

THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Harry Barrett

*Still Working To
Preserve Oakville's History*

March 2016

Volume 50 Number 1

PUBLIC SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday March 16th, Pot Luck at 6:30 pm with meeting at 7:30 to 9:00 pm
The Oakville Historical Society **Annual General Meeting** takes place at St.
John's United Church. Please bring a contribution for our pot luck.
All Society Members Welcome.

**Wednesday
April 20**

Dr. Richard Ruggles presents "WW1: The Halton Story"

**Wednesday
May 18**

Mr. Michael McAllister, co-ordinator at Hamilton & Scourge National
Historic Site of Canada presents, "**Ghost Ships: Museum Under the
Waves,**" the hidden shoreline historic sites.

**Above presentations 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.**



DOWNSIZING ~ MOVING ~ CONSOLIDATING?

Remember, the OHS **Yard Sale** is coming up on **May 14th from 9:00 am until 2:00 pm**. Jim Young would be happy to pick up your donations of knick-knacks, dishes, small furniture items, kitchen items, lamps, vases, figurines, linens & etc. anytime between now and May 12th. Call the OHS office at 905 844-2695 or call Jim directly at 289 259-0955.

Yes, this cast-iron claw-foot bathtub is for sale.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's been very quiet around the Society since Christmas – a great time to work on some renovations. As part of our longer-range plans to digitize the collection and records, we're moving some things around at the office. We've already renovated what was a storage room in the southeast corner of the building. It's now called the **Technologies Room** and will eventually be set up for scanning and photography. The current project (*see photo of volunteer below*) involves converting the bathroom off the boardroom into a **File Room**. This will allow us to move the filing cabinets from the board room which will give us more work space and increase the amount of library shelving as the library grows. We'll also be moving our book inventory from the new technologies room to the new filing room, freeing up some space in there. The old bathroom still had its claw-foot cast iron tub in it. The walls were not in good shape and some repairs are required. The office, entryway and boardroom all need some work as well. They haven't been painted since we took over the building in the early 90s.

On behalf of the Society, I would like to welcome **Julian Kingston** as the new **Supervisor at the Erchless Museum**. He was around for a visit in early January and met several of our members.

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming **Annual General Meeting** which will be held at St John's United Church on Wednesday 16 March. As usual, a pot luck dinner will precede the meeting. The dinner starts at 6:30. The meeting starts at 7:30.

Believe it or not, spring is coming and we need some help with the gardens. If you're interested in helping out and enjoying our lovely garden at the same time, please contact **Averil Jany**.



If you haven't had a chance yet, make sure you drop in to see our new exhibit, **Pleasure Boating in Oakville**. (*see photo at left*) Greg Munz and his crew have found some great items to put on display including photos, artifacts and a great 4-foot long racing model sloop built by Harry Barrett when he was a teenager.

I hope to see you all at the Annual General Meeting. *George Chisholm, President*

Cover photo shows Harry Barrett when Mayor of Oakville in the 1980s

Harry Barrett and Oakville's History

The following short story covers almost seventy years of Oakville's history and one man's vision. **Harry Barrett's** contribution to Oakville's heritage is broad and has lasted a lifetime. At 90 he is still on the Board at the Historical Society and visits the office regularly, regaling us with stories of Oakville past and improving our understanding of the Town's development. He is also Chair of the Town of Oakville Heritage Committee.

During his time as Mayor from 1973 to 1985, Harry Barrett reversed the "tear down" mentality of the time to one of respect for heritage. His list of achievements, honours and awards are numerous; this article will be confined to his work on the preservation of Erchless, the Harbours, the Waterfront Trails and Heritage.

Erchless Estate

This wonderful property, the estate of Oakville's founding family, the Chisholms, a hub of Oakville history and a delight for residents and tourists alike would not exist today were it not for the foresight of Mayor Harry Barrett and Town Council in 1977. Mr. Barrett deserves much of the credit for saving the estate from destruction. In 1977, a request was made on behalf of the Oakville Historical Society and some residents of Old Oakville to preserve the estate. At that time, a developer owned the property and was planning to build a highrise. The Town approved the purchase and Mayor Barrett managed to secure the entire estate for \$555,000, a decision that would preserve this beautiful historic property for our enjoyment today.



Erchless west façade 2016

The Town gave the Oakville Historical Society a grant to establish a museum, but a later council proposed that The Town should assume responsibility for the museum. It was agreed eventually that The Town would keep the artifacts collected by the Historical Society and manage the Erchless Museum, the Historical Society would maintain the archives and library and run the Thomas House Museum. This compromise works well today with The Society and several departments of the Town working together amicably and collaboratively. Harry Barrett is pleased that our current Mayor and Council continue his work in the interest of preserving Oakville's heritage.

Harry Barrett continued

Actually, Harry Barrett's involvement with Erchless went back much farther than his 1977 decision to save the estate. His first involvement was serendipitous. Some time in the late 1940's when Harry's father's plumbing business had the contract from the Chisholm family to winterize the house, a pipe burst in the big house and Harry, being the skinniest and most agile, was asked to wiggle under the floorboards. When he got to the north end where the help lived, he found a space beneath an 18" false floor. There he found documents including ships' manifests from the 1800s. He "scrabbled out," as he put it, and gave the papers to Mrs. Hazel Chisholm Mathews, the great-granddaughter of the Town's founder, Colonel William Chisholm. The next thing he knew, Mrs. Mathews and her sister Juliet Chisholm had been to the surplus store for coveralls to continue the search! According to her daughter, Nancy, this was to be the inspiration for Hazel Chisholm Mathews' book *Oakville and the Sixteen*, published in 1953.

It was around this time that Mrs. Mathews formed The Oakville History Society and Harry Barrett and she would discuss questions about the papers and the history of the town. Having grown up in Oakville, he would have been able to add much both to the book and to her efforts to form The Oakville Historical Society. Later, in the 1990s, he would spend nine months as lead volunteer in the renovation of the two small cottages on the estate which are now the Society offices

The Waterfront

It is thanks to Harry Barrett's farsightedness that we enjoy the wonderful parks, open spaces and walking trails along the lake in Oakville. In 1952, when he was on the Town Planning Board, and the estates along the lakeshore were breaking up, he discovered a clause in the Planning Act indicating that when the land was subdivided and density increased, the Town was entitled to five percent of any subdivision for parkland or money in lieu. He proposed that the first fifty feet of waterfront would come under public ownership. In the 1960s a by-law was passed so that when an estate would change hands and density increase, the Town would take ownership of the lakefront.

Harry was recognized for this achievement in 2013 by Mayor Burton and the Town Council, at a ceremony at Tannery Park where a plaque was placed, naming the waterfront trails **The Harry Barrett Waterfront Parks System**.

Harry Barrett continued



You can see these commemorative plaques in **Arkendo Park, Gairloch Gardens, Tannery Park, Coronation Park, and South Shell Park**. At the dedication, Mayor Burton praised Harry Barrett's leadership and foresight. *"It's with great pride that we dedicate this network of waterfront parks, open spaces and trails to Mr. Harry Barrett. Leadership stems from doing the right things for both today and tomorrow. Harry's foresight ensured that future generations of Oakville residents and visitors can access our beautiful lakefront properties. On behalf of Oakville, we thank Harry for his contributions in shaping the outstanding community we live in today."*

Harry Barrett, Award Presentation June 2013

The Harbours

Much is owed to Mr. Barrett for his leadership in the restoration of our beautiful harbours in Bronte and Oakville. In 1973 the harbours were in poor condition so Mayor Barrett formed the **Oakville Harbour Development Authority**, charged with developing both harbours. He hired the late Gurth Bramall as Harbourmaster and many people, including lawyers and engineers volunteered their time. Along with Town staff, they were given the mandate to do the soundings, acquire the lands around the harbours, clear up the debris, landscape, dredge and create new moorings. His purpose in naming it an authority and not a committee was that in endowing people with authority they would command the respect to get things done, something committees often find difficult to do.

"It was all part of my plan to have the waterfront and harbours available for public use," recalled Harry. *"We had a good council who trusted me and I them."* It is Mr. Barrett's wish that the public will eventually have access to the entire Oakville waterfront. The Town of Oakville is currently working to continue the development of the west side of the harbour, under the leadership of Chris Mark, Director of Parks and Open Space.



Oakville Harbour looking south

Harry Barrett continued

Heritage Committee

Harry Barrett has been member of the **Heritage Oakville Committee** since 2001. He was nominated and appointed as the representative of the Oakville Historical Society and was subsequently appointed by Town Council as Chair of the Committee. As the result of the work of the committee, some five hundred and eighty properties have been designated, including The Granary, The Murray House, Gairloch and The Sovereign House, as well as all those within the four heritage districts; Old Oakville, First and Second Streets, Trafalgar Road and Downtown Heritage Conservation Districts.

The Heritage Committee has recently simplified and shortened the process of approving minor changes to heritage buildings. Many decisions can now be made by the Town Heritage Department instead of having to be approved by the Committee. This has speeded up the approval process for home owners.



Harry Barrett's 90th birthday with long-time friend Evelyn Bullied aged 99. *photo Marianne Hawthorne*

In conclusion, our town has benefitted from Harry Barrett's leadership and foresight which came from an honest desire to do the right thing, not for himself but for his fellow citizens. His hope for the future is to see the entire waterfront under the control of The Town and accessible to the general public. He would like to see community involvement continue to grow. These wishes certainly seem to be respected by our current Mayor and Council. At Harry's ninetieth birthday party, a casual meeting at our offices, Mayor Burton and many members of Council and Town staff came out to pay their respects and express their congratulations. We at the Oakville Historical Society take pride in being able to say we know Harry Barrett for the person he is: a man of action, foresight and vision, balanced with true authenticity, compassion and humility.

Andrea Stewart

AROUND THE SOCIETY

Welland Canal Fallen Workers

The Welland Ship Canal was an amazing engineering feat carried out between 1913 and 1935. It now carries more than 3,000 vessels per year and is important for the economies on both sides of the Canada/US border. However, it took a serious toll: the lives of some 137 workers who are finally being recognized with the memorial they deserve.



Mr. Aiden Phair, above, shows an image of the proposed memorial. photo Greg Munz

Our February speaker was **Mr. Aiden Phair**, a volunteer with the **Canal Workers Memorial** who came to tell us the story of the workers. This, the largest loss of life on a Canadian government infrastructure project in Canada's history, was met at the time with almost total disregard for the safety of the workers and the consequent loss of life. Compensation for the surviving families was either woefully inadequate or non-existent and accounts of the various casualties related by Mr. Phair are shocking for us today. Three families suffered the loss of fathers plus sons; one father who witnessed his son's death when his body was crushed was himself crushed to death six months later. The last casualty before the Canal's Official Opening in 1932, died within an hour of arriving on his first day at the job site. His widow was left with no money, little English, and six children to provide for. Despite the loss, she persevered, keeping the family together and raising her two girls and four boys in their new home of Canada. Details of all

these casualties and the survivors can be found on the website, www.stcatherines.ca/CanalWorkersMemorial.

At the opening of the canal in 1932, The Honourable Dr. R.J. Manion, Minister of Railways and Canals said *Peace has its heroes as well as war, and in a construction project of this magnitude, with its daily risk, and hazard...It is only right and proper that we should give a thought to the men who lost their lives during the progress of the work.* It is only now that these workers are to be recognized. A memorial garden planned to be opened in 2017 will be located at the Welland Canals Parkway, north of Lock 3. *Andrea Stewart*



A recent acquisition to our collection is a 1953 photo at right, of a house being moved to, or from, Washington Avenue, east of Kerr Street. Above is the street today with Kerr St. at left, out of the frame.



AROUND THE SOCIETY

We are pleased to have welcomed eight new members since our December 2015 Newsletter:

Mr. and Mrs. Don Baird
Mr. and Mrs. M. Follows
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jelinek
Mrs. Peggy Morrison
Father O'Mahony, St. Andrew Church
Toronto Reference Library
Ms. Rosalie Ward
Ms. Ruth Anne Winter

We look forward to welcoming these new members at our upcoming events.

Membership Reminder

Thank you to those of you who so promptly renewed your membership for 2016. However, there are some eighty memberships still outstanding. If you have been away or have forgotten, I wonder if you would be good enough to send your membership soon. We hope you will continue to enjoy the benefits of membership and support the work of our volunteers in preserving Oakville's history. Thank you.

Andrea Stewart, Memberships



photo Greg Munz

Kaj Pindal (born 1927) is a Danish-born Canadian animator and animation educator who worked at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) beginning in 1957. He began his career as an underground cartoonist during the German occupation of Denmark and was forced to flee his home city of Copenhagen when his series of anti-Hitler cartoons put his life in peril. He immigrated to Canada in 1957 and joined the NFB the same year.

It was our pleasure to have Kaj discuss with us and show some of these favourites at our Speakers' night in November 2015. He also brought an example of what the students at Sheridan College have produced – a most entertaining “whodunit” about a mouse detective whose neighbourhood was the pages of a newspaper! We in Oakville are very proud of the great tradition that has made Sheridan College one of the most respected

among animators worldwide, thanks to the talents of those artists on the teaching staff and the commitment of the students. *Mary Davidson*

Day Trips There have been some requests by our membership for an organised excursion to a near-by museum or historical locale. We propose we meet at the office, fill our vehicles with members wanting a ride and meet at the site, which could be - Fort York, McCrae House, Dundurn Castle.... Need a Spring Day out? Call or write and let us know what interests you. We are open to all suggestions of time and place.

AROUND THE SOCIETY

How did it begin? Last spring Delmanor Glen Abbey requested someone speak to about the history of Oakville. I rose to the challenge and I haven't looked back.

"The History of Oakville" sounded dull, so I named my presentation "**A Glimpse Into Our Past**" and at the end of the afternoon when I asked if there were any questions, the first question was, "Do you have any other presentations?"

I had been leading tours of the old town, but it was too much walking for seniors so I decided this would be my next challenge. I had my grandson walk the tour with me and take photos of about 45 homes of the early settlers. I then took this presentation named "**A Walking Tour - Without Walking**" to Delmanor, and that is how it all began.

I gave both presentations at five seniors homes last fall - I space them about a month apart - and each one draws between 21 to 45 in the audience, depending on the size of the home. I also spoke at the Colbourne Centre for Seniors, reaching 75 folk that day. My smallest audience so far was seven ladies in a private home.

As much as it is helpful to bring a little cash into the Society, my main reason for all this is to better educate the folk of Oakville on their very interesting past.

I will still continue to take people out for walking tours, but would like to fill the colder months with more inside presentations. And I do all this in costume. One never grows too old to enjoy "dressing up." *Trish Sinclair*

While volunteering at OHS and working on the recently published **Oakville Memories Old and New: Let's Remesce**, I was led back to my favourite activity: interviewing.

As we prepare for the second edition of *Remesces of Oakville*, the veteran volunteers of OHS suggested we record those Oakvillians whose stories could be heard by the click of a link on our website. Now I am listening to and recording our citizens tell their stories in their own words and soon you also will be able to hear them. What a great idea for readers of the future to experience the sound of the voices of the storytellers of Oakville. Please contact me at the OHS office, 905 844-2695 if you, or someone you know would like to participate in this project.

Margaret Godefroy



Above, Trish Sinclair leads an outdoor tour

AROUND THE OFFICE

CHJ Snider (1879 - 1971) wrote a series of columns, “Schooner Days” which ran in the Toronto Evening Telegram from 1935 to 1956. His work included the first-hand information he gleaned from aged captains of schooners, stonehookers, and steamers, from Great Lakes sailors, and others who had an intimate knowledge of the inland seas of North America and the Toronto waterfront. This vast collection of articles has been a fascination of volunteer **Philip Brimacombe** and he has spent years collating, categorising and organising them into a form easily accessible to any researcher wishing to learn about this activity on the Great Lakes. They are all on our library shelves waiting for you to open



Pictured at left is a rendition of a **stonehooker**, the type of vessel that brought up flat stones that lay under the lake near the shore. They were extensively used to build foundations of early Oakville buildings. The stone hooking practice died out when concrete was perfected. This work by an unknown artist was donated to OHS. The back of the card is shown at right.



This above property at 1110 Lakeshore Rd. E., shown in our **December** newsletter was once a grounds-keeper's house on the **Baillie** estate, **Lisonally**.



Our **June 2015** edition featured a photo of **Cedar Croft Motor Court**. At left is a photo that shows the property in **December 1989**.



Mrs. Thomas never looked so good. The Thomas House, shown at left, had some visitors recently. **Sheridan College** students **Neda Ahmad** (photographer), **Sasha Pawluk**, **Stefania Floro** and **Gloria Siu** (hair & makeup team) used their many skills as did model **Jodi Harris**. We are pleased to lend our premises to Sheridan students as they are always professional and respectful.

THE WAY THINGS WERE



Where is this?

What year?

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

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