

Souvenirs & Mementos

The story of how the song “Ye Little Olde Pill Shoppe” was written is most remarkable. I spotted the poem in the “Toronto Sun,” their “Poet’s Corner,” at the bottom of the comics page some time in February 1978. By the middle of March, I had nearly completed the song. Unfortunately, “nearly completed” is how the song remained for almost 40 years. Upon joining PROCAN (SOCAN since 1990), the performing rights organization, I realized that copyright permissions for texts not in the public domain were pre-requisite for all registrations. So, who was Nancy Evans? Early in the 1990s, I turned to the Toronto Public Library for help. Indeed, there were four books published by Nancy Evans, starting in 1979. The publisher was B. J. Hamwood located at 625 Lansdowne Avenue in Toronto. Looking up the address in the City of Toronto Directory, I discovered that a certain Hazel Hamwood did reside there, telephone: 531-6003. Was this Nancy Evans?

One day I picked up the phone, dialed, and was soon trying to explain the who, what, when, where, why, and how to Hazel Hamwood. She was amused that one of her “ridiculous little verses” had caught my fancy. I confirmed then that Nancy Evans was indeed a pseudonym for Hazel Hamwood. She wondered if I had taken any liking to her more serious poems, those in the 1982 collection. A decade later, she was still grieving for her beloved “Red”—her late husband, Beverley Johnston Hamwood. He published her books, he was the love of her life... I asked for permission to use her text—this she gladly gave. In return, I promised to send her the completed song, as soon as it was finished... Sadly, “soon” was not soon enough. Decades later, Hazel (Nancy) is gone. She never did hear her “ridiculous little verse” set to my music. I tarried, long... too long!

“Ye Little Olde Pill Shoppe” was included in Hazel’s 1981 volume “...here we go again!” You can find it on page 143. Two of the books in the Toronto Public Library are signed by her. In addition to the poetry, there is much information in them on the history of the Hamwood, Willis, and Verral families. Oh, did you know that Hazel’s mother Florence Amelia Willis (née Verral) once had the longest hair of any woman living in Toronto? It seems that the Willis-Verral family certainly knew something of vitamins and tonics.



Beverley Johnston Hamwood and his dearest wife Hazel Maude (née Willis), also known as “Red” and Nancy Evans, in Rosetown SK, 1939.



Hazel Hamwood

Cover of “...here we go again!” (1981) and the signature of Hazel Hamwood (Nancy Evans).