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

JUNE 2012

Volume 46: Number 2

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Sunday, June 10th, 2012** Mayor's Picnic & Band Concert – Lakeside Park
Noon to 4:30pm
- Saturday, September 29th, 2012** Doors Open
- Saturday, September 29th, 2012** Harvest Festival Bake Sale – Thomas House,
Lakeside Park 11AM – 4PM
- Friday, December 7th, 2012** Members Christmas Party, OHS office – 110
King Street

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

- Wednesday, October 17th, 2012** Women and the War of 1812: Speaker Cheryl
MacDonald
- Wednesday, November 21st, 2012** The Home Children (with focus on those who
came over from the Dr. Barnardo Institute).
Speaker Elaine Guther

All programs will be held at St. John's United Church and begin at 7:30pm.

Attending the Mayor's Picnic on June 10th?
Don't forget to invite neighbours, friends,
relatives and anyone else who would enjoy an
afternoon in the Park listening to some stirring
music. Bring the babysitter as well, as kids are
welcome.

COVER PICTURE: Oakville's Old Boys' Band – August 4th, 1924 - Front porch,
Mount Vernon, Oakville (Lakeside Park now)
Advertising insert artwork and compilation by Carolyn Naismith.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This newsletter marks the start of our summer season – a time when your Society is even busier than usual. There is an increased need for volunteers in a variety of roles. You don't need to be an expert on history or the history of Oakville as we offer free training. If you would like to help out at the Thomas House, at the office, with walks, or just help out please let us know.

Our last two speakers' nights have been particularly well attended. In February, Society member Steve Shaw presented his movie on the Avro Arrow. Close to 100 people turned out to hear it including several former Avro employees. The Arrow is obviously still a hot topic. One person wondered how long the meeting would have run if we had moved it across the corner to the pub. The May meeting with Ken Weber talking about the War of 1812 was almost as well attended. As usual, Ken held the audience spellbound. With 2012 being the 200th anniversary of the War, there is great interest and there are many events around the area in commemoration. After the meeting, a visitor gave the Society a silent movie of Charlie Chaplin which came from the old Victoria Hall on Reynolds Street. On the surface, it sounded like a great item to add to the collection but film of that age is on nitrate stock which deteriorates with age and can spontaneously ignite. The cost to safely store this movie is prohibitive so we are looking for a more appropriate home for it. Speaking of Victoria Hall, which stood where the Curling Club parking lot is now, if you have any photos of the **outside** the building, we would love to have them as we do not have a photo of the outside of the building in the collection.

In March, we held our annual meeting which was preceded by the usual pot-luck dinner. Three directors had their terms expire and all were re-elected. Welcome back to Harry Barrett, Phil Brimacombe and Jim Young. Because of low attendance at the last two board meetings, the board has not yet elected officers. We are, however, in need of a new treasurer. Greg Munz has decided not to continue in that role although he is staying on the board. If you know of someone who might be interested in taking over as treasurer, please let me know.

Later this month, a small group will be getting together to start the research required to create a new walk. It was decided a while ago to create at least one cemetery walk and the project is finally rolling. The first walk will feature Oakville St Mary's Cemetery at the top of Lyons Lane.

In February we were saddened by the passing of long-time Society member and Vice President Barb Savage. Barb was involved in just about every function of the Society and was a prime advocate of the Society. She is missed.

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
georgechisholm@sympatico.ca

Oakville and the War of 1812

Isaac Brock and the battle of Queenston Heights, Tecumseh, the burning of York, the burning of Washington, Laura Secord and her cow. These are the images that usually come to mind when we think of the War of 1812.

The war was a far more complex event than these vignettes illustrate. Declared by the United States on the 18th of June 1812, the war was ostensibly about the right of American sailors to be free from forcible service in the Royal Navy (impressment) and the right of Americans to freely trade through the British naval blockade into Europe. Lingered unresolved issues from the American Revolution and the 1783 Treaty of Paris which ended it, also played a large part in the process leading to the declaration of war by the American government.

The war was fought mainly around the Great Lakes, mostly on Canadian soil, five hundred miles from the ocean and the maritime causes outlined in the declaration of war. The major portion of the war rolled up and down the Niagara Peninsula and along the Niagara River for two years with side campaigns in southwestern Ontario, the Ohio Territory and along the St Lawrence River and eastern Townships of Quebec. The defeat of Napoleon in 1814 allowed Britain to focus her military efforts against the Americans, leading to the occupation of a large part of northern Maine, the attack on and burning of Washington and the unsuccessful attacks on New Orleans and Baltimore.

The war had no direct impact on Oakville and the Halton Region. In 1812, there wasn't anything here to be impacted on. Oakville and Bronte didn't exist and the town sites were reserved by treaty for the use of the Mississauga Indians as farming and fishing sites. The Lakeshore Road, (Highway 2) wouldn't be built for another twenty years. Legal settlement in the region, which had only begun in 1805, was thinly scattered along Dundas Street (approximately where Highway 5 is now located) and on the west side of Nelson Township. There were less than twenty families settled along the lakefront from Burlington Bay to the mouth of the Credit River. The largest population centre was the hamlet of Wellington Square, located at the north end of the Burlington Beach strip on Joseph Brant's land grant and adjoining settlement to the west along the north shore of the bay in East and West Flamborough townships. Out of a population of roughly three hundred people, half of whom were children, all males between the ages of sixteen and sixty were required by law to serve in the militia. Based on roots stretching back to the ancient British fyrd, dating from Saxon times before the Norman invasion of 1066, the

militia called on the population to defend the country. It had its flaws; organised along regional lines, the militia was only required to assemble between one and four days a year for training at the discretion of its local commanders, it could only serve for a maximum of six months when called out and it had no equipment. All members were required to provide themselves with their own musket within six months of registering with their local company and there were no uniforms.

In early 1812, Major General Brock, the administrator of Upper Canada, took steps to improve the effectiveness of the militia by creating Flank Companies within the existing militia units. These companies would be the first to be called out for service when needed and would train for up to six days a month. An additional incentive to joining was that they would be paid for this training, starting at the rate of six pence per day for a Private.

The Chisholm brothers of West Flamborough were among the most active in this service. The sons of Scottish Loyalists forced out of the upper Hudson River Valley during the American Revolution, John Chisholm commanded the 1st Flank Company of the 2nd battalion of York Militia throughout the War, William served as a Sergeant in Captain William Applegarth's 2nd Flank Company, later being commissioned as an Ensign and then Lieutenant and serving as a Lieutenant in the Incorporated Militia while the third brother George, served as a Sergeant and Ensign in his brother John's Company. All three would serve throughout the war, taking part in the battles of Detroit, Queenston Heights, Stoney Creek, Lundy's Lane and Fort Erie.

While the war only came as close to Oakville as the capture of York and the battle of Stoney Creek, it did pass relatively close by when the American naval forces of Commodore Isaac Chauncey chased the British naval forces of Sir James Yeo from York to Burlington Bay in what became known as the "Burlington Races" in September of 1813.

The most positive impact of the war on Oakville was the effect that it had on the man who created Oakville, Merrick Thomas. Born in Vermont, he was brought to the Queenston area where his father, Seneca, was employed on the construction of gun



Merrick Thomas 1806-1856

batteries on the British side of the river. His father was arrested and jailed as a suspected American spy for having crossed to the American side of the river after the declaration of war became publicly known. During his time in jail, his wife died leaving the children in the care of relatives and friends. On being released from jail, Seneca fled back to the United States, abandoning his children. Merrick would recall in later years how the family had all fled to the British fortified camp at Burlington Heights in the face of the American invasion in the summer of 1813, with himself at the age of nine, driving a wagon and pair of horses the whole distance.

The war both strengthened existing attitudes toward the United States and Americans and created new ones among the inhabitants of Upper Canada. Bishop John Strachan of Toronto created a mythology, which endures to this day, about the sturdy Loyalists of the militia who had saved Canada from the Americans, while down playing the efforts of the small British Army garrison of the day. This early nationalism helped to concentrate political power in the hands of the small group of well off veterans and their families. Known as the “Family Compact” they would dominate the history of Ontario for the next thirty years, eventually leading to the struggle for responsible government and the creation of Canada as we know it today.

Americans remember the War of 1812 every time that they play their national anthem. In Canada, we are more reserved. The War of 1812 was a major factor in the development of Ontario and later Canada. We often overlook the part it played or ignore it entirely as a historical sideshow of little significance. It took Laura Secord, whose father kept the Government Inn on the Credit River, all day in June of 1813 to walk twelve miles across country in the heat of a Niagara summer to warn the British at Beaverdams of an impending American attack. Now that travel is much easier and far more comfortable, take the time to visit one of the many events which will be remembering the War of 1812 at National Historic sites, battlefields and communities across Southern Ontario over the next two years and learn about the people and events that helped to create our province and country.

Stewart Sherriff

Visit the OHS website at www.oakvillehistory.org for the enlarged and colour version of this newsletter and, explore the many informative areas of the website for event and tour dates.

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were”

The photo shows a view from West River Street looking east onto the old Triller Street Bridge, c1912. The white building in the background is the Methodist church.

Lance Naismith

Volunteer Service Awards

On April 2nd 2012, five members of the Oakville Historical Society were honoured to receive “Volunteer Service Awards” from the Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

May Isaac, June Hitchcox and Lance Naismith received their 10 year pins and Phillip Brimacombe his 20 year pin. Margaret Buxton did the Society proud with her 40 year pin.



L/R Lance Naismith, Margaret Buxton, May Isaac, Phil Brimacombe, June Hitchcox

Future Speakers

As you may know, the OHS does outreach by attending various groups and giving talks on Oakville history. These can be professional groups, charities, youth organizations or senior residences. We are looking for people who have an interest in sharing their knowledge (hobby, research, etc) with others and are willing to set up a presentation that could include photographs, slides etc. We can help them work up a powerpoint presentation and give access to our full database of photographs and textual information. Contact us at the Society and put forward an idea that you would like to develop.

Lance Naismith

Thomas House

The Thomas House will open on Friday May 18th for the 2012 season and our interpreters are in place for May. We are still waiting to hear from those volunteers who so willingly gave of their time last year – please let us know the days you would like to work during June (weekends only) then July, August - Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays – weekends and holiday Mondays, closing at the Labour Day weekend on September 3rd 2012.

We would also like to welcome those new members who have expressed an interest in acting as interpreters at the Thomas House – give us a call with your preferred dates, and we can pair you up with another volunteer as this is a great way to become familiar with the history of the House and its family – and all the other great stories you will hear from visitors! We have a package outlining all you need to know available at the Offices.

Please phone or e-mail:

Mary Davidson: 905-842-6935
Susan Wells: 905-844-4474

charles.davidson2@sympatico.ca OR
swells@cogeco.ca

Mary Davidson

The Plaque Committee – Oakville Historical Society

Good progress is being made in the construction of new historical plaques for various structures in Oakville. The Plaque Committee has been meeting once a month since the early part of the year at our Oakville Historical Society offices on

King Street. The committee is composed of Phil Brimacombe, George Chisholm, June Hitchcox, Doug Mabee, Jamie Macrae, Ray Peacock, John Sinnott and Jim Young.

Each member has volunteered to handle a different aspect in the process of producing the plaques. We thank our President, George Chisholm, for recently demonstrating to the committee a new process of carving the letters on the plaques using computer technology. Ray Peacock and Jamie Macrae are to be thanked also for their valuable assistance in putting together a flowchart detailing the process by which the idea for a new plaque is initiated and researched to the final steps of production and installation.

We have a number of plaques underway and various members of the committee are involved in carving and painting. We also thank Susan Wells for volunteering to update the albums in our library at the King Street offices. These albums contain photographs and descriptions of the structures that have been plaqued. We are grateful to May Issac, our librarian, for her efforts in taking so many photographs included in these albums. They are a superb resource for those interested to researching the history of our older buildings. We have also discussed the possibility of initiating a new program of installing plaques on more recent structures in town sometime in the future.

Phil Brimacombe

[Oakville Heritage Awards](#)

Two of our long standing members received awards from the Oakville Ontario Heritage Trust at Town Hall.

Presented by Mayor Rob Burton, Margaret Buxton (**L**) received the 2011 Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement for sustained volunteer contributions to community heritage over a period of 25 years or more and, Evelyn Bullied (**R**) received the Lifetime Achievement Award for her support of Oakville heritage for over 20 years. Congratulations to both for all their efforts.



Susan Wells



Presentation – Avro Arrow

A large audience of over 100 on 15 February at St. John's United Church felt they were witnessing a great moment in Canadian history told through the recollections of men and women who engineered and built the **Avro Arrow** in the 1950s ending in 1958 when the programme was abruptly halted by the Diefenbaker government.



Steven Shaw

Steve Shaw, of Steve Shaw Productions, presented a video, “The Decade of the Avro Arrow”, to a very interested crowd. In this audience were 8 former employees of Avro Aircraft Limited (Canada), eager to add to the information. There were many heads leaning in to hear the rumours, the gossip and, the unofficial reports of an aircraft industry, told by some of the 14,000 people who worked there and were told one morning they were out of a job. We had to remind ourselves this all happened over 50 years ago but you would not have known that from the passion of the employees. Thank you Steve Smith and, thank you to the special eight who made the evening electric.

Susan Wells

Grace Schroeder getting the goodies ready. Our thanks Grace – very much appreciated.





Jim Young, Secretary – Making the introductions.



Ex-Avro Arrow Employee





Presentation – War of 1812

Hands up. Who was Charles Plenderleath? No? John Harvey? What about Sir Isaac Brock or Laura Secord? (No, Laura did not make chocolates for Brock). Enthusiastic author **Ken Weber** answered these questions for a large, equally enthusiastic audience at your Society's May 9th talk on the War of 1812.

Mr. Weber (**R**) made 200-year-old events appear fresh, relating details such as: one attack was successful because the attacked enemy was drunk, another because the commander was off for the weekend seeing his lady friend down the lake, taking his fleet with him to impress her.



We look forward to hearing this skillful author again. Funds received by Mr. Weber were donated to the **Escarpment Land Preservation Program** of the Bruce Trail Association.

Susan Wells

Presentation at the Society – War of 1812 (local impact)

On February 22nd, Michelle Guay, a student serving an internship with the University of Toronto Historical Studies Program spoke about the War of 1812 as it applied to Trafalgar Township. Though there was no major event in Trafalgar Township there was a significant contribution from the township militia.

When the war began on June 18, 1812, the militia were largely credited with the defence but a considerable part was played also by the native people. At the time the countryside was dense wilderness and a harsh environment. At first, settlers were reluctant to leave their farms; their priority was to clear the land, plant crops and to protect from weeds and pests; not to mention plunderers. Some who had arrived from the US were reluctant to fight their fellow Americans. They lacked training and were relegated to support roles.

Brock established a “Pitchfork Militia”, comprised of native people, settlers and the regular army. A flank company of 20-30 Trafalgar militiamen became available, recruited largely by John Chisholm, son of George. Their leaders were leading citizens; large landowners and merchants.

Much has been made of the number of desertions; but these were desertions to their homes and not to the enemy, an act of high treason. There was some understandable disaffection; shortage of money, harsh weather, sickness, lack of clothes, shoes and equipment, not to mention fear for their homesteads and families. However, they did prevail but it meant the destruction of lives (many died of flesh wounds) and property (by not only the Americans, but also by the British and some Indians). It also presented opportunities for many to gain land grants, promotions and pensions. The greatest gain was their pride in the shaping of Ontario as they continued to carve farms out of the wilderness.

Andrea Stewart

*Do you do **Facebook** or **Twitter**? Help out the OHS by putting event information out via Social Media. It would be appreciated.*

Mayor's Picnic & Band Concert

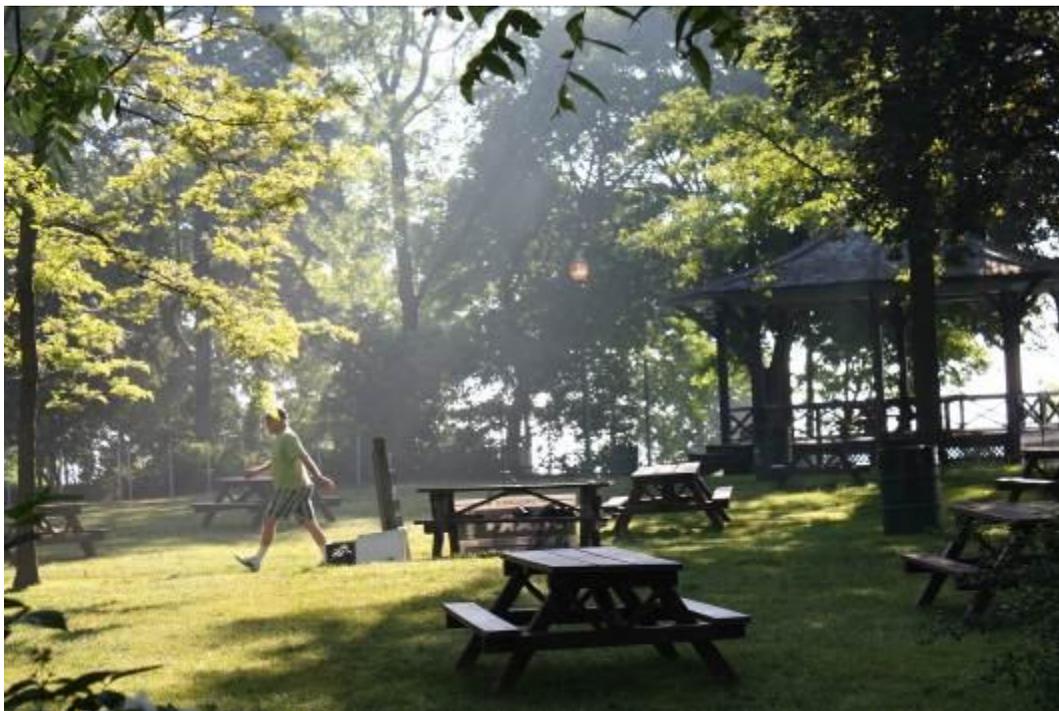
If you missed the Mayor's Picnic & Band Concert this year at Lakeside Park, you missed out on having some good memories. The weather was perfect and the place resounded with jazz, classical and pop music and, the laughter of children having fun – a mixture of fun one doesn't get to experience too often. Add to that the Thomas House, our homegrown Audioman – Roger Lapworth who provided gratis the sound system. And, two, count em, two clowns – Roundabout and Doodlebug, who entertained the children and, some adults still enjoying life fully, with balloons and facepainting (PartyCalifornia). Our Oakville Fire Department gave us an educational demonstration on how to tear apart a car and save a life. Some of us had the enjoyment of actually helping to crash the cars. Once the heavy equipment got working on the cars, everyone enjoyed watching them come apart like tissue paper. ☺ Oakville Hydro showed up with a real crowd pleaser – something young and old could all enjoy. A ride in a real bucket hoist simulating “High Wire” repairs. From the smiles on the children's faces (and the parents), you could see this was a real hit. Kudos to St. John's Ambulance staff who were on standby all afternoon.

The picnic was opened with short and sweet lighthearted speeches by His Worship, Mayor Rob Burton and former Mayor, Harry Buxton. This was quickly followed by the St. Paul's Dixieland Jazz Band, who got everyone's blood flowing with some snappy and lively tunes. Between the battle of the bands, the Oakville Ale & Sword Scottish Dancers gave an entertaining demonstration of Scottish dancing and showed that all could enjoy this group activity. The rest of the afternoon was spent listening to a variety of tunes given by the Oakville Wind Orchestra – Canada's largest running community band. Led by Conductor Chris Arthurs, we were entertained with not only an eclectic blend of classical and pop music but some background mixed with the occasional lighthearted comments that kept us interested in what was next. A repeat of last years “competition with the speed boats” was held but, I think the Orchestra won this year.

Mr. Ed Finch, along with his wife Helen, attended with their 1931 Model “A” Ford, which formed the perfect backdrop for our lady of the afternoon, Marianne Hawthorne. Surprising how many people wanted pictures with the car and her alongside. I think we could have sold tickets and squashed the country's debt.

This was a joint effort between the Oakville Historical Society volunteers and the Town of Oakville. Marianne Hawthorne (organizer) would like to make special mention and thanks to: Donna & John Starkey, Mary Davidson, Maggie, Brock and Sara Leaver,

Carroll Castle, May Isaac, Lance Naismith, Jamie McCrea, former Mayor Harry Barrett, current Mayor Rob Burton and “Parks and Open Space” staff from the Town of Oakville. Our appreciation to Kopriva Taylor Funeral Home for their chair loan. There is so much to tell about the picnic so, let the following pictures close off the story.



Audioman starts the process – setting up the “sound”.



Early Bird gets the setup. Carroll Castle and Marianne Hawthorne bringing the “Stuff”



Former Mayor Harry Barrett
giving a helping hand.



Beating the crowds and
getting there early and,
relaxing by the lake. No
life like it.



“Audioman’s” groupies awaiting the tunes.





Donna Starkey bringing the bunting



Jamie McCrae & Don Calendar (Atlanta, Georgia) putting up the bunting.





A well deserved break by the setup crew.





**DON'T FORGET TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR
NEXT YEARS CONCERT – 2ND SUNDAY OF JUNE**



St. Paul's Dixieland Jazz Band

L/R D. Crown, M. Prout, B. Devey, J. Mink, D. Flewelling, H. VanMelle, R. LeFevre



Mr. E. Finch (owner) with 1931 Model A Ford

Young entrepreneurs – proceeds donated to “Sick Kids” Hospital



Fire Department Crew – “The Autoextracation Team”
L/R K. Merriman, P. Turpin, M. Bortolotto, Capt. K. Cutmore, C. Roberts, Capt. M. Hall





Oakville Hydro – “High Wire”
bucket demonstration.







Oakville Ale and Sword
Scottish Dancers





Oakville Wind Orchestra







THAT'S ALL FOLKS!!!!
Too bad these folks missed it.
Maybe next year?

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. Can you identify the location?
2. Can you identify the event being celebrated?
3. Do you recognize the stone building right centre of picture?

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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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