

The Merrick Thomas Farm House Museum

Oakville Historical Society



The Thomas House Museum

Open seasonally from
Victoria Day to Labour Day

Saturdays, Sundays & Holidays:
May to September
Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays:
July & August Only
Open 1-4 p.m.
Closed Other Mondays & All Fridays

The Oakville Historical Society

P.O. Box 69501
109 Thomas Street
Oakville, Ontario
L6J 7R4

The Thomas farm in Oakville was situated on land to the west of the Sixteen Mile Creek, where the St. Thomas Aquinas High School and St. Jude's Cemetery now stand.

Merrick Thomas was born in Vermont in 1803, son of Seneca Thomas. Seneca brought the family to Canada just before the war of 1812, but at the outbreak of hostilities left them in Canada, while he crossed the Niagara River to join the American forces. Taken prisoner by the British and suspected of spying, he escaped to the U.S. and never dared return to Canada. Merrick's mother died at this time, and while his younger siblings were taken in by relatives, Merrick decided — at age 9 or 10 — to fend for himself.

He first found employment with a store owner of Saltfleet; later entered the service of William Chisholm, businessman and shipbuilder of Nelson (Burlington). In 1827 — the year in which Chisholm purchased the land at the mouth of the Sixteen — Merrick married Esther Silverthorn, sister to Mrs. William Chisholm. Thomas was moved to the new community of Oakville to oversee its development and the building of a harbour. He was then 24 years old.

In 1829 he acquired the Thomas farm and built on it this farm home.



Merrick Thomas 1803 - 1856

As the family grew — the family had 7 children, but the three girls all died in infancy — the farm home was extended, with the original structure serving as summer kitchen. The sandy, pine forested portion of the farm, (south of Lakeshore Road) was deeded to the Anglican Church in 1853 for a rectory and cemetery.

At age 53, in 1856, Merrick Thomas died, leaving his wife Esther and son Robert Murray to carry on the operation of the farm. This continued until Mrs. Thomas' death in 1891.



Esther Thomas 1806 - 1891

In her older years Mrs. Thomas was joined at the farm by Mrs. Skoog, also a widow, and her son. The Skoogs continued to operated the farm until Robert Murray's death in 1921.

In 1955 the Thomas farm was acquired by the Department of National Defence, who intended to demolish the old house. Recognizing its historic value to Oakville, Hazel Mathews and the Oakville Historical Society, which had just formed at her instigation, purchased the farm house — for one dollar — contingent on its being moved from its site.

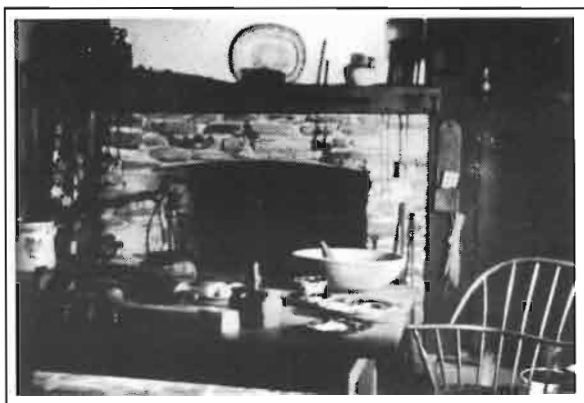
Only the oldest portion of the home was moved, the extension being discarded, except for what old

material was needed to repair the original farm home. It was moved to land deeded to the Town of Oakville in 1952 on which a similarly rescued Old Post Office already stood, and was being developed as a museum.

Since 1955 the Oakville Historical Society with its Volunteers has presented the Thomas House as a period farm home of the 1830-1840s, open to the public in the summer months.

While the structure is almost entirely original, and characteristic of the 16' X 24' home required of a settler of the period, not a great deal of the furniture from the early home has been recovered. The spinning wheel, wool winder, bed and black leather boots belonged to the Thomas family. In other aspects the house is furnished in the style of the 1840s.





The Thomas House Interior

Volunteers of the Oakville Historical Society engage in a variety of activities typical of pioneer farm living, for example, cooking at the open hearth, carding and spinning wool, preparing and drying fruit and herbs.

The Society also operates a historical library and archive storage facility at premises nearby, 110 King Street. Telephone 905-844-2695 Fax 905-844-7380.
