and continues traditions; she updates and brings in the new (like computers!) when it's needed. Nannette continues with Pat to keep the gardens picture perfect all year round.



Marsha, Nannette and Harold celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Green family ownership of the New Perry Hotel.

Although the hotel has mellowed in these past fifty years of Green ownership, it retains much of its 1940's gracious ambiance. The Louise Turner original camellia and magnolia paintings still grace the walls. Elise Rogers still greets the guests from the main desk as she has done for thirty-seven years. Mary Kovac and Sallie Williams share their nearly forty years of culinary experience at the New Perry Hotel with newly hired personnel, keeping the favorite recipes intact. Bertha Hill, Roosevelt Collier, and Milton Jones keep things pretty much the same in the kitchen. From early morning, aromas whet appetites of everyone in the vicinity as the kitchen crews are at work preparing fresh vegetables, baking their own special breads and homemade pies, cutting and roasting sides of beef, pork, and lamb. In the dining room returning guests recognize the familiar faces of Louise Lassetter and Juanita Sledge among the waitresses. These two have served to them for over thirty years.

Interview guests in the dining room and often they will say, "Oh, yes, we've been coming here for many years. Our parents brought us to the New Perry as children and now we are bringing our children and grandchildren. We schedule our trips to be here for a meal." Others confide that they have made the New Perry Hotel a second home for many years and consider it a privilege to return each winter for several weeks or months. Eldora Lester and her cleaning crews keep their rooms ready for them, for they are more like family friends than tourists. This is why the Hotel has survived even through the coming of Interstate 75 with its myriad of motels and fast food restaurants.

Thus the story of the New Perry Hotel is truly the story of southern hospitality personified--welcoming strangers traveling through Perry and making them want to return, sharing with cherished friends in a unique way, helping to promote the town of Perry. Nannette likes to reminisce about the old days and treasures the memory of many dear friends who have visited during these fifty years, enriching her life.

So here's to you, Nannette, and to your wonderful memories. Perry folks want to say "Thank you," for putting us on the tourist map, for preserving something of our southern traditions in your gracious hospitality and ever blooming gardens, and for feeding us all our favorites for 50

years. "Happy Anniversary on your fiftieth year at the New Perry Hotel. We wish you many happy returns!"

Bobbie Nelson