

Bronte Harbour and Bronte Bluffs

Location: The Bronte Harbour is located at the mouth of the Twelve Mile Creek (Bronte Creek), at Lake Ontario. The Bronte Bluffs are found directly west of the Harbour.

Description: Bronte Harbour comprises the historic harbour created in 1856 and its immediate surroundings that developed as a focal point for the historic village of Bronte. The harbour includes an “Outer Harbour” area and an “Inner Harbour” area. Bronte Bluffs is an elevated, forested park that overlooks Bronte Harbour and Lake Ontario. The Bluffs park serves as a connection between Sovereign House/West River Street and Bronte Harbour.

Current Observed Use: The harbour and bluffs area are used by the public for recreation.

Existing Heritage Designation: Portions of the harbour and bluffs are listed on the Register of Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest (Not Designated) and other portions are designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act:

Bronte Harbour: Listed, not designated for its “potential cultural heritage value for its association with the development of Bronte’s fishing and boating industries”.

The Metro Marine building (located in Bronte Harbour) is designated as a property of historical, architectural and contextual significance by By-law 2014-124.

Bronte Bluffs: Listed, not designated for its “potential cultural heritage value for its treed landscape along Bronte Harbour”.

The Sovereign House at 7 West River Street is designated as a property of historical, architectural and contextual significance by By-law 1990-050.

Results of Phase I: A Cultural Heritage Evaluation of the property as a Cultural Heritage Landscape was recommended.

Phase II Background Research Findings:

Pre-Contact The mouth of the Twelve Mile Creek has been an important resource location for a number of Indigenous groups. By the late 18th century, the watershed along the Twelve Mile Creek, once densely forested, was set aside as a fishing and hunting ground for the Mississauga. Agricultural crops are planted, including: corn, squash, and beans. These crops are harvested along with wild crops such as berries, mushrooms, roots, and wild rice.

(Phase II Research findings cont...)

Bronte Harbour:

1820-1856 Early Harbour Construction. With increasing pressure from European settlers, the Mississauga hunting and fishing Reserve at the mouth of the Twelve was ceded to the Crown in 1820. The highly desirable land was sold by public auction in 1826.

Plans for Bronte Village are submitted by William Hawkins and Lots are auctioned in 1834.

At least four schooners are built in the Bronte Harbour between 1852 and 1854.

In 1846, the Bronte Harbour Company is formed to construct a harbour and enact tolls for good passing through the harbour. Harbour construction includes the dredging of the creek and removal of wetland to widen the channel. The two heads at the mouth of the creek are altered to form a single opening into Lake Ontario. Two piers are added and a lighthouse is built. Construction is completed in 1856. By that time, the harbour is surrounded by a variety of local merchants, mills and warehouses.

1858-1930s The price of wheat collapses in 1858 and the railway by-passes the lakeshore. Bronte Village population decreases from 550 to 220 inhabitants and remains relatively unchanged until the turn of the century. Stonehooking (a method of gathering stone from the lakebed), becomes an early industry in Bronte. A unique fleet of stonehooking ships serve Bronte Harbour (c.1800-1875).

1930-1954 Recreation and Shipbuilding. Bronte Beach, the east side of Twelve mile creek, was used as a summer resort and hosted many festivals, dances and community events. Many small cottages lined the edge of the creek.

Shipbuilding becomes a viable and prosperous industry in the 1940s. The Northern Shipbuilding and Repair Company (Metro Marina) builds 29 boats between 1945-1954 until demand subsides in 1955.

Sever flooding and storms wash away many of the small cottages and devastate the shoreline in 1947 and 1952. Hurricane Hazel causes massive destruction in 1954 and a regional approach is developed to control and manage the watershed with the creation of Conservation Halton.

(Phase II Research findings cont...)

1970-present Despite erosion and water management efforts, numerous incidents of record-high waters in Lake Ontario in the 1970s, cause further damage and loss of homes above the harbour.

The Town of Oakville purchases the Metro Marina in 2005 and currently leases the building.

Bronte Bluffs:

1834 William Hawkins surveys the bluffs in 1834 and create small half acres pots of land numbered 15-20.

1886-1962 **Cottages along the Bluffs.** In 1886, the Joyce family is granted the crown patent for lot 15 and 16 along Bronte Bluff. The Joyce family is directly associated with development of the bluffs and play a large role in the Bronte community.

The Joyce family purchase lots 17 to 20 along Bronte Bluff between 1871 and 1893 and build “St. Clair Cottage” on Lot 16. The property also has a large barn and an attached boat building shop.

Annie Joyce, marries Harris Bumby in 1902 and they build a two storey house where present-day Sovereign house is located.

Members of the Joyce family live and vacation on the bluffs between 1910 and 1950.

Alvin Bumby runs “Lake Point Camp” during summer season between 1930 and 1950.

Rheva Joyce sells lots 15-19 to Lina Construction around 1958.

Town of Oakville expropriates the bluffs for use as a public park in 1962 (By-law 1962-177, repealed by By-law 1966-145).

1969-present The Wuthering Heights condominium development is proposed in 1969.

The Ontario Municipal Board approves Oakville’s plan to purchase the 4.32-acre Wuthering Heights property in 1976 for recreation and open space.

Sovereign House is moved to its current location at 7 West River Road in 1988.

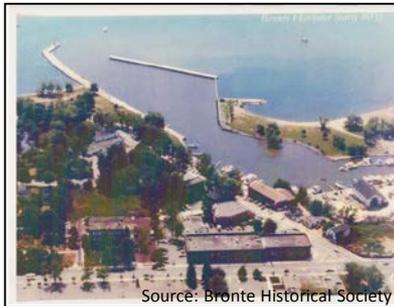
The area is currently used by the public for recreation.

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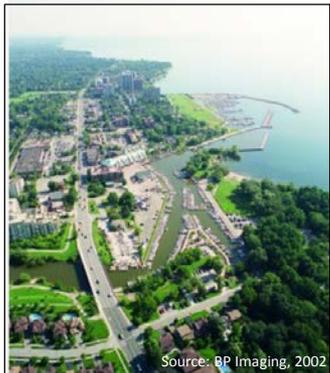
Source: Bronte Historical Society

1931 Aerial View of Bronte Harbour.



Source: Bronte Historical Society

1980 Aerial View.

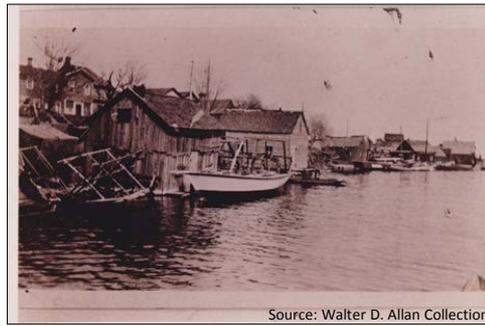


Source: BP Imaging, 2002



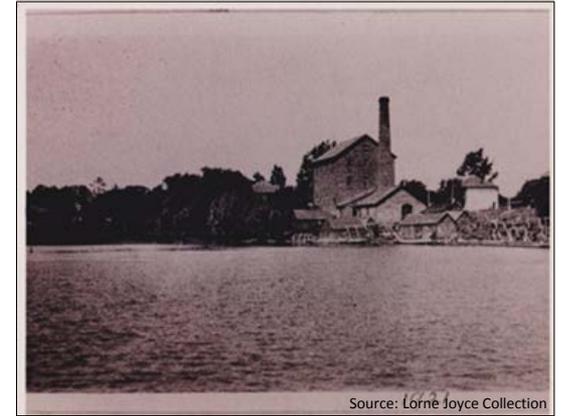
Source: BP Imaging, 2002

2002 Air Photos of Bronte Harbour (left) and Twelve Mile Creek (right).



Source: Walter D. Allan Collection

Fishing shanties that once lined the creek edge, c. 1916.



Source: Lorne Joyce Collection

Shoreline along Twelve Mile Creek c. 1921.



Bathing Beach, Bronte, Ont.

Source: TTHS, Digital Collection

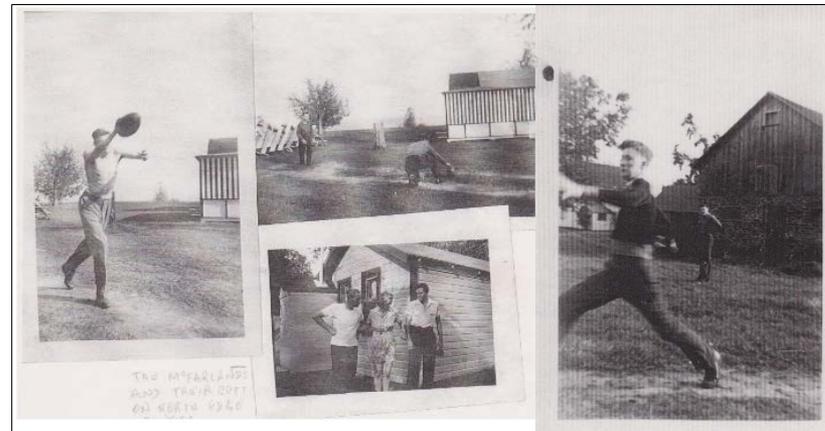
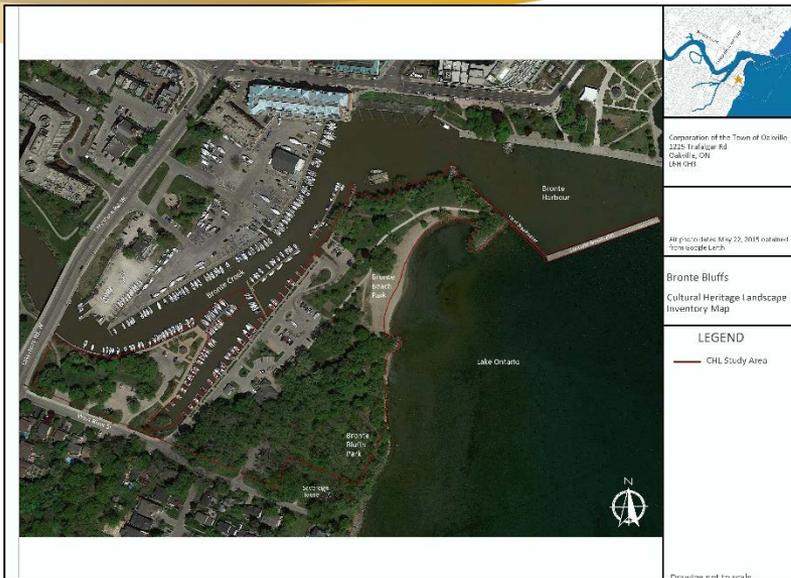
Postcards of Bronte Beach c. 1930.



A Happy Crowd

Bronte Beach Park

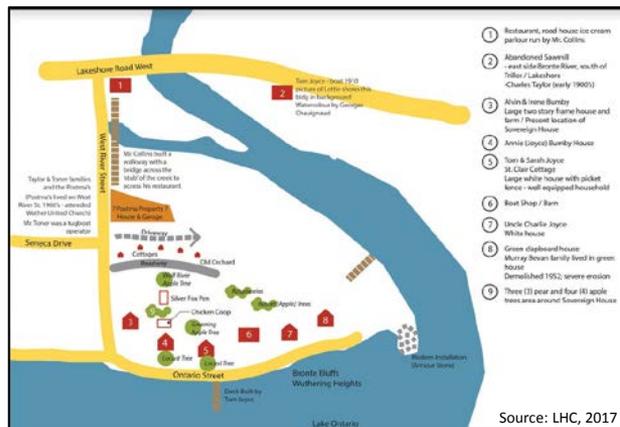
Source: TTHS, Digital Collection



Source: David Joyce Collection, 1941

Photos of various Joyce family members playing on the bluffs. Some of the small cottages and barns are visible in the background.

Map of the Bronte Harbour and Bluffs landscape.



Map of features once located on the Bluffs (as compiled by B. Strong through interviews of Joyce Family members)



Detail of survey lots along the Bluffs, 1877.

Below: Joyce family in front of St. Clair Cottage c.1920.



Source: David Joyce Personal Collection