



*"The J. T. Payette House"*  
33 Robert St. W., Penetanguishene  
An Ontario Heritage Landmark

---

Grisé Art Studio Gallery and Residence

A brief history

According to pioneer papers, the original house on this site was "a mansion of huge timbers and framework", built in 1834 by Andrew Mitchell, a merchant & furtrader. Andrew moved to Penetanguishene in about 1828 when his father, Dr. Mitchell, the first Surgeon General of the Indian Affairs Department, was moved by the British from Drummond Island to the Naval Establishments here in Penetanguishene.

The house burned or, after 65 years, simply fell into great disrepair; records say that it was "rebuilt" c.1900 as we see it now, in brick and stone, by Wenceslaus Blanchard of Lafontaine.. Mr. Blanchard was a builder and a stonemason by trade, and it is thought that he built the house on speculation with the intention of selling it at a profit..

The best known resident of the house was J.T. Payette, a very colourful man who was Penetanguishene mayor, a well-to-do foundry owner and entrepreneur who built and owned the horse race track in the Town and who lived here from 1918 to 1939. Mr. Payette owned a fast car in the day when there were few cars in Town; on seeing a plume of dust in the distance on the dirt roads, people would say "there goes J.T. Payette !" It is said that Mr. Payette was tried at least once for arson in connection with a fire at his sawmill, and was acquitted.

The house was designated an Ontario heritage landmark for both its historical and architectural significance.

The house was for many years the home of Dr. W. Binkley, who carried on his medical practice in the house. It appears that Dr. Binkley did some significant changes to the house in the 1960's. He and his family lived on the main floor and rented apartments upstairs. His medical practice was in the small white annex, what was probably originally a summer kitchen. The house was rented as apartments for some time, and has recently been in the process of restoration; it is now, once again, a home and working art studio gallery.

---

The main floor, second floor landing and sunroom are open to visitors this year.

Front hall:

The front entrance hall has been restored; it is quite large, with ornate woodwork in the vestibule and entrance.

studio

The room to the left of the hall, is now used as an art studio, which can be closed with a large pocket door. Beside it is the public washroom. The two rooms were probably originally one large room, the bathroom having been built in more recent years, possibly the 1960's when Dr. Binkley was here.

Living room

The room to the right of the front hall also has a pocket door. The hardwood floor is a

replacement of the original. The interesting chandelier actually was purchased by a former owner from the owner of the Thompson House on Water Street, which is another heritage home.

Note the old tile fireplace with ornate cast iron cover. This was a coal burning fireplace, there is a chute in the floor of it that allows ashes to be dumped into a bin in the basement for cleaning.

The coal chute was also located in the basement.

There is a set of double pocket doors leading to the dining room.

### Dining Room

The dining room appears to have been remodelled in the 1960's. The fireplace in this room originally would have matched the one in the office. A new brick and steel "heatilator" fireplace was installed in place of the tiled coal burning fireplace. The mullioned windows were replaced with double-pane picture windows.

### Billiard room (back room main floor)

This room is said to have been the billiard room of J. T. Payette, where his cronies could slip in and out the back door. There is a small laundry chute in the floor of the closet where laundry could be dropped to the basement where the laundry was located. One corner of the room has been remade into a laundry room and bathroom. Note the interesting ceiling and medallion which are original. The floor is made of concentric pattern hardwood which is original. When you view the sunroom on the second floor, note that it mirrors the design of the billiard room, on a smaller scale with matching rounded ceiling with medallion and concentric hardwood flooring.

### Kitchen

The kitchen is probably 1960's era. There is a wide partition wall between the kitchen and dining room and in the days of J.T. Payette, this contained a dumbwaiter to serve the upstairs rooms. Across the side entrance vestibule is a room now used as an office - this was probably the original summer kitchen; note the thick wall that would have been the original exterior wall of the house.

### Upstairs

The second floor of the house features large landing and sunroom. The rest of the second floor, which is not open this year, contains bedrooms. Across the back of the house in a T-shape, is a bedroom wing with three bedrooms and bathroom, and back stairs that may have originally been the back kitchen stairs.

### Attic room

The attic room on the third floor, which is not open this year, was finished into a large bedroom and ensuite washroom in the 1980's and has a fine view of the harbour.

### Secrets of the house

Local rumours say that there is a tunnel from the house down to the Bay, that was built during prohibition for rum-running. This is pretty far-fetched considering the elevation of the land.

There is however, a secret room. There are no known ghosts.