



BENZIE SANGMA

Intelligencer

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This restaurant closed down in the early 1950s but listening to city resident Ron Fox talk about his favourite item on the menu, one would think that he had just been there ordering himself a serving of delicious taffy tarts.

"Oh, if you had one, you wouldn't forget it," he chuckled as he effortlessly dug into his memories of the Dickens and Son Restaurant once located for many years at 215 Front St., Belleville.

Owned by Ernest Dickens and his son, Jack, the aroma of the goodies and fresh loaves of bread at the counter located at the front part of this one floor restaurant, drew in the only too willing clients. Among them, recalled Fox, was his own mother.

"I remember she used to love that bakery. She often went in there to buy all sorts of baked stuff. As I recall, Jack (Dickens) was very artistic. He used to decorate the cakes very nicely," said Fox.

The section of the floor popularly referred to as "the tea room" was located at the rear part of the building and was often busy, he added.

"People used to congregate there for tea and tarts and they'd buy from their bakery at the same time. Groups of ladies shopping downtown would go there for tea and that would be considered an outing at the time. It was a great spot. It was a meeting place," said Fox.

Number of other bakeries existed in the downtown area at the time, recalled Fox, but the bakery at the Dickens and Son was the most well-known.

An array of chocolate eclairs, cream puffs, candies, butterscotch tarts and cakes for numerous occasions teased the customers and invited them in for more.

Belleville-resident Mary Townsend, now



JACK DICKENS

85 years old, recalled working at the Dickens and Son in the mid-'30s for a few years.

"I remember it was a popular place. I loved working there. I had to wear a black dress with a white collar and a little white hat when I was working there. I remember I was awful tired one day and I walked home with the little lace cap still on and I couldn't figure out why people were staring at me."

She walked that way all the way from downtown to her home opposite the CNR station and it was only when she reached home and her mother pointed it out to her that she became aware of the hat still being on her head.

Most of the staff at the time were girls, she said, but there were some boys who manned the bakery counter.

Townsend recalled that the Dickens used to make their own ice cream as well. She thought they had their own small factory, which was located in the area near the bay. The location was later confirmed by Jack Dickens as the Macintosh-Ridley building on South Front Street. The Dickens owned the building before selling it in the late '20s.

"They made everything from scratch themselves and that's why I think they were very popular," said Townsend.

The story of this business operation