

Once a snoozing little railroad station; now a daily panorama of city life seeking the country.

THE EVOLUTION OF OAKVILLE

What Country Life Movement did for an Ontario Town

By DONALD B. SINCLAIR

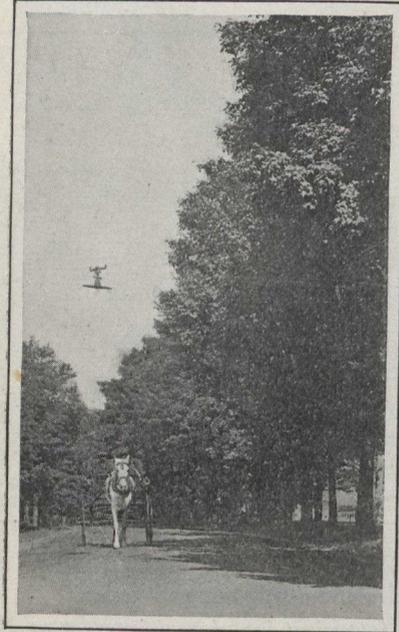
WHERE will you see more motor cars and carriages at a country station than are shown in the picture at the top of this page? This is Oakville depot, on the Grand Trunk, midway between Toronto and Hamilton. South a mile and a half, close to Lake Ontario, is the town of Oakville. The railroad station belongs to the days when transportation companies expected towns to build out to them. Oakville never got that far. But the people in the motor cars and top buggies you see here, don't mind the drive on the broad highway of stately maples which curls from the station to the town, all the way overlooking the soft waters of Sixteen Mile River far below.

These people have come to Oakville for drives and to take in scenery. They belong to the summer colony of Toronto and Hamilton men who, in the last few years have built country houses in Oakville because it is within easy reach of their offices in the city. They are country life enthusiasts. And out of a raw rural town they have made a luxurious suburban annex for city people.

Modern Oakville is one of the most unique country places in Canada. Situated with two big cities within twenty miles on either side, it could hardly be expected to develop growing-pains under normal conditions. But Oakville has found her location to be her chief asset. A village tucked somnolently in an arm of Lake Ontario, through the influence of the country life movement, has become a progressive, live municipality. Oakville has been rediscovered.

Oakville is an old town. It was on the map long before the Grand Trunk linked up Southern Ontario with Uncle Sam's border cities; incorporated in 1857, to be exact. Goods were being sold over counters in Oakville when Guelph, up in Wellington County, for instance, had hardly been surveyed into streets. Recently a silver-haired lady with pioneer reminiscences, whose husband had farmed near what was part of the site of Mr. Hugh Guthrie's native heath, told me that she and her neighbours always sent to Oakville for supplies—"especially when we ran out of darning needles; you got extra fine ones in Oakville village."

Oakville, nestled in a wing of Lake Ontario, has a rather good natural harbour. Big schooners slipped into this haven; loaded up with sacks of grain ported to Oakville over corduroy roads by farmers in the environs; and then unfurled their sails again.



The Lure of a Long Road--From the station to the town.



A Touch of Old Oakville. Glimpse of part of the main street as it used to be.



Sixteen-Mile River gives Oakville almost a classic background.

But other harbours on the lakes handled larger shipments than Oakville. Urban life shooting up all over the province cut into the trade of the little port. Gradually Oakville approximated to a type of municipality not uncommon in older Canada. To an onlooker it became one of those towns which seem never to be growing up as the years pass. Old men began to dictate in civic affairs. They were retired, elderly, bearded farmers, whose incomes after years of toil now permitted a house in town. Their senile energies found an outlet in the town council—which they dominated. Peaceful old gentlemen, they were contented if the ledgers of Oakville showed a balance at the end of the year; and proud that their town gave the name to

the famous "Oakville Strawberry," called by hawksters in the streets of fifty cities when the world is green with spring.

About seven years ago, Oakville began to awaken to new opportunities. Sons of these very councillors, young fellows who had taken some of Dad's money and beat it out of Oakville and seen a few things, developed fanciful ideas. These they publicly propagated. Said they: "If this town can't be an industrial metropolis, why can't we make it a playground for the workers of the big cities on either side of us." Old folks nodded sagely. Funny that they had never thought of that before.

It came about that young blood started to flow into the Oakville Council. A Mayor without whiskers was elected. The present Mayor is the energetic man who meets the train with the 'bus. The city fathers planned to get Toronto and Hamilton people to build country homes in Oakville and live there in the summer. Individually they talked to city men. They pointed out that Oakville was only a half an hour from either city. It had the advantages of a country resort. Lake Ontario afforded facilities for boating and bathing. Back of the town began one of the finest fruit belts in the world. The postmaster who had handled the mails for years resigned, and went into real estate. He lives in Oakville to-day and he's very wealthy. The appeal to the cities met with response.

Mr. James Ryrie, the wealthy jeweller of Toronto, went to Oakville and erected a country house on the lake front which must have cost him \$100,000. Here I saw him the other day, with a wheelbarrow, enjoying "the experience," as he termed his rustic activity. Mr. Herbert C. Cox, son of Senator George A. Cox, put up a rival country mansion next to Mr. Ryrie. He brought out from town some of his famous horses and hounds. Members of the well-known Toronto Gooderham family also seized on lake shore sites at Oakville.

They were followed by other wealthy people. In seven years the appearance of a sleepy Ontario town in decline has completely changed. It is now a suburban annex. Imposing, palatial houses erected by city men spread their broad, cool verandahs. Daughters of the city, in dainty frocks and suede shoes, flit prettily down to market with bronzed farmers' daughters. In the afternoons these maidens join flannelled youths in canoes and paddle gently up the stream which winds a mile to the station. At night there is gay laughter and slipping of light feet to music in the Oakville Club House.

But Oakville is not a summer resort frothing with feverish frivolousness. It has no summer hotel. It is still a country town; one rejuvenated for city people. You may still buy thread, darning needles, and bread in one store. The people who have been encouraged to come to Oakville are those with a hankering taste for quiet country life. The jaded office man, half an hour after leaving his desk, arrives at his tranquil Oakville seat and forgets his worries. He leaves refreshed in the morning for the city again. Oakville offers Peace, and it has paid her.

The village now supports 2,500 permanent population. The immigrants are not all millionaires by a long way. Land costs fifty to \$1,000 an acre in Oakville now; by the foot, six to ten dollars. Oakville, through her country life colony, has prospered. For real estate which five years ago brought \$200, you have to pay now a cool thousand. And more. The city rusticators who honk up to Oakville depot in the morning have put down paved streets—thirty miles of them; a municipal electric light plant operating three miles into the country; miles of oiled roads. They have made a new town out of an old one.