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*Preserving Oakville's  
Historical Heritage  
Since 1953*  
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## THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

**MARCH 2012**



**Volume 46: Number 1**

## SPECIAL EVENTS

- Wednesday, March 21st, 2012      OHS Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper  
Starting at 6:00pm
- Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012      OHS Yard Sale at 110 King Street 9AM – 1PM
- Sunday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012      Mayor's Picnic & Band Concert – Lakeside Park  
\* Noon to 4:30pm
- Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012      Doors Open
- Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012      Harvest Festival Bake Sale – Thomas House,  
Lakeside Park 11AM – 4PM
- Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012      Members Christmas Party, OHS office – 110  
King Street

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

**2012**

- Wednesday, May 9th, 2012      The War of 1812: Speaker Mr. Ken Weber
- Wednesday, October 17th, 2012      Women and the War of 1812: Speaker Cheryl  
MacDonald
- Wednesday, November 21st, 2012      The Home Children (with focus on those who  
came over from the Dr. Barnardo Institute).  
Speaker Elaine Guther

All programs will be held at St. John's United Church and begin at 7:30pm, except  
the March 14th program (6:00pm).

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**COVER PICTURE:** Fisherman's Shanties Along Bronte Harbour C. 1910 Ross  
Wark Collection  
Advertising insert artwork and compilation by Carolyn Naismith.



Atex Printing & Graphics -Proudly putting quality images on paper! - 2070 Speers  
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Your Society is very fortunate to have a very active group of volunteers. It seems as if the size of this group is growing but there is always room for more. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons the office seems to get busier month by month. Many of our volunteers contribute on other days as well and much work is done at home. Some time ago we started opening on the third Sunday afternoon of the month and Phil Brimacombe and Stewart Sherriff have helped out many visitors during this new open time. Volunteerism can be a hot topic and there is a real push by different organizations and levels of government to recognize the efforts of volunteers. We get a fair amount of mail concerning volunteer awards and recognition. It's impossible to formally recognize everyone and some of the award applications require an amazing amount of work by – a volunteer. I am very pleased to report that I recently received an invitation to attend the Ontario Heritage Trust - Heritage Community Recognition Program Awards Ceremony to be held at Town Hall at the end of February. Long-time members and volunteers Margaret Buxton and Evelyn Bullied will be receiving this award. My congratulations to them.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held 21st March at 6:00 at St. John's United Church. As usual the meeting will be preceded by a pot-luck dinner. Let's hope the weather is better this year.

A month or so ago Greg Munz and I had the opportunity to tour through the new Queen Elizabeth Park Community Centre where the Society will have about 1000 square feet of storage space. We will also have the opportunity to put up displays in the building in conjunction with the Oakville Museum. Eventually most, if not all, of our archives will be moved there where they will be better protected against fire and we will have more space at the office for research. The Society will be represented at the official opening to be held on 24 March. If you have the time, go by for a tour of this great facility.

The Society is looking for a new treasurer. If you have an accounting background and are interested in taking over this position, please contact me.

I hope to see you at the Annual General Meeting.

Oakville Historical Society E-mail  
[info@oakvillehistory.org](mailto:info@oakvillehistory.org)

Archive Hours \* Tues & Thurs –  
1PM to 4:30PM at 110 King Street.

George Chisholm  
905-842-5385  
georgechisholm@sympatico.ca

## *Bronte: Ever Growing, Ever Changing*

**B**ronte is located around the harbor area where the Twelve Mile Creek (Bronte Creek) enters Lake Ontario. Originally aboriginal lands, Bronte as a village began to take shape in the early 1800s. Philip Sovereign bought land west of the harbor in 1814. In 1834, a sawmill was built, and the village was laid out with various sized lots for sale. A road from Toronto was constructed that closely followed the Lake Ontario shore.

During the 1850's, the harbor was a thriving centre for the export of wheat and lumber from the surrounding Township of Trafalgar. Later, fishing and boat building were prime industries, as was stoneworking – dredging flat stones from the lake bottom. These stones can be seen in a few remaining buildings from this time period. These ventures attracted merchants, artisan and other industries – the basket factory and blacksmith shop being but two. Bronte Steam Mills was one of the largest grist mills in the province when it opened in 1858. Next to the mill was the post office operated by Joseph Flumerfelt. In the early 1900s, he had postcards printed in Germany showing local Bronte scenes which proved popular with tourists. Allie and Lila Flumerfelt, along with Councillor Alf Jennings, opened the last “stand alone” post office in the early 1950s.

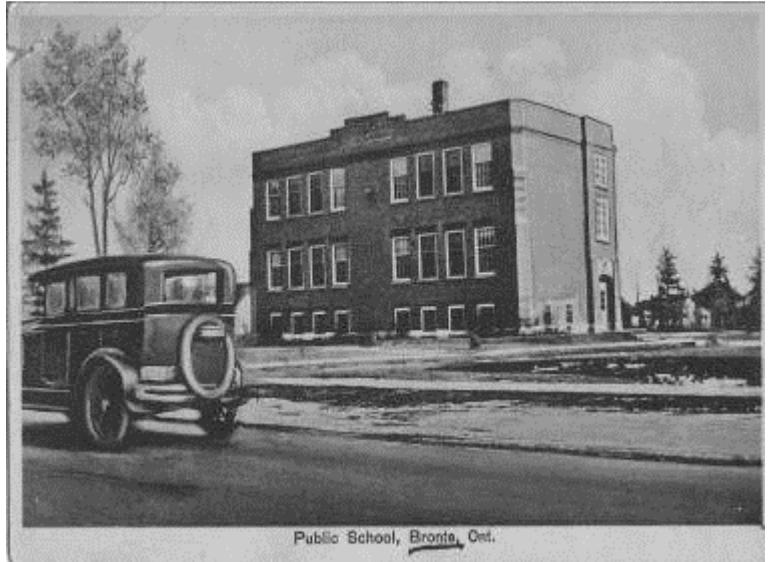


Councillor Alf Jennings (L) &  
Allie Flumerfelt (R) at opening of new Post  
Office (Ross Wark Collection)

Bronte's first log school was likely built in 1815 on West Street near Chisholm. The Sovereigns and the Belyeas were prominent in educational affairs. In 1872, a two story school made of stone was constructed on the north side of Chisholm St. (now Marine Drive). It was demolished in 1923 and a new school was built with the south half built in 1949. Centriller School closed in June of 1976. Students then moved to Westbrook (later demolished), Eastview and St. Dominic's. T. A. Blakelock High School is the closest secondary school since Queen Elizabeth Park H.S. closed a few years ago.

As a child in the late 1940s, parental warnings kept us from biking from our Oakville home to Bronte. Something about those “Bronte boys”. It’s my understanding that a similar warning was issued to Bronte “Ciscoes” (fish) travelling by bus to Oakville Trafalgar High School on Reynolds Street.

How times change!



Today a group of Oakville – Bronte people – of a certain age – meet at the Firehall Restaurant. Many share memories, pictures, postcards and newspaper clippings of times past. The basket factory, fishing shanties, teen town, Orange Lodge, volunteer fire department, Bell telephone operators with their friendly “number, please”, west pier diving tower, and many more have disappeared, but memories linger in the minds of long time area residents. The Commercial Fisherman Memorial on the east pier tells the story of brave men who fished the lake. Some never returned.

Bronte Public School (Centriller) Ross Wark Collection

From 1951 – 1958, Bronte was incorporated as a village within Trafalgar Township. In 1962, the Township (including Bronte) became part of Oakville. Families who enriched this vibrant community include: Adams, Allan, Bray, Hinton, Speers, Cudmore, Pollock, Osborne, MacDonald, Triller, Joyce, Hill, Hopkins, McKim, Orr, Ingledew, Sargent, McCraney Pickard, Page and Belyea.

Today, “Bronte Village” has a great deal to offer residents and visitors alike during every season. Hundreds are drawn to July 1<sup>st</sup> celebrations south of the Lakeshore on Bronte Road. The harbor area park in August attracts art lovers to Art in the Park. Brightly decorated streets, shops and restaurants are popular during the autumn and winter....all year round really. Add in the boardwalk, both piers, parks, recreational boats of every description and you have a photographer’s delight.

This eclectic article leaves much for readers to investigate for themselves. Celebrate our past and preserve our heritage. We've lost too much already. Support the efforts of The Bronte Historical Society to showcase the best that remains. Volunteers are always willing to assist with research, displays and art shows.

Ross Wark  
Trafalgar Township Historical Society

## *AROUND THE SOCIETY*



### Solution to “The Way Things Were” – December 2011

The December photo showed the “Snowman” pool in Santa Land. It was taken while the finishing touches were being applied and water filling the pool. This project was the vision of Bill Adams.

Lance Naismith

#### **HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS AND GHOST WALKS**

**Planning your summer and fall events – relatives/friends visiting?  
Check our website at [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org) for the 2012 Schedule.**

## Martin Luther King Day at the Synagogue

On a Sabbath day in January members of the Oakville Historical Society were invited to Shaarei-Beth EL Synagogue on Morrison Road to hear Don DeCoursey give an account of growing up in Oakville as a person of colour, in recognition of Martin Luther King Day.

Don was born in Oakville in 1942 into one of the two original black families in Oakville who had come from Maryland in the 1850s; the Duncans and the DeCourseys who were related through marriage. Growing up on the “East Side”, the only black family in the neighbourhood, they nevertheless got along and forged lifelong friendships with neighbouring kids. Overall, Oakville was a racially tolerant place to live, though he did recall one very unpleasant, hurtful situation.

Oakville was a much smaller community with a population of around 5,000 and, Don’s parents Gordon and Betty, were an outgoing couple; active members of St. John’s



Don DeCoursey

United Church and various social groups; his Dad serving in the Lorne Scots and his Mother in the district commissioner’s office of the Girl Guides. He recalls shopping on Saturday mornings, a social event, running into friends who called his father “Speck” because of his freckles.

His family knew and worked with members of the Jewish community, including the family of Max Brown, founding member of the synagogue and the Burkes, one of whom, Bill, taught Don to play trumpet and they played together in the Oakville Citizen’s Band.

The other link with the Jewish community is his wife of sixteen years, Lena, with whom he enjoyed learning about Judaism and enjoyed the trip of a lifetime, to Israel. Don and Lena, who



Gordon & Betty DeCoursey

have just become members of The Oakville Historical Society, are also friends of membership volunteer, Stanley Smurlick, and his wife, Shirley.

Members of the Oakville Historical Society would like to thank Rabbi Stephen Wise and the congregation of Shaarei-Beth EL for their hospitality and kindness in guiding us through the service and for providing a social hour following.

Andrea Stewart

### Membership Report

We welcome the following new members who have joined this year so far:

|  |                          |                |                  |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Jackie Bennett                                   | Ross Erdis               | Reiner Jaakson | Wendy Janisse    |
| Doug Mabee                                       | Evelyn Ortwein           | Linda Rothney  | Yvonne Vanderlin |
| Lena Ruehle and Don deCoursey                    | Eileen Za                | Steve Zazulyk  |                  |
| Irene and Bruce Richards                         | Andrew and Carol Kennedy |                |                  |
| Scott Hannah, Heritage Manager, Town of Oakville |                          |                |                  |
| Dave Gittings. Town Councillor                   |                          |                |                  |

We look forward to seeing all of you at our upcoming events.

**For those members who have not yet renewed, we urge you to do so before the March Annual General Meeting so that you will be entitled to vote.**

Andrea Stewart

### Yard Sale (White Elephant Sale)

Set aside Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 for the OHS YARD SALE, which will be held at 110 King Street (9AM to 1PM) and, the early bird gets the best pick. We're asking members and non-members to scout out their garages and basements for good, clean, non-clothes items or appliances etc. that would be suitable for sale.

As well, volunteers to organize on the Friday (May 25<sup>th</sup>) or help on the day of sale would be appreciated.

Jim Young

Please take time to look at our advertiser's insert. Their sponsorship has been the reason we have our COLOUR December edition. It would be appreciated if you were to stop by and thank them.

## Books For Sale

Available for gift giving, for the history buff in the family or, whoever would like to be one!

### **Oakville & the Sixteen**

*Members - \$35.00*

*Non-Members - \$50.00*

### **Oakville: A Small Town**

*Members - \$10.00*

*Non-Members - \$12.00*

### **Oakville Harbour & Bronte Harbour**

*Members - \$10.00*

*Non-Members - \$12.00*

### **Oakville: Street Names and Landscapes**

*Members - \$35.00*

*Non-Members - \$42.00*

### **Halton's Heritage: Wm. Halton & Halton County (New this year)**

*Hard Cover - \$55.00*

*Soft Cover - \$42.00*

### **Ever Faithful**

*\$25.00*

### **A History of the Lorne Scots**

*Members - \$10.00*

*Non-Members - \$12.00*

### **Old Oakville**

*\$25.00*

*All prices quoted include taxes.*

**Just a phone call away – we will happily meet with you at our offices when convenient to you. Cash or cheque only. No credit cards please.**

Mary Davidson

If you wish to submit photos for the Print newsletter, please ensure they are High Resolution – not email quality. Otherwise they will not reproduce well. Editor

## 1918 Influenza Epidemic

*The Spanish Flu was the most devastating epidemic in recorded history. Arriving as it did at the end of World War I, with returning troops and increased civilian movement conditions were ripe for disease. It spread rapidly, claiming at least fifty million people world-wide. more than were killed in the war. No country seems to have been immune. Canada lost at least fifty thousand lives.*

At our most recent Speakers' Night, John McDonald of the Milton Historical Society spoke about the effect of this devastating epidemic in Halton. Though little had been written about the epidemic, Mr. McDonald was able, through interviews with local residents and newspapers from the period, to present a graphic and interesting account of the local impact.

The first signs of the influenza in Halton were found in October 1918. The epidemic lasted until March or April of 1919, and took a roller-coaster progression, with the most severe outbreaks occurring around Christmas 1918 and January 1919. Curiously, this flu seemed to hit not the young or frail elderly, but healthy 25-45 year-olds. By the time the epidemic ended, some 150 Halton residents were dead and several hundred had been severely affected, out of a total population of 23,000.

The first recorded report was in Georgetown on October 10, 1918. There were some 300 cases in Burlington. Many doctors died and nurses had to be trained to deal with the sick. The funeral director died and the demand for coffins couldn't be met. There are reports of self-contained funeral streetcars. The local newspapers contained numerous advertisements offering medicines, salves, and ointments.

In order to contain the spread, the medical authorities sought to ban assemblages and close public places such as schools and theatres. This ran counter to those who sought to organize public rallies and to raise funds for the last few months of the war effort. The clergy were upset about the closure of churches and theatre owners petitioned the Boards of Health in the municipalities to reopen the theatres. Images of throngs of people at train stations welcoming home soldiers illustrated how difficult it would have been to prevent gatherings. In December of 1918 "Business as Usual" was declared but it was not to be; the 'flu was more severe when it came back at Christmas and January. The Guelph Winter Fair went ahead and many farmers became infected. Despite the grimness, the illness and loss of life, there seems to have been no evidence of hysteria and, on the contrary, much kindness among the public. People demonstrated a great ability to cope, not only with the war, but also with this final insult.

As there was no central health authority such as Health Canada, each Halton municipality had its own Board of Health to deal with the crisis. In 1919 Federal Health Care came into being, together with new awareness program.

The origin of the flu is still not scientifically known but it is believed to possibly be a bird flu from the far East; some believe it may have started from a swine flu in the United States. The reason it was named “Spanish Flu” is that Spain, having been neutral during the war was therefore not censoring their newspaper reports and able to report the epidemic, unlike the other countries involved in the war effort who didn’t want their enemies to know that they had been badly affected. Because the Spanish reported the widespread illness and death, it looked as if the epidemic had started there.

Andrea Stewart

### Grand Opening: QE Park Community and Cultural Centre

**Saturday March 24th, 10am - 5pm**

A brand new community centre is opening up in the old QE Park High School, and the OHS is going to have a climate-controlled storage facility there to better protect our precious archives. The GRAND OPENING will see many interactive activities, including some of our own from the Oakville Memories project. For more information, contact Alyssa Reynolds or Yvonne Verlinden through the OHS.

Yvonne Verlinden

### Society Offices

We are continuing to open the offices and museum of the Oakville Historical Society on King Street, from 1:30 to 4:00pm every third Sunday in the month. We would be delighted to welcome you to our beautiful headquarters by the Volunteers’ Fountain if you are taking a stroll in the vicinity.

Phil Brimacombe, Stewart Sherriff

*Editor's Note: A long standing member of the Oakville Historical Society and a Director, Barbara Savage, recently passed away. She will be missed by us all. Below is a reprint of an article written about her early years in Oakville.*

## *Christmas Memories of Oakville*

*Reflecting gratefully on the good things in life with Barbara Thornton-Savage .*

As the holiday season approaches, I once again reach for my volume of Christmas recipes that have inspired our family's celebrations for decades. These recipes are a kind of time capsule carefully documenting the festive foods enjoyed by our little Oakville community almost a century ago, Sitting down with a cup of tea, I open Dad's recipe book and remember. As I drift back through the years, I once again enter an enchanting world of memories and recapture the sheer joy of this magical holiday season from my childhood.

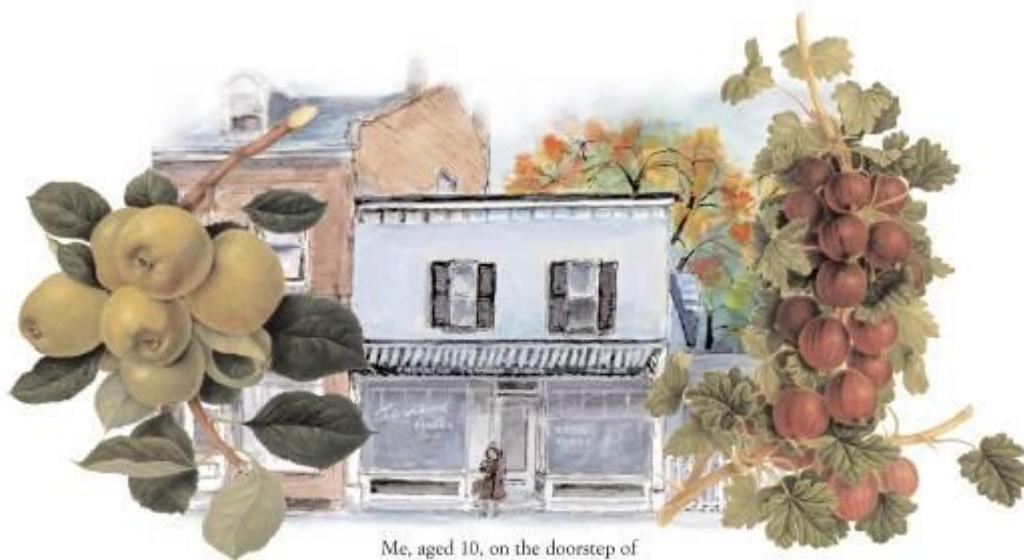
Suddenly it's Christmas time, 1939 again. I'm just eight years old and standing at the top of the stairs savoring the wood smoke from the oven in the bakeshop behind the kitchen below. I can hear Mom and older sister Joanie laughing and humming our favorite holiday tunes as I make my way down to see Dad.

Dad's day began at 4 a.m. everyday except Sunday. All the bread and baked goods had to be prepared before the store opened at 9 o'clock. Dad was so proud of his little shop, Thornton' Bakery, on Colborne Street (now Lakeshore Road) with the cozy flat above that was our home. The large oven in the bake shop was wood-burning, so Dad had to start early to get the oven hot enough to bake the bread, cakes and pastries that would soon fill the shelves and window of one half of the store.

The other half was the children's favorite where the fragrance of cinnamon, orange peel, cloves and peppermint permeated the air. This was the candy side with baskets and jars overflowing with candy canes and humbugs, maple fudge, chocolate, roasted cashews and red skin peanuts. All sumptuous treats for sharing or giving. Best of all was the Mixed Nut Brittle. Dad made and sold tons of it. Unfortunately he never became a rich man because he really didn't count his hard labor when working out the price of the goods.

The sweet smell of peppermint filled the whole of the store and flat above. There were pans and pans of candy canes all made by hand. The whole family took part in the exciting task of making these sparkling festive confections. First, Dad would boil the fragrant toffee mixture until it formed a mound, he would then cut it in half. One half he would pull over a hook, over and over again until it turned pure white. Pulling the hot toffee on the hook was strenuous work but Dad was strong and never complained. He then added bright red food coloring to the other half that he laid in strips over the white and twisted into a long rope. This was cut into varying small lengths and hastily passed along to my Mom, brother, sister and me so we could bend a hook in one end. We had to work fast as the candy would harden quickly.

I recall just before Christmas standing outside the store looking in at the candy window. I suppose I must have appeared wistful because a very kind lady suddenly went into the shop and bought me a small bag of candy. I can still see her shining eyes as she handed me this gift. I quickly realized she did not know who I was but even though I was a young child I knew not to spoil her act of generosity by saying that my father owned the shop! It's strange but seventy Christmases later, I still vividly remember her kindness.



Me, aged 10, on the doorstep of Thornton's Bakery in 1941.

Once again I call upon my store of Christmas memories as I push open the door and wiggle my way through the crowded shop. It's impossible not to get swept up in the Christmas spirit when it's bustling all around you. The waft of warm butter and vanilla mingle with the sugary scent of a hot batch of cookies baking in the oven. But just now I've got a job to do. I interrupt Mom serving customers by giving her a little hug as I squeeze past into the bake shop in the back.

There, wedged between long tables holding all different sizes of dark fruit cake sumptuously topped with an inch of almond paste and a thin sheet of crisp white icing, I can see my Dad and sister Joan. They don't notice me they are too busy writing Merry Christmas and Season's Greetings on the cakes before piping a scroll around the border and adding a Christmas rose or two. Since I was not good at decorating, my job was to follow along and add a small stem of paper holly.

In retrospect, it sounds as if we all participated in child labor, but it was so much fun and such a sense of connection with the whole family. And there was always lots of free time too. As soon as I finished my holly contribution I dashed out to meet with some friends to go ice-skating on the river. It had been so cold that we were able to skate right up to the Old Mill built by William Chisholm.

Now it's dusk and I'm walking home along the river path towards the town. As I reach the high street I am greeted by a warm, golden light radiating from all the windows. A magical moment in twilight with Christmas bells ringing as I enter the shop. The sound gives me a sudden rush of happiness as I anticipate the festive time to come. On Christmas day the church bells chime Christmas carols which echo along Colbourne Street, always quite deserted on that most special of days.

It's closing time as I enter the shop. Mom just smiles at me as I scoop up one lonely gingerbread man left on the tray and whispers that there is a plate of sugar frosted mincemeat pies to enjoy after supper. Tomorrow Dad would be baking some Christmas cookies specially for us to offer Santa on Christmas Eve.

In retelling the story of my childhood I appreciate there are few things that stir warmer memories than the food we remember from that time. I would like to share with you one of my particular favorites - Dad's recipe for Mixed Nut Brittle - which I very much hope you will one day press into your own book of Christmas memories.



## *Ingredients for Mixed Nut Brittle*

2 cups fine white sugar  
1 teaspoon salt,  
2/3 cup of water

1/3 cup of corn syrup  
1/3 cup of butter

1/4 teaspoon lemon juice  
4 cups mixed nuts (Brazil, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, and cashews)

## *Preparation*

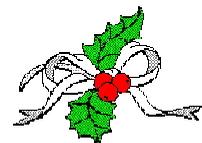
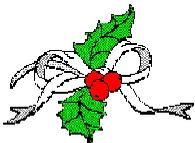
Butter a cookie tray with an lip at least 1 inch high, and place in the freezer.

## *To mix*

In a heavy pot, over a gentle heat, combine sugar, salt and water. Stir continuously until all sugar crystals are dissolved. Put in the candy thermometer, clipping it to the side of the pan, and turn up the heat.

Bring the mixture to a boil and then add corn syrup. Do not leave the boiling sugar unattended as it rises quickly in the pan and may boil over. Heat the mixture up to 280 degrees F. Add butter and continue to cook, stirring frequently. The temperature is very high and splashed boiling sugar syrup is extremely dangerous - as dangerous as boiling oil on the skin - so be very careful.

When the temperature reaches 285 degrees F, remove from heat and stir in the lemon juice. Immediately add the nuts and mix thoroughly. Pour onto the cold, buttered tray, and separate into clusters by pulling the mixture apart with the tines of two buttered forks. Work quickly, as the toffee will harden very fast.



## **THE WAY THINGS WERE**



1. What is the name of the bridge in the picture?
2. What is the white building in the background?
3. What was the road called when the bridge was present?

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**The Oakville Historical Society: 110 King Street, Oakville**

**Archive Hours: Tuesday & Thursday \* 1:00 to 4:30PM**

**Tel: (905) 844-2695 Fax: (905) 844-7380 Website: [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)**

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