

HALTON'S PEOPLE

Acton man reflects on his rough start in Canada

By **MAGGIE HANNAH**
Herald staff writer

"I love Italy 'cause I was born there, but I love Canada because that's where I make my living."

So says one of Acton's long time residents, Eugene Braida. Mr. Braida was born in a stone house in a village called Gravare, which is in the Alps in the north of Italy. The farm was very small and the main crop was grapes. They made wine for a canteen, he said.

"It was a poor way to live," he said. He was 12 when his father died and he had to help his mother raise his four younger brothers and sisters. He waited until he was 19 before he decided to emigrate because he couldn't make a good enough living in Italy to keep himself and help his family too.

He made the trip with three or four boys of roughly the same age but two of them stopped off around Toronto where they had friends and he travelled on to Bracebridge with only one companion. They had come by boat to New York City, that took a month, and took the train the rest of the way. Customs were no problem in those days, he said. In Italy Customs officials might have been stricter about what people were bringing into the country but both Canada and the United States were welcoming new immigrants in 1906 so they weren't checking things very carefully.

TANNERY WORK
He had friends from his village working in a tannery in Bracebridge and they had arranged his passage for him and sent him his tickets. Unfortunately his train ticket was wasn't quite complete. It was only good to take him Gravenhurst, 10 miles short of his destination. The train officials forced him to get off at Gravenhurst and since he could speak no English he couldn't make them understand where he was going nor could he find out what was wrong with his ticket. Finally a policeman came up to him on the platform and tried to ask him what was wrong. Mr. Braida pulled out a letter with the address of the Anglo-Canadian Tannery on it and tried to explain that he was going there to work.

Another officer was brought over and the train officials and the station agent got into the act too. They kept saying money over and over but Mr. Braida didn't know what that word meant.

Finally he pulled out the last of his cash, a five dollar bill, and gave it to the agent. Immediately his problem was solved. He gave him a ticket for his destination and handed him his change and he was off again. The total cost of the remaining passage was 12 cents.

During the two day train trip Mr. Braida said he had nothing to eat or drink. "I expect there was some place I could get food and water but I didn't speak English so I couldn't ask for it," he said.

Wages when he started in the tannery were 12½ cents an hour for a 10 hour day, he said, and he got room and board for \$4 a week.

Italians were well liked, he said, because they were known as hard workers. For this reason there were a number of Italian families in Bracebridge and it was easy to get jobs for friends or relatives in the tannery.

LATER MARRIED
One of the Italians already in Bracebridge when he arrived was the girl he later married. Teresa and her sister emigrated in 1905 along with their aunt and uncle and Mrs. Braida was working in a linen factory when he met her again. They had gone to school together as children in Italy, he said, so they were already acquainted before they arrived in Canada.

Mr. Braida worked in Bracebridge for a number of years with a few breaks for other things.

One of these breaks occurred shortly after he first came there although he isn't exactly sure of the date.

He was out of work because the tannery was on short time so he decided to go north and see what he thought of mining. He took the train to Cobalt and then went to a silver mining camp by horse and wagon. It was about an hour's ride from the town. There were no roads, just trails through the bush.

Some of the miners lived in tents but some, like Mr. Braida, had to sleep in wagons with a blanket thrown over them to keep off the rain. They bought their own food and cooked it themselves outside. The beds were full of lice, he said, and the only transportation was farmers who came to the camps, took the men to town for a fee, and waited to bring them back.



Eugene Braida, 91, was born in a stone house in the Italian Alps. His mother died in this home in 1918. All through World War 2 the Braidas could get no news of their family and never knew if they were alive or dead. Mr. Braida spent three months in Italy in 1956 and gave the farm to other members of the family at that time.

"Every time I go down in that dark place with light on my head I think, 'this is no way to make a living. Better you go back to Italy,'" he chuckles. The only lights the miners had were candles. Although he only stayed in the Cobalt silver mine about a month he managed to be there at the time of Cobalt's first fire. He remembered going by horse and wagon to watch the whole town burn to the ground. He can't recall what started it but he remembers it was a very dry time, probably in the early spring and the fire happened during the night.

WANTED TO KNOW
When he got back to Bracebridge everyone wanted to know what he thought of the north and the mines.

TANNERY CLOSED
The Bracebridge tannery closed up and its workers were offered jobs in a tannery in Huntsville. Mr. Braida said he and his family stayed there about six months, long enough to see one winter, then decided they didn't like the area. They came to Acton in March 1926 and he's still here.

Since he had learned a trade, finishing sole leather, he was able to get a job in Beardmore's tannery and he was with them 16 or 17 years.

Mr. Braida bought the shoe store on Mill Street from Bill and John Kennedy in 1938 and he ran that with the help of his daughter Rena, until 1958. He quit the tannery in the 1940s although he can't remember the exact date. He opened his own factory in 1952 making women's shoes, boots and slippers in a building behind his home on Queen Street. He had 40 people working there when it closed in 1965.

Mr. Braida bought the old Mann farm which he suspects goes back to the crown. It was the property famous Canadian railway builder Sir Donald Mann bought to build his parents a home. The 130-year-old house has been completely renovated inside and out but the original structure is still there underneath.

Mr. Braida recalled that during the Depression money was scarce in their home as it

was in many others and he used to cut all his winter's wood on neighboring farms and use that to keep expenses down. He also worked for any farmer willing to hire him when he was on short time at the tannery and often got a patch of ground on which he could grow the family potatoes for the winter in return for his labour.

The Braidas farmed on their 58 acres for 12 years. During eight of those years they kept Guernsey cattle and shipped milk to a local dairy.

Then in 1955 the land was sold for Acton's first subdivision, Glenlea.

"I didn't want to sell," Mr. Braida said, "but I figured I was not doing justice to the town if I don't. The town want to spread out, let it spread, I figured. Somebody got to start it, so I guess it's me."

The Braidas celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1962 and Mrs. Braida died seven years later.

FAMILY CHIEF
It was while Mrs. Braida was ill that Mr. Braida learned to cook and he is now the family chef with the meals on the table when Alma and Nino get home in the evenings from work.

Politics has been a long time interest of Mr. Braida's and he said he hasn't missed voting since he has been able to vote in Canada. He may have his own bias in politics but that hasn't stopped various mem-

bers of parliament from dropping in to chat whenever they were passing. He was approached during his younger days to stand for municipal elections, but his wife always discouraged him, he said.

He is the oldest and longest-standing member of St. Joseph's parish and the back room of his shoe store was the scene of many a good theological discussion through the years as the Presbyterians, United and Anglican ministers stopped in to chat with Mr. Braida.

Mr. Braida was well known inside his family for his storytelling ability and his children well recall how he used to have them in tears for hours with his sad stories.

"Of course, we had nothing else to do in those days. There

was no radio and we didn't have a car so we didn't go anywhere," his son said.

The eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren have all enjoyed Papa's stories too, he said.

When Mr. Braida celebrated his ninetieth birthday with an open house last year conservative estimates says 275 guests stopped in some time during the day to wish him well. Visitors came up to 100 miles for the party.

Mr. Braida is very proud of the relationship he maintains with his two brothers who live less than a mile from him. They never fight, he said, and they still love each other. His two sisters died in Italy.

He lost his son Norman in 1971. He was president of Beardmore at the time.

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Julian Reed, M.P.P.
HALTON BURLINGTON
CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 1978

Local Cancer Society meets, discuss need to help patients

By **DEE BUTWELL**

The executive members of the Halton Hills Unit of the Canadian Cancer Society met on November 30th, at the home of Mary Ellen Bridge. A warm welcome was extended to our guests, Joan Takahashi, and Barb Fitzgerald, and we hope that they enjoyed their evening with us. Following a delicious pot luck supper, the business meeting was conducted by Barbara Skinner, our President.

It was announced that Claudette Smith, who has been our unit's Treasurer, for the past year, would be the 1979 Campaign Chairman for Halton Hills. Hugh Patterson, treasurer of the Acton branch of the Society, will assume the responsibility of Treasurer for the Halton Hills Unit. It was with sincere pleasure that Barbara Skinner presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Mary Dequidice, who has been the Service to Patients Chairman for the past two years. Mrs. Dequidice has done a wonderful job in supporting, and encouraging the

proaching. The patients are very grateful for this help, and many friendships have developed in this way.

The executive agreed to make a donation to the Princess Margaret Hospital, in order to bring cheer to those who are confined to the hospital, over the Christmas holidays.

Betty Hull, the Knitting Activity Chairman, reported that the beautiful hand knitted infant and toddlers wear, plus novelty items, knitted by our Activity Group, would be on sale at the Blue Triangle Club's bazaar, held December 1st, at St. Andrew's United Church. We express our thanks to the Blue Triangle Club, for enabling us to have a booth set up at their sale.

Mary Ellen Bridge, Education Chairman, stated that a float was being built for the Georgetown Santa Claus parade, by Chris Bridge, and Barry Butwell.

We welcome Rita Bairstow who is now the Recording Secretary of the Executive.

The need to help our patients from within our own area doesn't lessen, just because the holiday season is upon us.

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Come to Church

<p>ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH Anglican Rev. Richard Berryman B.A., S.T.B. Sunday, December 24th. Advent 4 8:00 a.m. The Eucharist 10:30 a.m. Carol Service 7:30 p.m. Choral Eucharist 11:00 p.m. Choral Eucharist Monday, December 25th. Christmas Day 10:00 a.m. Choral Eucharist 9:30 & 11 Church School 9:30 & 11 Nursery Provided</p>	<p>GEORGETOWN ALLIANCE CHURCH 14 Main St. S. Pastor Peter Ralph Sunday, December 24th. 9:45 a.m. Sunday School 11:00 a.m. Morning Worship 6:30 p.m. Evening Service Everyone Welcome Come make our church your church</p>
<p>HALTON HILLS PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLY Trafalgar Rd. and No. 7 Highway Pastor Rev. E.J. Friesen Sunday, December 24th. Christmas Services "For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11 11:00 a.m. Christmas Worship Musical Guests "The Gulliean Singers" 7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candle Light Service "The Gulliean Singers" "Make Christ the centre of your Christmas"</p>	<p>IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH Windsor Road at Carole St. Vacancy Pastor Rev. Arthur Rader Sunday, December 24th. 9:00 a.m. Worship Service 10:15 a.m. Sunday School Worship Service Church of the Lutheran Hour 11:00 a.m. Where is He That is Born 4:00 p.m. Candlelight Carol Service NURSERY At All Services Boys Girls Youth Clubs Telephone 877-6655-0320</p>
<p>ST. JOHN'S STEWARTTOWN The Rev. David W. Sinclair Rector December 24th 9:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist 11:00 a.m. Morning Prayer Christmas Eve 11:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist December 25th Christmas Day 10:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist St. Stephen's</p>	<p>ST. STEPHEN'S HORNBY 11:00 a.m. Morning Prayer 7:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist</p>