

and Son, he said. After that year it became known as Dickens and Son.

"People called it a tea room but actually it was a restaurant with three rows that could seat about 110 people at a time. We served breakfast and lunch there. The bakery goods were sold at the counter at the front section of the floor while the actual bakery was at the rear," said Dickens. "My father rented out this store next door to us. Behind us we sublet the front part and at the rear he built the tea room. It was all oak furniture and fireplace. I think that's what people remember most. I think it was built in the late '20s."

The baked goods sold at the Dickens and Son bakery were homemade, said Dickens. He took over his grandfather's catering service in the mid-'30s.

"I used to cater at the Officers Mess at the Belleville Armouries. I used to take our waitresses over there on New Year's eve and cater the midnight dinner."

His artistic gift for cake decoration drew many a client's attention and his talent for it simply came from his high school interest in painting.

"My high school teacher wanted me to go to Ontario College of Art but my father said he couldn't afford to send me there at the time so I stayed with the business. So I guess I just transferred that skill to decorating wedding cakes."

The "tea room" which sat about 50 people, went with the building when it was sold. Also known as The English Room, it was separate from the main area of the business, said Dickens.

"Actually we could hold private meetings there. That's where the Belleville Theatre Guild had its first conception meeting long time ago," he added.

Reflecting on those days of running the family business, Dickens concluded:

"The restaurant business is a tough business. It involved very long hours and for me, it got to be 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week. We had a young daughter at the time and sometimes I'd go a week without seeing my family. That was hard."

In 1953, fire, the third to assault the business over the years, started on the second floor and did heavy damage to the restaurant and his father, who had just retired at the time, decided against selling it and closed it down.

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The interior of the Dickens and Son during the middle of the last century.

goes back to the later part of the 19th century.

"I was the fourth generation in the business. It was in Belleville for a long time. It opened around 1887. It started out as a bakery and a candy manufacturing shop," explained Dickens, who began helping his father, Ernest and grandfather, Ed, run the business in the '30s.

Until 1944 when his grandfather died, the business was known as Ed F. Dickens