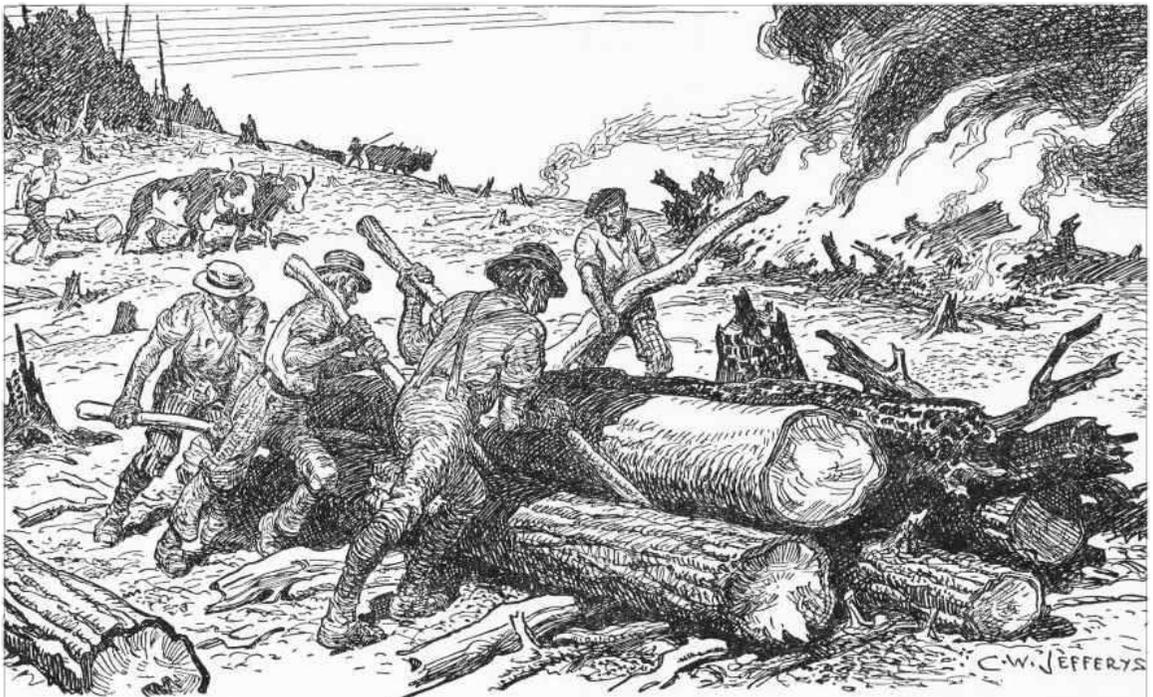


# THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



CLEARING LAND, ABOUT 1830

September 2016

Volume 50 Number 3



# PUBLIC SPEAKERS

**Wednesday  
November 16th**

**Plum Johnson** author of *They Left Us Everything* will speak about her family who lived on Trafalgar Rd. at the lake front. Her memoir won the **2015 RBC Taylor Prize for Nonfiction**.

**Above presentation will be made at St. John's United Church at  
Randall and Dunn Streets (enter by the Randall Street entrance)  
7:30 - 9:00 pm Admission is free and refreshments will be served.**



The Oakville-built schooner Royal Albert, which sank to the bottom of Lake Ontario in 1868, has been found near Fair Haven, N.Y. It was speculated that the load of railroad rails aboard the schooner shifted, bursting the ship's seams and causing it to sink so rapidly that the crew barely had time to escape. Shipbuilder John Simpson constructed the ship in 1858. *Oakville Beaver photo*



OHS organized a trip to **Guelph Museums exhibition Lucile: Fashion. Titanic. Scandal** *Lucile, Lady Duff Gordon, the fashionista of her day – inventor of the fashion show, creator of respectable scanty lingerie, and designer to the rich and famous.* To provide balance to their day the group then enjoyed afternoon tea at **McRae House**. All reported it was a very enjoyable outing and will plan another. Destination ideas are welcome. *Greg Munz photo*



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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**We** have certainly cut back on the amount of firewood used this summer at the Thomas House. It's been so hot and sticky that most volunteers have not wanted a fire. As the weather cools we hope to get at some of the repairs required. The Town has recently moved the bank behind the Thomas House back a couple of feet and done a great job of paving the area. This means that we can finally stabilize the back corner of the building which has sunk significantly in the years since the building was moved to Lakeside Park. There is no foundation. The building is sitting on lake stones. We also need to replace some rotten wood and do some painting. The joys of owning a wooden building.

We are delighted with the number of people contacting us about volunteering for the Society. Our new volunteers include recent retirees, recent grads and students.

We're also very pleased that demand for the **Oakville Memories** book has been so great that a second printing has been ordered. We're also gathering stories for Volume 2. If you missed the boat for Volume 1 and would like to contribute to Volume 2, please let us know.

It's early, but mark your calendar for the Annual Members Christmas Party scheduled for the 2nd of December.

On 22nd August, members and guests of the Society celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of long-time member and volunteer **Evelyn Bullied**. Ev (Savage) was born and raised in the Village of Sheridan at the corner of what is now Winston Churchill Boulevard and the QEW. At that south-west corner you can visit the cairn that lists the family names of early residents.

There is so much history around us and much of it is very well presented. This past summer, Brenda and I drove and camped around the Gaspé Peninsula. Not only is the scenery amazing but there are also several historic sites. Highlights of our trip included staying in Forillon National Park and seeing whales and grey seals, camping with a view of Percé Rock, camping at Carleton-sur-Mer, visiting the Miguasha World Heritage Site with its 390 million year old Devonian shale beds and fossils, the Battle of Ristigouche National Historic Site and the Point-au-Père site with its Empress of Ireland Exhibit and HMCS Onondaga submarine. Cross that trip off our list.

*George Chisholm, President*

Illustrations on cover and pages 6 and 7 by **Charles William Jefferys** (August 25, 1869 – October 8, 1951), a Canadian painter, illustrator, author, and teacher best known as a historical illustrator.

# "THE SOUND OF THE AXE"

## EARLY LUMBERING DAYS IN TRAFALGAR TOWNSHIP



**The Virgin Forest** When the first European settlers established themselves in Trafalgar Township 200 years ago the district was covered with thick virgin forest. Approximately 85% of what is now the Town of Oakville was covered by trees of various types. This immense forest cover appeared to our earliest settlers to be an inexhaustible supply of timber, lumber, potash and staves. Through the tracts of forests covering what is now Southern Ontario were lakes like Lake Ontario, great rivers like the St. Lawrence, as well as lesser streams like the 12 and 16 Mile Creeks at Oakville that provided pathways for the shipment of wood products to markets in Britain, Europe and the United States. From the earliest French settlements in New France in the 1600s to the subsequent waves of Loyalist, British and European settlers in the 1800s, it has been estimated that 50 million acres were cleared for agriculture in the St. Lawrence Valley and the Canadian side of the Lower Great Lakes.

In the lands bordering the western end of Lake Ontario including Halton, hardwoods provided the greatest source of export revenue for the pioneer economy during the "Timber Boom" of the early and mid-1800s. Oak, elm, maple, birch, hickory and cherry were used in such trades as carriage-making which was an important industry in Oakville during the mid to late 1800s. Tanbark was used in the manufacturing process at the large tannery situated on the west bank of Oakville Harbour during the 1800s until it ceased operation in 1925. Of particular note locally were the magnificent white oak trees as well as the pines that frequently rose to 200 feet!

By the late 1820's lumbermen had ventured as far as the "Head of the Lake" including Halton County as forests further east became quickly depleted with the westward advance of European settlement. Starting at the Lake Ontario shoreline, they soon began lumbering further inland in the watersheds of the 12 and 16 Mile Creeks in Trafalgar Township.

**Clearing The Land** In the spirit of "All Help One and One Help All" the pioneers assisted their neighbours in the gruelling process of clearing the land of forest cover so fields could be established for crops and grazing. These "Logging Bees" were usually held in the winter months when pioneer farmers were not as busy. In 1837, James Logan wrote:

‘Another day went with Mr. Carnegie to a logging bee at his neighbour's place. There were about six acres to log, and he had collected about twenty of his neighbours or their servants. There were yokes of oxen with generally four oxen to a yoke, with a boy to drive. To the yoke over the necks of the oxen is fastened a long chain, with a hook at the end, and this chain was put round a log which is thus dragged to the pile.... When the logs, which vary from ten to fifteen feet in length, and from one to two and a half in diameter, were brought to a pile we laid them on in the proper manner. After the first layer was arranged the rest of the logs were hoisted on with hand-spikes. This is a very labourious part of the operation, especially when the logs are heavy; and if they should slip you are in danger of getting your leg broken or even of losing your life.... In the evening we had a dance and otherwise agreeably entertained until one in the morning.’

The social aspect of the bees was never neglected, and the host and hostess were expected to provide the best they could offer in the way of food and drink. "People in the woods have a craze for going to bees and run to them with as much eagerness as a peasant runs to a race-course or a fair," Susanna Moodie commented in her well-known book, *"Roughing It in the Bush."* For one of her own logging bees she reported that "the maid and I were engaged for two days preceding the important one in baking and cooking for the entertainment of our guests. When I looked at the quantity of food we had prepared I thought that it could never be all eaten...."

Her doubts were swept away, however, when "they all sat down at the rude board which I had prepared for them, loaded with the finest fare that could be procured in the bush. Pea soup, legs of pork, venison, eel, and raspberry pies, garnished with plenty of potatoes, and whiskey to wash them down, besides a large iron kettle of tea"

After clearing the land the pioneer farmer planted a crop of wheat. But for the next 3 or 4 years the land had to be put into pasture, as weeds would choke the grain and the trees would sprout again. Cattle kept down the sprouts and the stumps. If the stumps were not already removed by hand (another back-breaking task!) they gradually decayed. Soon the land could be ploughed and uninterrupted wheat cropping started. The wheat flour, timber, lumber, potash and wood for barrel staves provided the first sources of income for the pioneer farmers.

#### **OUR LOGGING-BEE**

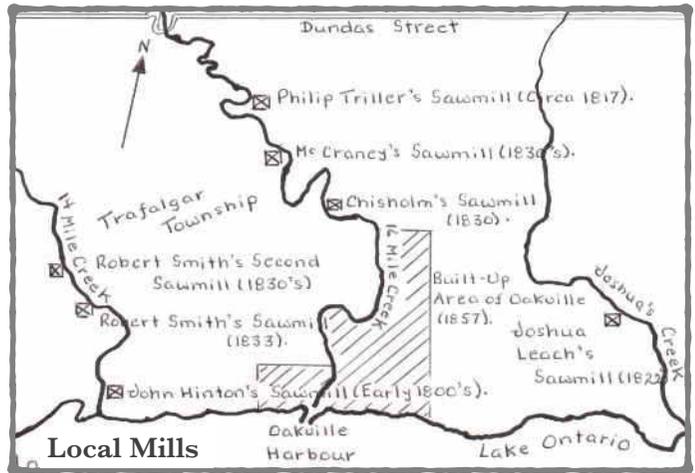
*There was a man in our town,  
In our town, in our town –  
There was a man in our town,  
He made a logging-bee;  
And he bought lots of whiskey,  
To make the loggers frisky –  
To make the loggers frisky  
At his logging-bee.*

*The Devil sat on a log heap,  
A log heap, a log heap –  
A red hot burning log heap –  
A-grinning at the bee;*

*And there was lots of swearing,  
Of boasting and of daring,  
Of fighting and of tearing,  
At that logging bee.*

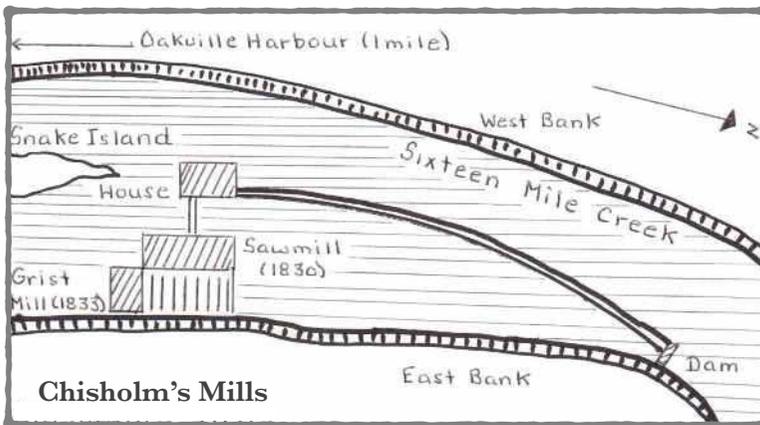
Susanna Moodie

**The Lumber Trade** The timber most commonly used for mercantile purposes was white pine. However, the most valuable wood for local export was white oak. It was most suitable for shipbuilding, an industry that flourished in Oakville in the mid-1800s. After the trees were cut and the branches removed, the logs were squared. When squared the lumber was easier to raft, and, as the squared logs fitted snugly together in the holds of the Trans-Atlantic sailing vessels, the cargo would not shift with the rolling of the ship on the rough ocean crossings. The local



timber and lumber industry consisted mainly of squared timber for the British market. However the U.S. market gradually opened up to the industry by the 1840s as the supply of good-quality domestic lumber south of the border did not keep up with the demand in the fast-growing market in that country. The U.S. market demanded a good deal of Canadian sawn lumber by this time and this resulted in an increase in the number of sawmills in Southern Ontario including Trafalgar Township. Later on, as the British preference for Canadian lumber declined and

Britain turned to Free Trade, the demand for our squared lumber declined providing a further stimulus for erecting sawmills. White pine remained the Canadian timber most in demand in the mid-1800s. Called the most useful timber in the world at the time, Oakville and surrounding Trafalgar Township were at the heart of an extensive white pine forest. The wood from this tree is light but nonetheless strong and is easily worked.



It found numerous uses from matches to venetian blinds. The tree preferred the sandy soils of the old Lake Iroquois shoreline running along the northwest shore of Lake Ontario in Peel and Halton Counties.

**The King's Pines** From the time of the earliest European settlement in Trafalgar Township 200 years ago the local virgin forest had supplied pine for masts and spars in the vessels of the Royal Navy. Marked with a "broad arrow" by agents for the Crown these trees were known as the "King's Pines." The American War of Independence had put an end to the supply of New England timber to British markets. However, with the subsequent opening of the eastern colonies of British North America to settlement a new source of supply for Britain became available. Pine masts and oak timbers played a vital role in the supremacy of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic War at the turn of the 19th Century. The Napoleonic War had closed the Baltic ports from which Britain obtained timber thus initiating a further stimulus to our local timber and lumber industry. The local timber was carefully cut and squared using axes, then dragged to the Lake Ontario shoreline and floated to the mouth of the 16 Mile Creek at Oakville. There, seasonal labourers fashioned the timber into huge rafts for the journey along the north shore of Lake Ontario, down the St. Lawrence River and through the various rapids to Montreal and thence to Quebec City where the timber and lumber were loaded into the holds of great sailing vessels for the journey overseas.

**The Potash Trade** In 1830, while the harbour at Oakville was still under construction, included in the exports of wheat, flour, lumber and tallow were 109 barrels of potash. Leached from the ashes of hardwood trees, potash was one of the chief sources of income for the backwoods settlers in the early days of settlement of Trafalgar Township. Before it was replaced by mining-sourced product, wood-source potash was much in demand in Britain for the manufacture of glass and soap. Most merchants in Trafalgar Township in the early days operated asheries in conjunction with their general stores. Potash was the settler's first manufactured product and the source of their first income besides timber and lumber. Ten acres of good timber yielded at least 5 barrels of potash. Each barrel contained 500 pounds. The difficulties the settlers encountered shipping this produce to Oakville Harbour for export overseas stimulated the construction of roads to the mouth of the 16 Mile Creek and proper port facilities such as piers, docks and a warehouse at that location.



**The Stave Trade** Staves were in great demand in Britain and the U.S. for the manufacture of barrels of all sizes and shapes. In making staves, squared white oak was cut into blocks 5 1/2 inches by 3 feet long. With a wedge and small mallet, a 6 inch block could be split into 4 staves. The sizes most in demand were the extra-heavy pipe staves and the somewhat lighter standard staves. The shorter West Indies staves were slightly narrower and thinner. Each stave was marked with a hammer bearing the initials of William Chisholm, Oakville's founder. Made in the bush during the relatively slack winter season, the staves were stacked. Before the spring freshet, cullers were sent to throw out the culls and then, unless made on farms on the northern sections of Trafalgar Township, the staves were corded together and

**The Stave Trade** *continued* dragged by oxen over the icy, snow-covered roads to Oakville. Where Trafalgar Road meets Inglehart Street a wooden slide was erected, down which staves were slid one by one onto the decks of cargo schooners moored near the head of navigation on the 16. Farmers in the northern sections of Trafalgar Township sent their staves to Oakville Harbour via the 16. As soon as the spring freshet arrived, men were hired to toss the selected staves into the river and pilot them downstream to the harbour. Carried by the high water, the staves rushed down to Lake Ontario where a boom kept them from drifting offshore. It was said at the time that one could walk on the mass of staves floating down the 16 from the harbour to the dam at Chisholm's Mills, a distance of about a mile! Transient lumberjacks lived in shanties on the flats at the north end of Navy Street and tales were told of the brawls and carousing heard at night in their makeshift encampments!

A few of the staves were used locally but most were destined for Britain. Shipping finished barrels was uneconomic as they took up too much space in the vessel holds. Barrels made from Canadian staves in Britain played a vital role in the shipment of commodities throughout the country and abroad during a period of rapid industrialization and colonization. Some were destined for the West Indies sugar trade where they were returned in the shape of sugar hogsheads and rum puncheons. Some of this produce was sent directly to Canada where the barrels would likely have been reused after being emptied of their contents or knocked down and the wood used for other purposes.

**The Final Days** By the 1860s, the trade in wood products in Southern Ontario had declined as farmers' fields had replaced much of the forest cover. Some sawmills like Doty's at Oakville Harbour survived until the turn of the 20th Century. Lumber yards like Blakelock's on Randall Street were still a common site in Oakville into the mid-1900's. Meanwhile Ontario's lumber industry moved north to districts like Georgian Bay, Muskoka and Nipissing where farming was not as common due to the thin soils of the Canadian Shield.

*The Sound of the Axe & map illustrations by Philip Brimacombe*

We are most pleased to welcome the following **New Members** since January of this year. We hope you will all make full use of our resources and enjoy the companionship of the Society.

*Andrea Stewart, Memberships*

Mr. Jim Bond   Mrs. Wendy Burton   Ms. Amanda Griffin   Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Hood  
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jelinek   Mr. William Terry and Ms. Margaret Warwick  
Mrs. Nuala Johnston   Ms. Beryl Jones   Mr. Julian Kingston, Supervisor Erchless Museum  
The Reverend John Maranjac, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish Church   Mr. Fred Hayward  
Mr. Chris Mark, Director of Parks and Open Space   Mr. and Mrs. Wade Pitman  
Ms. Carolyn Rumble   Mr. Roger Sanders   Ms. Christine Sherry   Mr. Andrew Pierce  
Ms. Susan Schappert, Heritage Planner, Town of Oakville   Ms. Carlina Watson  
Saints Peter and Paul Serbian Orthodox Church, Oakville  
Ms. Carolyn Cross, Curator of Collections, Erchless Museum  
Mr. Ethan Strathdee   Ms. Carolyn Van Sligtenhorst, Heritage Planner, Town of Oakville  
Ms. Maya Vasdani   Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wood   Mr. and Mrs. Norman Young

# AROUND THE SOCIETY



To highlight his office display, planner and designer **Greg Munz** held a contest for younger citizens at the June Mayor's Picnic. Here is Martin Laretei (mid-left) with daughter Kristina and her children Erik and Emmet enjoying the prize of a sail on the Anitra with owner and skipper Jaime Macrae (r).



**Greg Munz** (above) recently aided young visitors with his sailing skills and terminology quiz, in conjunction with our neighbour, Erchless Museum, and their summer programme.



Levinia Kidd above (l) with sister Lilian was another contest winner. Here they are at the bow of Ruffian skippered by Peter Wells.



Claudette Shaw at left, with Nicole Lauermeier decide where to plant herbs at the Thomas House. Spurred on by Claudette, we are choosing plants that would have been grown in Mrs. Thomas' garden c1850.

The Oakville Historical Society is proud of our volunteers. **Greg Munz** is one such tireless individual, who received the 2016 Town Of Oakville **Heritage Award**. Greg continues to prepare and mount exhibits at our offices. Greg Casey (left) from Genworth Canada presents Greg (right) with his award.



# AROUND THE SOCIETY



Our archives hold 40 years of diaries of **George Sumner** who was Oakville's Chief Constable from 1859-1902. In addition to that major responsibility, here is a list of some of his other duties: Jailor, Truant Officer, Dog Catcher, Sanitation Officer, Janitor & Ticket taker at Town Hall, Immigration Officer, Superintendent of Roads & Sidewalks, Undertaker's Assistant, Summer Steamer Agent, Tax Collector, Harbour Master and Health Officer.

We were pleased to have his descendants visit us to study the diaries. Shown above are Carol (Sumner) Morling (his great granddaughter), Charles Morling (great great grandson) and Ben Morling (great great grandson) who is reading a c130-year-old diary.



**Evelyn (Savage) Bullied** who has lived and worked in Oakville most of her life was born 100 years ago on a farm where Ford now builds vehicles. We all wish our long-serving volunteer continued good health!

## Oakville's Ghosts Return

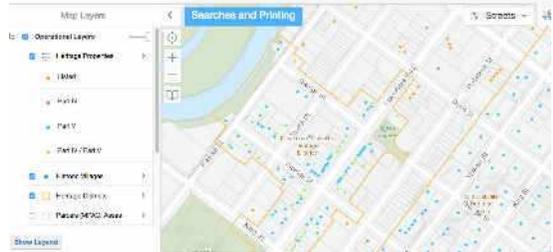
The Oakville Historical Society will again welcome the return of a number of local characters - characters who died in the 19th century. Yes, our annual **Ghost Walks** will begin on **Thursday, October 13 and run until Saturday, October 29.**

Why do we choose this time of year? In the fall, near All Hallow's Eve, the veil between our dimension and the dimension beyond is thinnest and ghosts apparently can come through more easily. But do our Oakville ghosts frighten, threaten? Not according to the late **Joyce Burnell** who was a long-time member of the Oakville Historical Society and author of *Ghosts of Oakville* and *Boo Too*, Oakville has only the nicest ghosts, which is why our Walks are so popular with families and groups of young people such as Brownies and Cubs. Last year we did 49 walks/bus tours/presentations. And this year we plan to do even more. Cost remains \$12 per adult and \$6 per child under 12 for our one hour Walks.. We are delighted that several more Society members have volunteered to haunt the streets of olde Oakville. We also welcome any members who would like to be roaming ghosts - those characters who stroll along the streets in costume once or twice during a designated walk to greet the Walk participants - a role also perfectly suited for high school students, drama enthusiasts or not, wanting to earn volunteer hours! And we also encourage members to volunteer to help with refreshments that are served after each Walk. Contact Mary Davidson or Wendy Belcher at 905 844-2695

# AROUND THE TOWN



Looking for Heritage properties?  
Go to the **Town of Oakville** website and choose **Heritage Planning**. You can choose what properties you wish to see on the map -



**Doors Open Oakville** will take place **Saturday, October 1**. We are looking forward to adding some new sites, including the Oakville Club, The John Bell Chapel at Appleby College, and MacLachlan College, Halton Regional Centre, Joshua Creek Heritage Centre, Oakville Greenhouse, and St. Andrew's and Knox churches. A full list of our Oakville sites is on the Doors Open Halton website. A brochure will be issued soon.

Some of our sites will need additional volunteers to welcome visitors and explain a little about the buildings. We will provide the necessary information for this purpose. If you think you could spare a couple of hours October 1, please email -

Membership.Oakville.Historical.Society@outlook.com  
or phone (905) 844-2695 for further information.

*Thanks, Andrea Stewart*



**June 2016** Newsletter showed a photo of a sign proclaiming **“JACOBS’ JAMS MADE HERE”** ‘HERE’ was the north side of Randall St. at Navy St. where the Scout Hut is today. Owner George Jacobs was Mayor of Oakville from 1933 to 1939.

# THE WAY THINGS WERE



Where is this?

What was its purpose?

What is there now?

## Archive Hours

Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 4:30 pm  
Third Sun. of the month 12:30 to 4:00 pm  
(905) 844-2695      [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)



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