

ABOUT RED ROSE TEA

Saint John's connection to tea dates back more than a century, and was an important part of the local economy of the day, arriving first on wooden sailing ships, then steamers, and railcars. The tea was originally sold loose from tea chests by local merchants, but the quality varied, until local businessman Theodore Harding Estabrooks came up with the great idea...to produce and pack a quality blended tea that was consistent from cup to cup.

And so, the T.H. Estabrooks Tea Company was founded on May 1st 1894 and his business was opened at 61-63 Dock Street. The "Red Rose" brand was born in 1899 when Estabrooks met M.R Miles, a member of a prestigious tea-taster family in England. They came up with the idea to create a blend of Indian and Sri Lankan teas, rather than the more common Chinese and Japanese teas. During the first year of business, he only sold \$166 in tea. Even with such weak beginnings, he did not give up. In just 6 years, he was selling over a thousand tons of tea per year. Their tea became a household name around NB and Nova Scotia and spread into New England.

The Red Rose Tea Building was built in 1903, and is the sole surviving example of Saint John's 19th century tea industry today. The 5-storey plant opened at 35-49 Mill Street on Dec. 30 on "Red Rose day" and was described as the largest tea warehouse in Canada, built specially for blending, packing and shipping teas, and employed a staff of 70 people. In 1929, Red Rose introduced tea bags for the first time. A tea warehouse was built circa 1943 to the west of the main building, used for tea storage. Tea boxes would be unloaded and stored in this building and then transferred to the main building when needed for blending. You can still see a large Red Rose Tea mural on its west wall today.

In the 1920's Estabrooks had become friends with Gerald Brooke, and so when Estabrooks made the decision to retire, he sold Red Rose to the Brooke Bond & Company of England in 1932. After WWII, Brooke Bond expanded and established new packing plants in Montreal, but kept the original facility in New Brunswick. Unilever acquired Brooke Bond Canada in 1984, and the plant in Saint John, NB was closed in 1988.

Red Rose remains a well known name in tea today, especially in Britain and Canada. Although the company started in Canada, it has in more recent years split into a U.S. and Canadian version and many believe the Canadian Red Rose tea is superior.

T.H. Estabrooks died in 1945 and is buried in Fernhill cemetery. A prominent local business person, he was a president of the Board of Trade and a director of the Saint John Tourists Association, VP of the NB Museum and was involved in numerous other organizations. He was born in Wicklow in 1861, came to Saint John in 1882 and studied at Kerr's Business College and began work with W.H. Harrison & Company in 1884, importing molasses. He began his own business in 1894 and retired in 1936. The son of Estabrook's first boss, Walter A. Harrison, was the vice-president of the Red Rose Tea Company, and T. Donald Estabrooks succeeded his father as president of the firm in 1936.

The Red Rose Tea building still stands as a heritage building today and is an excellent example of the plain and fancy architectural style. The Red Rose building stood as a dominant corner building near the harbour and along a busy commercial street. Today it serves as a significant gateway to the downtown core and a landmark to a vital part of Saint John's history.

The elegant historical Red Rose Mansion was built in 1904, for T.H. Estabrooks, founder of Red Rose Tea. It operated for a few years as a 5-star B&B Inn on Mount Pleasant Avenue, but is now privately owned. After nearly 100 years, the home has retained the intricate, detailed woodwork and beautiful stained glass windows created by the original period Craftsmen. It sits on 2½ acres of beautifully maintained grounds with scenic views of the city.