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NIGHTLIFE

Mystery Muncher

Tea room on the cusp of the country

Coventry Tea Room and Restaurant

1161 Ridge Rd. (Route 23),
Coventryville, 610-469-9134.

Hours. Lunch: 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. Dinner: 5 to 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. (Also open for dinner on Valentine's Day.)

- No smoking
- Wheelchair accessible
- BYOB
- Reservations accepted
- Take-out available

Price range. Lunches average \$6.95 per person. Dinners range from \$14.95 to \$21.95.

Parking. There is a parking lot, but it can get a bit cramped during peak hours. Be prepared to park near grassy areas if no spaces are available.

What's the story? There is much historical significance to this particular northern Chester County site. British settlers constructed the Tea Room and its series of adjacent dwellings in the late 1700s. It served as a residence until 1977, when the Frederick family turned the home into a

cafe. Recently, Mary and Bob Powell (along with another partner) acquired the operation. Chef Thomas Frederick has been behind the stove since day one.

The scene. With its bucolic setting and old-fashioned charm, the Tea Room typifies genteel country dining from a bygone era. The building exudes early Americana: A flagstone floor, foot-thick stone and plaster walls, deep-set windowsills, quaint curios, and a cozy gas fireplace provide an authentic homespun ambience.

What we had. We began with the fresh salad that accompanies each dinner entree, enjoying Chef Frederick's tasty homemade dressings. For a main course, my wife had the veal Parisian (\$16.95) — tender medallions of sauteed veal, blanketed with locally grown mushrooms, asparagus and scalloped potatoes. I ordered the 8-ounce filet mignon (\$21.95). The cut was more textured than most filets I've had, with a hearty, almost prime-rib-like flavor. It was served with potatoes, grilled portobello mushrooms and asparagus. To end the meal, we split the cream puff (\$3.75) — an amazingly light and satisfying house-made dessert.

Chef's suggestions. Chef Frederick says, "At lunch, we're known for our quiche [\$7.50], our chicken salad [\$7.25], and, of course, the tea sandwich sampler [\$6.75]." A dinnertime favorite of his is the seafood Italiano (\$16.95) — a combination of shrimp, scallops and crabmeat over cappellini. Those award-winning cream puffs, too, shouldn't be missed.

Nice touches. The Coventry Tea Room has several quaint spaces in which to hold small parties and special events. Its enclosed porch is a popular draw for showers and other genteel affairs. Another highlight: Hosts Mary and Bob, along with our server, were all sincerely cordial in the service they provided on that particular evening.

After you eat. This stretch of Ridge Road is an unofficial demarcation point between the end of the suburbs and beginning of the country. Head west and you'll pass Lancaster County farm stands and a winery on your way into Amish country.



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