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*Preserving Oakville's  
Historical Heritage  
Since 1953*  
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**THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**

SEPT 2011



Volume 45: Number 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As I write this, it's another hot August day. What a difference from the summer of 2010 when we rarely used our air conditioning. The heat this year has certainly affected the operations of the Society. Walking tour attendance has fallen off even more and attendance seems to be down at the Thomas House. Let's hope that the fall weather is better.

Keep the weekend of 24-25 September open – for Doors Open. Andrea Stewart is our representative on the Doors Open committee and could certainly use your help as a volunteer. She can be reached by leaving a message at the office at 905 844-2695. Consider also taking part by visiting one or more of the sites open for the event. Admission is free.

While our traditional walking tours are becoming less popular, group tours are increasing. Organizations contact us to arrange a special tour for their members. Some are done on foot as usual but some are done by bus or large van – particularly for retirement homes. If another organization of which you are a member would like a special tour, please contact us. Ghost tours become more popular every year as well and we could certainly use some help with them both as leaders and refreshment providers.

All our usual events will be running this fall as well. Harvest Festival is set for 25 September at the Thomas House. Two public meetings will be held in the fall at St John's United Church and **the annual Members Christmas Party** is in the planning stages.

I hope to see you at one of these events.

Oakville Historical Society E-mail
info@oakvillehistory.org

Archive Hours * Tues & Thurs –
1PM to 4:30PM at 110 King Street.

George Chisholm
905-842-5385
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In your travels, please stop by our advertisers and check them out. Their patronage helps to produce the December edition in colour.

KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING

(OAKVILLE IN WORLD WAR II)

In an article in the “Oakville Record Star” on Thursday May 10, 1945 there was the following report:

“Three thousand people gathered in Victoria Park on Monday afternoon to join in a service of Dedication and Thanksgiving in celebration of the defeat of Germany after five years and eight months of bitter war.

In opening the ceremony, His Worship Mayor Campbell said, “Today we celebrate the complete and utter defeat of the foul force, which for nearly six years has brought untold suffering and misery to humanity.

To our splendid men and women who have stood in the forefront of battle, we acknowledge an undying obligation. To those who bear the scars of war we promise our continuing efforts to assure them just compensation. To those gallant lads who have died on our behalf, we dedicate our lives to bringing to reality those high ideals of equality of opportunity, freedom and peace, for which they made the supreme sacrifice. To those near and dear to them we offer our sincerest sympathy.

May we unite with those who return in building a Canada which will be a proud memorial worthy of the sacrifice of the dead.”

With those words a fitting closure was made to the World War II era in which a small community of fewer than 10,000 inhabitants sent the highest proportion of volunteers to serve than any Canadian community of its size.

Canada joined the war effort on September 10, 1939. This was a week after Britain joined because of the Statute of Westminster, which meant Canada had to vote before entering the war. One of the first developments to meet the challenge was the switching of factories to make war equipment. Many factories were set up which helped increase the employment rate both locally and nationally. After a long economic

depression people in Oakville and surrounding Trafalgar Township welcomed the opportunity for full employment in factories like the John Inglis plant on Strachan Avenue in Toronto where peacetime production of household appliances changed to producing equipment for the armed forces. This facility by 1943 was turning out 60% of the world's supply of the Bren gun. The same could be said for the establishment of Victory Aircraft in Malton where aircraft like the Lancaster bomber, destined for overseas combat, were now being produced. Local workers took advantage of the new employment opportunities both in local factories and in factories situated within commuting distance. One big change was the employment of women in munition factories like Canadian Arsenals Limited near the rifle ranges on Lakeshore Road and Etobicoke Creek in Toronto Township. Visitors from Oakville riding on the Toronto Transit Commission streetcars and trolleys noticed that women were driving the vehicles for the first time! This freed up the male drivers, most of whom were volunteering for military service.



Art Hillmer, Kyle Thompson (neighbour) & John Hillmer – Sept 1942

Locally, men and women were travelling to Hamilton or Toronto to sign up for military service at the recruiting offices. On visiting the Memorial Hall at the new campus of Oakville Trafalgar High School one cannot be unmoved by the large number of staff and senior students from that school, the only local high school at that time, who made the supreme sacrifice. On a fall day in 1936 the rugby team at Oakville Trafalgar High School took the championship in Group One of their league. Later, 4 of the 18 members of the team lost their lives in World War Two. Douglas G. "Granny" Morris, a Wing Commander was killed in action in February of 1942. Jack Kemp joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1941, and was married in October of the same year. He was reported missing and presumed killed as a result of air operations in July of 1942. Flight-Sergeant, Pilot Bill Archibald, son of Principal R.H. Archibald, was reported missing as a result of air operations in September 1941. He was presumed dead on November 28 of the same year. Flying Officer R. Montye Bull graduated in Manitoba in 1941 and was later reported killed in action. For a small town losses, like these were especially difficult as everyone knew one another and shared in the grief of nearby friends and relatives who had lost loved ones or who had learned of injuries sustained in combat.

Everyday life in Oakville during the Second World War was similar to life in hundreds of other small communities all over the Dominion of Canada at the time. Those who lived at the time will recall the coupon books that one had to use to purchase items like tea, coffee and gasoline. They'll remember enjoying sodas and the terrific lunches at Len Hope's Drug Store on Colborne Street here in town. How about the awesome milkshakes at Dunn's Drug Store? Teens and adults alike enjoyed the dances at Victoria Hall on Reynolds Street during the war, enjoying hits like "I'll Never Smile Again" by Toronto's own Ruth Sandler Lowe, "Take the 'A' Train" by Duke Ellington, "Stardust", and my personal favourite, "Frenesi", also by the legendary Artie Shaw. Among other favourites were "Stormy Weather" by Lena Horne, "A Tree in the Meadow" by Margaret Whiting, and who can forget "Pennsylvania 6-5000" by the great Glenn Miller? For the more adventuresome, a drive into Toronto along the Lakeshore Highway, or the newly-opened Queen Elizabeth Way, to the Palais Royale or the Palace Pier at Sunnyside would be a treat as top musicians like Harry James, Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman made these clubs popular destinations on their North American tours. If a young man really wanted to impress his girlfriend, taking her into Toronto in a 1940 Chevy Sedan Classic, a 1941 Willy's Coupe might go over well. Perhaps they might borrow their parents' 1940 Cadillac Sixty Special Classic or the family Packard or Hudson. Still, most were happy walking to the dances on Reynolds Street or borrowing dad's old Ford if they promised to be home by 11!

I can remember my grandparents, who lived in High Park in West Toronto during the War, talking about the fine programs on C.B.C. Radio. They especially enjoyed the antics of “The Happy Gang”. Like many in Oakville, they listened to the C.F.R.B. news from the overseas conflicts, from people like Lorne Green, Gordon Sinclair, and Charles Collingwood Reed. Wes McKnight was another popular radio personality. In the early evenings they would faithfully read the old Toronto Telegram while listening to “Amos and Andy”, “The Texaco Star Theatre”, or my grandfather’s favourite, “The Bickersons”. He joked that it was the best representation of married life he had ever heard! I assume he was joking. Certainly, such enjoyment offered brief respites from the continuous litany of suffering and loss as a result of the war. I should imagine that local people also enjoyed the escapism from life’s grim realities at the time by attending the movies at the Gregory Theatre on Lakeshore Road at Trafalgar. Among popular films of this era were “Mrs. Miniver” featuring Greer Garson, and Canada’s own Walter Pigeon. Other popular movies were “Desperate Journey” with Errol Flynn, and Ronald Reagan, and “The Road to Morocco”, one of the popular “Road” movies featuring Bing Crosby, Dorothy Lamour and Bob Hope. My grandfather especially enjoyed “A Yank in the R.A.F.” according to his memoirs that our family has kept over the years. I somehow imagine that it is due to the fact that “The Girl With the Million Dollar Legs”, Betty Grable, was featured in that production! The entertainment in those days seemed to strike a balance between glorifying the war effort, as well as emphasizing the nature of strong family and community to “Keep the Home Fires Burning”.



H.M.C.S. Oakville

One of the fascinating stories to come out of Oakville and vicinity in the Second World War was the visit of the corvette H.M.C.S. Oakville to the Sixteen when she was commissioned in November 1941. She had sailed from Thunder Bay where she had been built to her namesake town for an official launch. The town put on a party not seen at any time previously. There was a blue-ribbon parade, speeches, tours of the boat and an evening banquet. The community collected 300 books for the ship's library, bought percolaters for the galley and radios for the crew quarters. Sailors received care packages and knitted clothes. A handmade silk ensign was presented to the captain. Canada's Naval Chief of Staff and Minister of Defence were on hand. The corvette, one of many built in Canada for convoy duty, had her moment in glory in the summer of 1942 when she captured and sunk a German submarine in the Caribbean, off the coast of Haiti. The vessel ended her days when she was sold to the Venezuelan Navy and was decommissioned in 1962.

It is quite interesting to read the newspapers of the time, some of which are available in the Oakville Historical Society collection at our offices on King Street. Imagine a new car being offered at Stirling Dynes Motors here in town for \$925.00! Gas was 19 cents a gallon at the McColl Frontenac gas station. A decent bungalow could be purchased for \$6900.00 locally. Bread at the Loblaws Groceteria on Colborne Street near Thomas Street was 8 cents a loaf. However, I suppose that one has to appreciate that the average annual salary was only \$2000.00 per year, and the minimum wage was 30 cents an hour! Many local people worked in local factories like Glassco's Jams on Randall Street or the Oakville Basket Factory up on the Sixth Line and Trafalgar near the train station and found it a struggle to make ends meet, especially with the larger families of the day. It was a blessing that seasonal work could be obtained on the surrounding farms. For example, strawberry picking was one method of securing extra income. In those days Oakville and Trafalgar Township was known as "The Strawberry Capital of Canada". Paycheques came out on Friday and there was the usual trek to The Bank of Toronto, The Bank of Commerce or The Imperial Bank of Canada on Colborne Street to cash them.

Most readers are aware of the old Independent Order of Forrester's Orphans' Home on Bond Street in the area of Oakville north of Rebecca Street and east of Kerr Street. During the war this building was taken over by the Department of National Defense for the Ortona Barracks. Many servicemen and their families were located in Oakville and their homes were subsequently built between Kerr Street and Queen Mary Drive. These houses were built between 1941 and 1947 by The Wartime Housing Limited (later C.M.H.C.). 30,000 of them were built to provide affordable accommodation for munitions workers and returning veterans and their families. Surrey Park was one such

development at the northwest corner of Rebecca Street and what is now Dorval Drive. These houses were recently demolished. It is said that one million of these wartime houses still exist in Canada today. Hopefully those built in Oakville will be retained as a symbol of housebuilding in another era. Local men joined The Lorne Scots Regiment that was based in Halton and Peel. Others joined regiments like the 48th Highlanders in Toronto, and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. Local army recruits trained in facilities like Camp Borden and Niagara–on-the-Lake. Those heading into the Royal Canadian Air Force trained as pilots at air stations that were springing up all over the country. Bases like Port Maitland, Centralia and Muskoka trained domestic pilots as well as those from countries such as Holland, Norway, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was established in May 1940 and lasted until March 1945 when the plan came to an end. There were 130,000 graduates trained in Canada. 72,835 were Canadian. 50,000 pilots were trained as part of the program, including a significant number from the Oakville area. Women enlisted in the armed forces and joined groups like The Canadian Women’s Army Corp, the Wrens, and Ferry Command. Women who did not join the armed forces gathered to make up care packages for those serving overseas. Some Red Rose tea or Maxwell House coffee were always welcomed by servicemen overseas. A couple of sticks of Wrigley’s chewing gum and some Sweet Cap or Export A cigarettes were a treat. If the serviceman didn’t smoke, he could trade them for other items. Condensed milk was a treasured item. In addition, letters from loved ones back home dispelled some of the tragedy, stress and frequent monotony of everyday life. Of course, servicemen were not allowed to disclose their location or any other strategic information that could have been useful to the enemy. Offending parts of letters were routinely blacked out by censors. “Loose lips sink ships” was the rule.

Oakville has three war memorials: the recently-refurbished Oakville Cenotaph in George’s Square, The Bronte War Memorial on Lakeshore Road and the Trafalgar Memorial. The memorial on George’s Square was constructed by The Royal Canadian Legion who underwrote the initial \$5500.00 cost. The granite benches were unveiled by Mrs. Charles Foot, wife of the Past President of the Legion, and Mrs. Nellie Hurst of Burnett Street, who lost 2 sons in the World War II conflicts in Italy. It is encouraging today that Remembrance Day services are attracting more and more people every year. In recent years efforts have been expanded to recognize those who fought in the Korean conflict, as well as those men and women who have served in various peacekeeping efforts around the world since World War Two. Finally, in more recent times we remember Canadians who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially local residents like Colonel Geoff Parker who died serving his country in May 2010 while serving with The Royal Canadian Regiment. He was the highest-ranking Canadian soldier to be killed in the Afghan conflict. We remember local people serving from 1939 to 1945 like Rear

Admiral Hugh Pullen, Lieutenant Colonel Charles K. Nicholl, Lieutenant-Colonel J.P. Browne, Colonel Jock Anderson, a decorated Canadian army chaplain, and the Honourable Ray Lawson, an Oakville resident who later became Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario. Among other things we remember Ray Lawson for his efforts in establishing major defense industries during the Second World War like the great refinery complex in the east end of Montreal. Today, there is Ray Lawson Boulevard in Montreal named after him. Local individuals did a great deal to help achieve victory.

It must have been a wonderful scene in Oakville the day World War Two ended in 1945. I understand that workers were allowed to leave to celebrate with family and friends and, needless to say, ears were peeled to the radio as they gathered around the RCA Victor radio to hear the celebrations in Times Square, New York, Trafalgar Square in London, and on Bay Street in downtown Toronto. The church bells must have been ringing in Oakville to their heart's content that glorious day, hopefully ringing in a new era of everlasting peace.

Phil Brimacombe

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were” – June 2011

Prior to the use of concrete, slab rocks taken from the floor of Lake Ontario by “Stone Hookers” were used for foundations. They were measured in a pile 3’

high, 6’ wide and 12’ long called a “Toise”. Each “Stone Hooker” vessel could carry 2 of these and they were stored on the shore. Picture shows a “Toise” on the west pier of the 16 Mile Creek, near the C.G. Marlatt Tannery.

Lance Naismith

Membership

Welcome to our newest members of the Oakville Historical Society!!

Anita Cwynar
Pauline Powers
Terence Whelan

Sandy Forsythe
Trish Ray

Shavak and Freny Madon
Gary Reed

Andrea Stewart

Thomas House

I would like to send a truly heartfelt “thank you” to all those who volunteered so faithfully and well over this very hot and humid summer with a high volume of visitors – you have certainly conveyed that “pioneer spirit” in your dedication – “THANK YOU”, again.

Mary Davidson

Great White Oak

Near the end of September, saplings from the officially designated historic 260 year old Great White Oak on Bronte Road will be available for sale. Only 500 saplings, from this iconic Oakville tree that was twice saved from destruction through the hard work of citizens, will be available. Contact Liz Benneian at president@oakvillegreen.org so she can add you to the list.

Mary Davidson



Mayor's Historical Picnic in the Park

This year's Picnic in the Park was a success, weatherwise and attendance. The two bands - the St. Paul's Dixie Land Band and the Oakville Wind Orchestra, entertained those who attended and either sat by the lake or close up to the music.

Announced by the OHS Crier Ian Burkholder, Mayor Rob Burton and former mayor Harry Barrett officially opened the event.

Children in attendance were also entertained by "Roundabout" the clown, a fire truck and a police car.



Mayor Rob Burton & Marianne Hawthorne















William Halton and Halton County

At our March presentation, John McDonald, a historian and author, gave a very in-depth talk on William Halton and his impact upon not only Halton County but Ontario as well.

The presentation was rounded out with an entertaining visual presentation, along with William Halton's life story – one not just centred in Canada. The presentation was well received by those in attendance.

Lance Naismith

CHECK OUR DECEMBER
NEWSLETTER FOR THE 2012
SPEAKERS PRESENTATION
SCHEDULE



Phillip Brimacombe and
John McDonald

AGM

Due to inclement weather on March 23rd, our Annual General Meeting was put over to May 18th. We know several people were heartbroken to miss the Pot Luck dinner and look forward to our AGM in 2012. The meeting was held and mandatory reports made to the members. Three directors were confirmed by the members. At the following board meeting, George Chisholm, Barb Savage, Jim Young and Greg Munz agreed to continue in their office.

Also at the AGM a long time member, Ernle Carroll was honoured for her long service to the OHS and cake was enjoyed by all.

We would like to mention that a member of the OHS, Drew Bucknall – a very active member of the OHS and the Heritage Committee, was honoured by the Ontario Heritage Trust with a Certificate of Achievement in Appreciation of Volunteer Work to identify, preserve, protect and promote our Province's rich Heritage.



Lance Naismith

The Cottages at 108 and 110 King Street

Editor's Note: You've probably been there and, walked past them or went into them and thought it was an odd design for a house. Well, there are some odd things about our Society building but, it is really two buildings, designed by two descendents of our founder, William Chisholm. Here is the history, -written by an unknown writer.

These Cottages on the north side of the Erchless grounds were designed by sisters Hazel Matthews and Dr. Juliet Chisholm, great-granddaughters of

Oakville's founder William Chisholm. Juliet Chisholm was an artist and pediatrician, Hazel an author and historian.



In 1953 the two women moved into the newly-built cottages, leaving the Customs House occupied by Hazel's son Monty Hart and his family. Juliet lived at 108, Hazel in 110.

Number 108 was conceived by Juliet as a Normandy cottage with stone floors, inspired by the years she had spent in France. The pinkish tint of the floor tiles is a

characteristic of the Credit Valley stone used in their construction.

Hazel's residence at Number 110 was in a more contemporary style. The differences in design went as far as the heating systems; 108 (Juliet's) was heated using forced air, whereas 110 (Hazel's) had radiators installed for a hot water heating system. There was a great deal of second-hand material used in the construction of these two homes, possibly due to the shortages brought about by World War II.



By the mid-70s, both the Erchless Family Home and the Cottages were occupied by tenants. The Town of Oakville purchased Erchless Estate in 1977 and continued renting the properties for some time. The Customs House was restored and opened to the public in 1983, while the Erchless Family Home did not open to the public until 1991.

In 1992 the Oakville Historical Society reached an agreement with the Town of Oakville whereby the Society was granted possession of the Cottage at 110 King Street.

Juliet's Cottage at 108 King continued to be occupied by its tenant, Commodore Robertson. Eventually the Society took over the second cottage also and commenced a three-year renovation project to join the two buildings into one. Vintage materials were used to maintain an authentic appearance.

The renovated building now houses the Society's archives, a collection of historical documents pertaining to the history of the Town of Oakville.



Erchless Estate – next
door to OHS

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. The “Sea Gull” is famous for initiating trade with what country in 1865?
2. What famous shipbuilder built the “Seagull” on the Sixteen?
3. What was its cargo? (Ed. Note: Dual spelling of ship – which one is right?)

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**The Oakville Historical Society: 110 King Street, Oakville**

**Archive Hours: Tuesday & Thursday \* 1:00 to 4:30PM**

**Tel: (905) 844-2695 Fax: (905) 844-7380 Website: [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)**

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