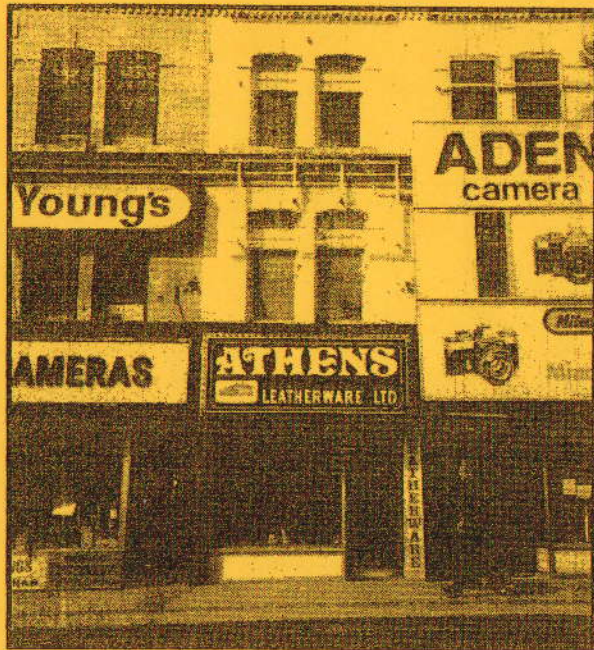


The way we were

By Mike Filey



354 YONGE St., site of O'Connor's first candy store with kitchen upstairs.

Happy Mother's Day! I wonder how many mothers received chocolates today and of those who did, how many received Laura Secord chocolates? Ever wonder where this truly Canadian product originated? Here's the story.

Frank Patrick O'Connor was born in Deseronto, Ontario on April 9, 1885. When 12 years of age, Frank moved to Peterboro where he attended a separate school for several years until he'd had enough of that and got a job with the Canadian General Electric Company in that city. Then in 1913, O'Connor left for the big city of Toronto with a recipe for making chocolate candies, a few dollars in his pocket and a dream.

He rented a shop at 354 Yonge St., just north of Elm St., converted the upstairs flat into a kitchen and opened Frank O'Connor's Candy Shop. His idea was an instant success and soon the city was studded with candy stores named after the heroine of the War of 1812.

In 1919, Frank decided to go after the sweet teeth south of the border and he opened his first Fanny Farmer Candy Store in Rochester, New York. Rea-

The story behind the Mom's Day chocolates

lizing Laura Secord, who spied on the Americans during the invasion of Canada in June of 1813, was probably not going to be a particularly popular name in the States, he selected the name Fanny Farmer from Fanny Merritt Farmer (1857-1915), a noted culinary expert who wrote the Boston Cooking School Cookbook in 1896.

About 1932, O'Connor acquired approximately 500 acres of property just west of today's Lawrence-Victoria Park intersection and developed a country estate which he called Maryvale after his daughter Mary. Here he bred prize-winning cattle and purebred racing horses. It is said that a special road was constructed to allow O'Connor easier access to his estate from his downtown office and factory on lower Bathurst St. and this road later became known as O'Connor Rd.

O'Connor also had a summer home at Lake Simcoe where he became good friends with Brother Alexander of the Christian Brothers order who ran the nearby de la Salle camp for boys at Jackson's Point. When O'Connor died, he bequeathed his estate and 1/10th of his fortune to the Brothers. Today, the



SENATOR FRANK O'Connor (1885-1939), creator of Laura Secord chocolates.

Christian Brothers administer Senator College School which stands on part of the Maryvale estate adjacent to the original O'Connor home and glass-covered swimming pool.

In addition to being quite a philanthropist, Frank O'Connor was also a highly political animal and was instrumental in the rise to power of both Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn and Prime Minister Mackenzie King. It was for these latter efforts in Ottawa that O'Connor was elevated to the Canadian Senate in 1935. He died at Maryvale on August 21, 1939.
