

Earl Young Today

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Sea Gulls Soar in the Fireplaces

CHARLEVOIX -- A lady visitor's overheard observation must be recorded as one of the most fitting compliments to Earl A. Young and his Weathervane Inn.

"You know, it looks just like it could've grown here," the lady remarked as she stood on the south side of the Pine River channel looking across at the Weathervane.

EARL YOUNG, now 78 years-old, no longer owns his unique stone Weathervane Inn, which he opened in 1955. He sold the nationally publicized restaurant last month.

Selling the Weathervane wasn't easy for Earl. The only way he would do it was with a life lease from the new owners to his office in the basement. He got the lease.

To move out of the Weathervane was unthinkable. Other buyers reportedly offered more money for the Inn, but wouldn't go for the life lease on the office.

During the 12 years he owned and controlled management of the Inn, it had its moments of glory as a successful restaurant. But as he grew older, Earl had to face the fact he is a builder and dreamer, not a hard-nosed, practical restaurant boss.

EVEN AFTER HE accepted this reality, he was reluctant to sell the Inn. Finally friends convinced him that no matter who owns the Weathervane it would "always be Earl Young's Weathervane." And that when comments like the lady visitor's are made, they will be directed to the builder, not the person serving food.

Earl conceived the Weathervane back in 1944 or 1945, ten years before he owned the property and placed the first stone. He created it from a dream and a life-long love of boulders, the majestic flight of sea gulls and the waves on Lake Michigan.

In 1918 he built his first stone house, at just about the time the Loeb estate was getting underway. His daughter and son in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gill, now own that first house, at 304 Park Ave.

The house at 304 Park was built for the then recently wed Earl and Irene Young. Irene, a high school sweetheart, and Earl live next door in another of the 30-some unique stone homes he has built in Charlevoix.

PEOPLE WHO know Irene and Earl continue to describe them as a classic match.

A successful artist in her own right, Irene designed and painted the original Traverse Bay, Mackinac Island and Charlevoix historic landmark maps that decorate so many fashionable summer homes and offices around the country.

She also pens poetry and sketches Charlevoix scenes with the kind of feeling long admired in provincial artists.

The original idea and mental sketches of the Weathervane Inn stemmed out of disappointment during the last days of World War II.

WHAT WAS TO become the Weathervane Inn was then the homey, three story metal-covered Argo Mill. As he looked at the Mill complex Earl's imagination replaced it with a rambling stone veneer restaurant alongside the Pine River.

But even then it wasn't, and still isn't, what he really wanted.

Just before World War II he and the late Bob Bridge, a pioneer Charlevoix banker, worked up plans and a scale model of a hotel-marina-restaurant complex along the entire northwest shore of Round Lake.

Each of the 60 rooms in the hotel were to face the lake. A circular restaurant would give diners a view of the lake and then proposed bridge. Cabanas were planned near the shore to accommodate boaters using the large marina.

OPTIONS ON THE property were obtained from the Charlevoix Lumber Co. Financing was arranged with several wealthy Charlevoix summer people.

Plans called for construction to start when the state started building the \$1 million bridge.

The first load of steel for the bridge arrived. The Japs his Pearl Harbor. The government took the steel back.

There would be no bridge or hotel until the Japs and Nazis were put in their place.

When it became apparent U.S. fighting men were on the way to victory, the lumber company, Earl reports, was no longer interested in selling the property. The project was abandoned.

With his grand dream destroyed, Earl started eyeing the graceless Argo Mill. It took ten years to negotiate the sale. Closing the deal hinged on him selling the Mill's coal business.

In 1954 he closed the deal: The Charlevoix Co-op bought the coal business. Earl took possession of the mill and started building his Weathervane the same day, Aug. 1, 1954.

Three years before he took possession of the mill, Earl had the thermo-pane windows diners now look through to see the ever-changing channel scene ordered and delivered to Charlevoix.

On Aug. 1, 1954 he put workmen to tearing down the two upper stories of the mill. None of the original foundation or the timbers in the main floor or lower level were moved.

The walls of the grain chutes, worn and oiled by nearly a century of grain shooting down them, were turned inside out and used as paneling in many areas.

An 18,260 pound stone he'd discovered while building his Boulder Park cottage subdivision on Lake Michigan in 1928 was repossessed from the woods where he hid it. The stone is an almost perfect map of Lower Michigan, including bold pink veins marking highway routes.

Destined to become the dominant stone in the Weathervane's main fireplace (the Inn has five) the stone was hauled in from the country after the rafters were up.

Earl had kept measurements of the stone for nearly 30 years. To accommodate it he had workmen leave enough space between rafters so that it could be lowered into place.

It didn't fit. The rafters were too close together. They were removed and the stone put in.

To this day Earl sticks to the original explanation he gave to workmen: "It grew 11 inches during all those years in the woods."

A black and white 2 by 3 inch photograph he took in 1904 of logging schooners in the Charlevoix harbor became the wall over the stairway. But first an Indiana artist was hired to recopy it in 10 by 7 foot size and in the real-life colors Earl remembered from 50 years before.

The frame and dock scene for the huge translite, which Earl calls "Windjammers in Charlevoix Harbor" cost \$1,100, he recalls.

The upstairs bar was constructed from pieces of an old shipwreck. Tables are made from walnut stumps, the mantle of the fireplace in his real estate office in the lower level is a section from an old Round Lake boatyard skidway -- moss still grows on it. Outside lamps are nearly century-old Copenhagen street lights.

A few years after the Weathervane was opened, a small segment of the original dream came true. A group of Charlevoix men decided to build a luxury motel on the corner of U.S. 31 and Dixon Ave., behind the Charlevoix Lumber Co.

The corner property was intended to be used for tennis courts in the original scheme for development of the 60 room motel and entire northwest shore of Round Lake. But instead, with Earl's magic talent guiding the builders, it became the Lodge.

Not long after the Lodge opened Earl managed to buy the Round Lake frontage directly east of the lumber company's main buildings. So far he has built two homes on it, a majestic stone house and what may be the most unique A-frame in the north. Two or three more homes are planned.

Then, in 1965, he opened the Weathervane Terrace, as awesomely-different motel, across the street from the Weathervane Inn.

Earl Young remains an enigma to fellow Charlevoixians. Even at 78 he continues to be at odds much of the time with the townsmen he has lived with since moving to Charlevoix from Mancelona in 1900.

Sensitive viewers find sea gulls soaring through the stone of his fireplaces. Tourists drive around town taking pictures of his stone homes, restaurant and the motels he built.

He hugs the natural beauty and charm of his northern big lake country with the reverence and passion religious fanatics use to quote Bible passages.

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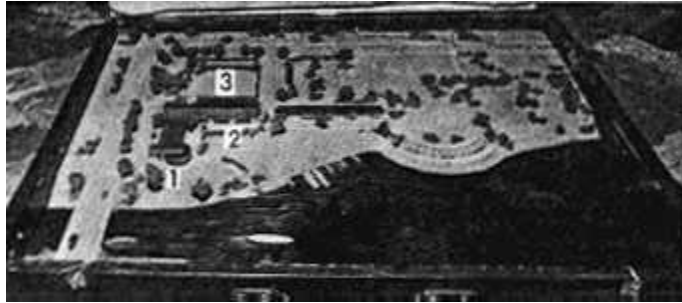
Weathervane's Charm Sprouted From Homely Mill

The Weathervane Inn, in foreground on right, was the homely Argo Mill, below, until it came into the grasp of Earl Young's love affair with the beauty of boulders, ever-changing Lake Michigan, the majesty of sea gull flight and other natural wonders of Charlevoix.

In the background on right is another of his creations, the Weathervane Terrace motel.



A YOUNGER EARL Young at the main fireplace in the Weathervane Inn, about the time it was built. He hid the big stone in the woods for nearly 30 years before using it here. See how closely it resembles a map of Lower Michigan, with the veins marking major highways.



THIS IS THE MODEL of the dream that didn't come true for Earl Young. Earl and several other Charlevoixians conceived this plan for a 60-unit motel-restaurant-marina complex on the northwest shore of Round Lake. In the left foreground is the Pine river channel bridge. Number 1 is the proposed restaurant. Number 2 is the proposed 60-unit hotel. Where the tennis courts, number 3, were to have been located the luxury motel The Lodge is now located. The Charlevoix Lumber Co. still occupies the land where the restaurant and hotel were planned. Young later acquired the property on the right and is building his unique homes on it.



"WINDJAMMERS IN Charlevoix Harbor," Young titles this picture he took in 1904. A 10 by 7 foot hand-painted copy of the picture, lighted from the rear is one of the main attractions in the Weathervane Inn.