

Everybody in Belleville burned coke

If you walked through the doors of the grubby factory on south Pinnacle Street over half a century ago, you would not have seen production of the bubbly beverage Coca Cola.

The "coke" which came out of the factory was not a soft drink, but a byproduct of the coal-burning operation, and it was used to heat homes in Belleville.

Arnold Ethier grew up near

Factory byproduct heated homes

the old coke plant in the early 1930s. Though the word coke is more commonly known to refer to other products today, when Ethier was growing up everyone knew coke came from coal.

Ethier remembers the coke was light in color, "like it was pretty well burned out."

Coke was used especially at night to keep a slow fire burning. Because of the gas it contained, soft coal was extremely inflammable and thus too dangerous to leave in the fire over night.

"Pretty near everybody in Belleville burned the coke."

The soft coal that was burned to make coke came to the plant by train. "A set of tracks went in right up along the side of the coke plant here," Ethier recalls.

When the cars pulled up, the hoppers were opened and the coal went into pits beside the

building. "They took the coal from the pits into the building."

From there the coal went into a furnace where it was burned creating three byproducts: gas, coke and tar.

A 1938 fire insurance survey conducted by the City of Belleville for all its public

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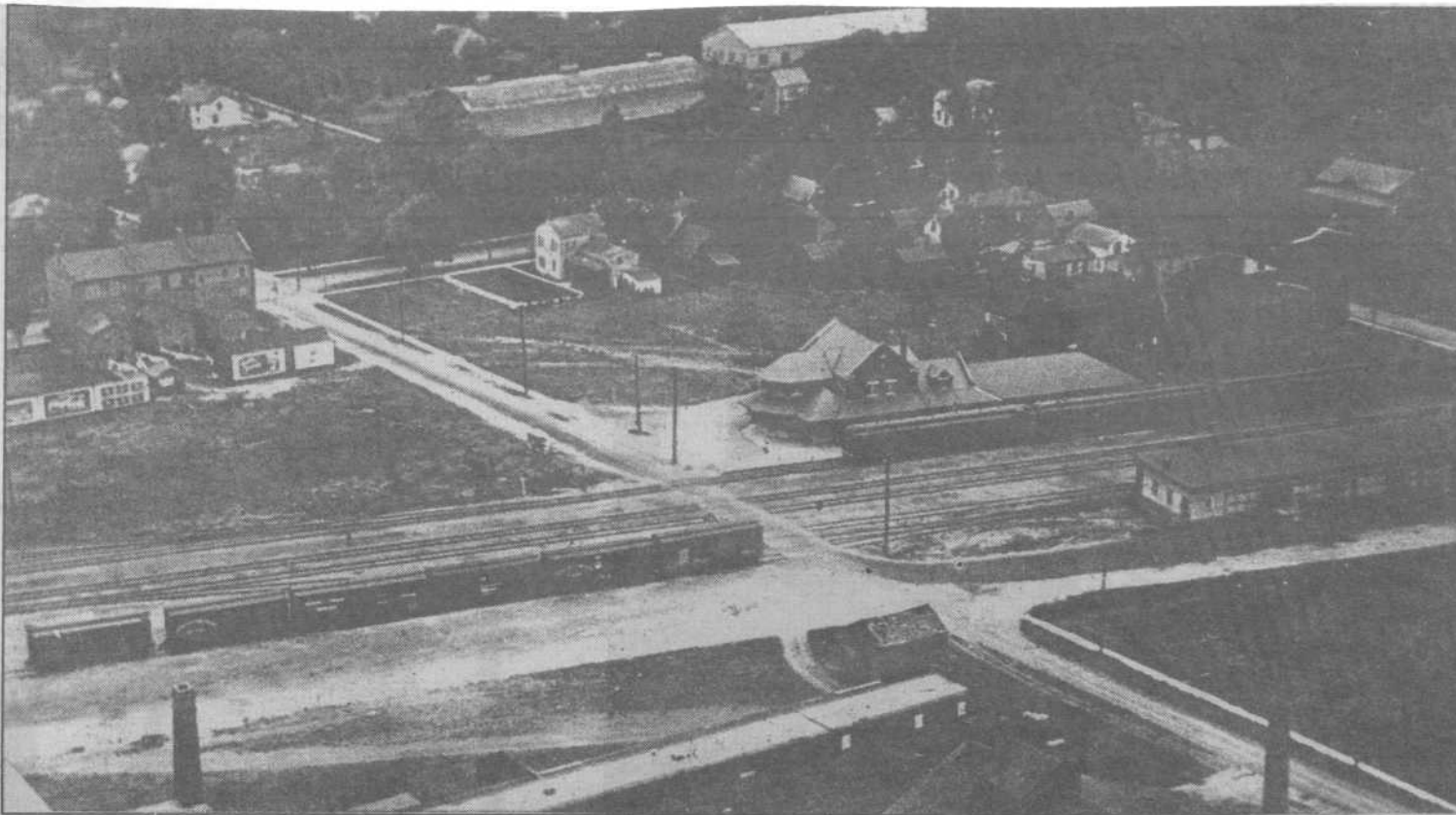


Photo courtesy Dick Lumbers collection

Foster Ward looked very different in this 1919 photograph, taken by the (Billy) Bishop Barker Co. of Toronto, when trains came to the station house that is now a community centre.

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Coke Oven (City of Belleville)
Remembered by Allan, Mitchell
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