

Oakville Historical
Society
since 1953

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The White Oak

News from the Oakville Historical Society



Welcome
Bronte
Historical
Society



The White House on Allan Street

By Susan Bowen

Volume 53 Number 1

March 2019

Speakers

17 April, Gurth M. Pretty
The Forgotten Squadron: The Royal Navy on Lake Ontario during the war of 1812.

15 May, Professor Mark Rector
Oh Canada! Our Home and Inventive Land! From the compound steam engine and gasoline of the industrial revolution, to the lightbulb and telephone of the Victorian era, to the Canadarm and Blackberry of today, we invented them all!

21 November, Ray Peacock
Ray Peacock will be talking about the Journeys of the polar explorers: Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen and Franklin. The endurance of all these men provides the background for Ray's presentation on the first successful crossing of the Arctic through the North West Passage.

Speakers Nights are held at St. John's Church, Corner of Dunn and Randall Streets. Enter from Randall. 7:30 pm. All welcome, donations accepted and refreshments served.

AGM

Join your fellow OHS members Wednesday, 20 March at St. John's Church, 6:00 pm for a potluck supper, Annual General Meeting at 7:30. Voice your opinion on all society matters! Make a difference!

Battle of the Plains of Abraham

It was a pleasure to have had Alan Ellis, an active member of the Oakville Historical Society, present a most informative history of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, an event which changed the course of Canadian History in 1759. The presentation, held at St. John's United Church here in Oakville on 20 February, outlined the events leading up to the decisive conflict, many fascinating facts about the actual battle, and the effects of the battle relating to the events of the Seven Years War. We thank Alan, an avid military history buff, for his efforts.



This year's OHS Yard Sale is on Saturday, 11 May from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. It would help if you could hold on to your treasures and deliver them to our office on or after Thursday 9 May. If you need help, please call Jamie Macrae who will pick them up. Phone Jamie at 905 399-6066 or the OHS office at 905 844-2695.

We thank Atex Printing for past services. Please welcome Print Three.



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A note from the Society President

We are now publishing a joint newsletter with the Bronte Historical Society, which includes input from both societies. You will see a BHS logo on pages with their contributions. Welcome to our new readers.

I'd like thank the board, particularly Vice President Susan Wells, for covering for me while I was off sick and recovering.



Welcome BHS.
Look for this
image alongside
their stories.

On behalf of the board I'd also like to thank Jim Young for his years of service to the society as Secretary of the Board. Jim has decided to step down. Marie Descent has taken over the role.

Most will have heard that the society has also lost founding member and long time board member Harry Barrett. It was thanks to Harry that I joined the society and board in 1992. Harry was my go-to person. Whenever I've had Oakville history questions or needed guidance or advice I've picked up the phone. Harry worked, with others, just about full time to

renovate our office building in the 1990s. We will all miss him.

At the suggestion of Marianne Hawthorne and the Events Committee, the OHS Board revisited the idea of creating a bursary for an Oakville youth. We're very pleased to announce that at our February board meeting we passed a motion creating the Oakville Historical Society Memorial Bursary. Each year the bursary will be awarded to a member of 1188 Lorne Scots Oakville Cadet Corps who is going on to further education in trades, college or university. The society has sponsored this cadet corps, not coincidentally, since 1992. Each year a different volunteer will be honoured starting with Harry Barrett. Harry was the senior cadet while he was a student at Oakville Trafalgar High School until joining the Royal Canadian Artillery. While Mayor he reviewed the Cadet Corps at their Annual Inspection.

George Chisholm, President



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The White House on Allan Street

Author Susan Bowen with co-writer Patricia Stephenson

My father and mother (a British war bride), and their young son David, moved from England to Northern Ontario in 1946 where my father worked for Ontario Hydro and where I was born. In the summer of 1949 we moved to Oakville. It seemed like a natural place for my father to settle after growing up in Clarkson, then attending Oakville Trafalgar High School.

My first and fondest memories are of our home on Allan Street, where my two brothers and I began our formative years. Our house was a square, white-stucco two-story, located at the corner of Palmer Avenue and Allan Street. My bedroom upstairs overlooked these streets, and from there I could watch the comings and goings of neighbours and friends.

We had a tall floor-model radio that stood beside the large fireplace in our living room. There was a children's program that I liked to listen to during the lunch hour. One year on my birthday, I was asked to sit still in front of that radio. Unbeknown to me, my mother had sent in my name and birth date to the radio station. What a surprise to hear the radio announcer call out my name and wish me a Happy Birthday!

I recall the basement in our home as a curious place of smells and sounds. Ricketty old wooden stairs led down to the basement, where the big coal-burning furnace stood, its heating ducts reaching the ceiling. The coal was stored in a separate room. A chute was put through a small window into the coal room and the coal would come tumbling in, billowing black dust. For us children, this was entertainment.

Our basement also served as a wine cellar when my parents made wine with grapes collected from my grandfather's farm in Clarkson. I remember a big wooden barrel. From a small hole at one end of the barrel, a red cloth used as a stopper

resembled a tongue hanging out. And I remember the wonderful aroma that emanated from that barrel.

A favourite place for my friend Michael and me to play was in the storage cupboard located in my bedroom, directly above my bed. We'd climb onto the bed headboard, and haul ourselves up and into the cupboard through its small entry door. The cupboard was cozy, about four by six feet, and very dark. We would pretend that the cupboard was an airplane and that we were flying. Then, just before it was about to crash, we would toss open the door and leap onto the bed below. This game kept us happy and entertained for what felt like hours.

On one occasion, our game of make-believe didn't go over too well with my grandmother who was visiting us from England. Once when she was looking after us, my brother David and I decided that we would go "boating" down the stairs. We got cushions from the living room sofa, used them as our raft, and flung ourselves down the stairs. Our shrieks of joy alerted my grandmother who immediately put an end to that activity.

The location of our home was perfect for children with an adventurous spirit. From where we lived, we could walk everywhere. David and I walked to St. Jude's to attend Sunday school. There didn't seem to be a lot of adult supervision in those days. On Saturday mornings, we children would walk into town to the Century Theatre. At times, a magician would entertain us before the film was shown. I especially enjoyed watching The Three Stooges. The theatre also held a "best costume" competition at Hallowe'en.

I shopped with my mother at Morley Keegan's to buy shoes, and at The Gwendolyn Shop to buy our "smalls." And we often walked to the beautiful stone library on Lakeshore Road, where we were encouraged to bring books home.

I especially liked the autumn when my father, sporting his trilby hat, raked the leaves into huge piles and Michael and I would fling ourselves onto them. Eventually my father would rake the leaves to the curb and light them. I still remember the wonderful aroma of those leaves.

A big part of our social life took place at Victoria Hall on Reynolds Street. I remember the inside as a big barn-like structure with a high ceiling. There was a stage, and little rooms where I took craft classes and my mother took a pottery class. My parents went to dances there. They were also involved with a community group that held amateur plays every year for children. When the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was held there, David played the part of a huntsman and I was a lady-in-waiting.

I recall my Brownie ceremony at the little Boy Scout hut on Randall Street. Inside the one-room building was an arbour. I stood at one end of it, the leader stood at the other. I waited for her to ask me the question I had been waiting for.

"Brownie, by what right do you come?" she asked.

"By the right of my golden hand," I replied.

"Welcome Brownie," she said.

Then I passed under the arbour and became a Girl Guide.

My education began at Miss Lightbourn's School on Randall Street. Then I attended Brantwood School, a short walk down the street from where I lived. For me, it was an exciting place, a friendly place where I could meet other children and play. We'd often play on the swing set behind the school.

In fourth grade I attended Central School, a red-brick building that was located where the Central Library now stands. I was given directions on how to get to school. I was *not* to walk along the main street downtown. It was quite a hike for a young child, and yet we had to come home for lunch. On one occasion I must have been dawdling, because when I returned to school after lunch, I discovered the doors were locked. I had no choice but to return home and tell my mother that I couldn't get into the school. She was not very pleased with me to say the least.

The other thing I remember about Central School was that it had a Curling Club. We used make-shift curling rocks constructed from cut-off coffee tins filled with concrete, with a handle stuck in the top. A little curling rink was in front of the school and I was part of the curling team.

I loved those schools.

There were a lot of places for children to play in those days and we were given a lot of freedom. We would wander around the neighbourhood, unsupervised, even at such a young age. To my young mind, Oakville was just the best and friendliest place to live. In 1956 we moved to the west end of Oakville. It was a nice home but it didn't hold the magic of that house on the corner of Allan and Palmer.

Susan Bowen recently joined the OHS and is currently working with Memberships.

Oakville Entertainment

1885 The Kenny and Howes roller skating rink opens on the northwest corner of Reynolds and Church Sts. Admission is 5 and 10 cents; ladies are free.



An Introduction to Bronte and its Historical Society

Tom Appleton, President, Bronte Historical Society

The settlement of the area along the banks of Twelve Mile Creek followed the signing of an agreement for the transfer of lands of the Mississauga Indian band to the Crown on February 20th, 1820. This encouraged an influx of United Empire Loyalists led by Charles Sovereign who had arrived in the area in 1814.

A small commercial fishing industry developed over the years as the harbour was dredged to create a port capable of supporting the burgeoning commercial activities of the area. Lumber mills and grain mills were built along the creek to process the local products. Exported by boat from Bronte, substantial cargoes of lumber and locally grown wheat were shipped to markets in Toronto and New York. Timbers cut in the Bronte area by the Welland Canal Company were used in the construction of the canal.

The Town of Bronte at the mouth of Twelve Mile creek was incorporated in 1834 (although to this day it remains known to all as a village). The storied stone trade developed in Bronte when the shallow waters around the mouth of the Creek were mined by 'hooking' slabs of slate from the lake bottom with a specially shaped fork, then lifted into small boats and shipped out to Toronto and elsewhere. It is said that most of the early commercial buildings in Toronto rest on Bronte stone, although the heritage building located at 49

Bronte Road, still in use as a restaurant, is one of the last constructed locally from Bronte stone.

Combined with the healthy fishing industry and the demand created for the so-called 'stoneboats', boat building itself became a thriving development.



Sovereign House on the move to its current location c1988

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At least three sailing vessels of 170 feet in length were designed and built in Bronte Harbour in addition to a myriad of other boats. Ken Pollock, author of *Bronte on Twelve Mile Creek* (available for sale at Sovereign House) notes that a laker named *Chubb*, built in Bronte was used to carry coal from Oswego, New York. Its Master was William Sargant who sold the coal to the villagers from his coal shed on Bronte Road.

Shipping could no longer compete with the advent of the railway from Toronto to Hamilton and development of the Queen Elizabeth Way and the Ontario highway system. With the decline of the fishery and the continual silting of the harbour, the industries of Bronte became overshadowed by developments within the Town of Oakville, which had the undeniable advantage of proximity to the metropolis of Toronto. When multinational companies like Ford, oil refineries and other companies chose to locate in Trafalgar Township in the 1950s, the logic of amalgamation became clear to the municipalities surrounding Oakville and by mutual agreement they merged on January 1, 1962. Today as part of the Town of Oakville, Bronte's heritage is celebrated by the preservation of Sovereign House.

Sovereign House was constructed by Charles Sovereign between 1825 and 1846. From 1910-1915 it was occupied by one of Canada's famous authors, Mazo de la Roche. A copy of the Sovereign journals, which contain detailed insight into the construction of the house, is available on location. The House is operated as a heritage display centre by the Bronte Historical Society with rotating exhibits of local history showcasing artifacts related to the builder, the lifestyles of the 1800s and the harbour. The surrounding gardens are cultivated in the 1910 style with pleasant walkways beside the lake, looked after by the volunteers of the Bronte Horticultural Society.

Art on The Bluffs, a showcase of local artists and other regular events are scheduled throughout the summer season. The exhibit rooms are open to the public from 19 May to 28 October, every Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday from 1:00 – 4:00 pm.

Mary Murray's Tea On The Bluffs

Margaret White and Patti Leard

What a wonderful way to spend an afternoon on Father's Day weekend! The Bronte Historical Society is pleased to present our first public event for 2019: Tea on the Bluffs, a bi-annual spring event (held since 1988). This year it will be held on Father's Day weekend, June 16, 2019 starting at 11 am, at the historic Sovereign House, 7 West River Street, Bronte.

"Mary Murray's Tea on the Bluffs" is a great opportunity to come to Sovereign House and enjoy our beautiful location. The canopy of trees and the gardens surrounding the Bronte Bluffs are a beautiful place to spend an afternoon. A traditional Devonshire Tea, featuring scones, strawberry jam and whipped cream, alongside other treats, coffee, tea and lemonade, will be served by the society's wonderful volunteers.

Come visit and learn about Bronte's fascinating history. The event is held in memory of Mary Murray. Mary was a dedicated member of our Executive team, until her untimely death some years ago. Many of our members remember her warmth and gracious spirit, and would have had regular contact with her as the Bronte Historical Society's Social Convenor.

The funds raised at this event are used for the maintenance of the house and hosting of events at Sovereign House. For information about this event or to purchase tickets please contact Sovereign House at 905 825-5552 or at brontehistoricalsociety.ca We look forward to seeing you at Tea on the Bluffs.



A Life Lived In Bronte

Tom O'Connor

Bronte village has been my home for over 70 years and still counting.

In 1948 my family moved from Hamilton to Bronte when I was eleven years old. This beautiful spot was discovered by my parents when we spent our summer holidays here. Now I have fond memories of an idyllic childhood by the beach when there were three rows of cottages close to the lake, below the Bronte Bluffs, including one my father built.

We had a great time swimming and fishing in the lake waters which were still clean at that time. Most families had rowing boats and we could take them out onto the creek and along the lakefront. At a pavilion right on the beach we treated ourselves to pop, ice cream and hotdogs. One year my oldest sister was designated to look after me, but her cooking skills were limited to French toast—delicious for the first couple of days, but I was very happy when my parents came by on the weekends and took over.

We would row our boats to an old barge with a crane, tied up at the bridge on Lakeshore Road, and climbed aboard to play pirate games with great gusto. The area by the abutments for the old radial railway at Rebecca street was designated as a swimming hole for the boys. All of us gathered there every year on the 24th of May to go skinny dipping. No girls allowed, of course!

We kids spent time hiking and exploring along the Twelve Mile creek and made small campfires to bake potatoes and cook wieners. Occasionally we would walk along the creekbank as far as the cave reputed to have been used by William Lyon Mackenzie during the 1837 Rebellion. At that time commercial fishing boats were still active on the lake from Bronte Harbour and if we were up early enough and ready by 6:30 am, the fishermen would allow us aboard the boats and take us fishing for the day.

The catches were driven to the train station on Bronte Road and sent on to the Toronto markets for sale.

Almost everything one needed could be found in Bronte. There were grocery stores, drug and hardware stores, a barbershop and poolhall, gas stations, garages, a post office, diners and numerous bootleggers. Even though Bronte was still called 'fishtown' by some people in Oakville, at least one of the Grey Coach bus drivers knew the importance of Allen's drugstore; he would always announce this stop as "City Hall."

One year a severe storm washed out both wooden piers at the mouth of the creek badly damaging many of the cottages. Some home owners, like my family, decided to move to higher ground on the bluffs. When my father retired from his job in Hamilton, he purchased a lot from Mark Dawson and built a house across the street from the bluffs. An avid sailor all his life, my dad bought a 30 foot sloop, only the second sailboat in the harbour. The owner of the ship yard, Harry Grebb owned the other one, a 54 foot schooner. I could not believe it possible, but my summers got even better after this.

During the winters we went skating on Bronte Creek, played hockey on the marsh and raced down the West River Street hill on a bobsled, right onto the creek ice. As I got older, I had several interesting part time jobs after school, such as working on a mink farm on West Street owned by Cliff Gilliam. It proved very tricky to take care of the cages with the minks in them, leaving plenty of scars on my hands from their sharp little teeth.

A less dangerous job was putting up TV antennas for Roy Johnson from the Bronte Appliance Centre – luckily, I managed not to fall off any roofs.

One could gladly do without the ever-increasing traffic on Bronte streets, but it still is a beautiful area with lots of green space and walking and biking trails.

A truly great place to live!

First Bylaws

Oakville Journal Record and OHS Files.

One of the first bylaws passed by Oakville council shortly after the Town's incorporation in 1857 was aimed at the control of contagious and infectious diseases. It provided that "no person shall keep, erect, maintain or use any building or shed within the Town of Oakville for the purpose of slaughtering animals or dressing or preparing meat for butcher's stalls. No person shall kill any animal within the said Town without burying the blood and offal of such animal at least two feet in the ground and a distance of fifty feet from any dwelling house." The bylaw prohibited people from hanging out the skins or hides of slaughtered animals for drying or curing, with a penalty of a fine up to five pounds or imprisonment up to 20 days for its violation.

A few years later the committee on police and public order assumed the function of a board of health and the health officer began inspections of dwellings. Householders were warned, through notices in the press, to have their cellars cleaned, drains opened, privies whitewashed, hog pens cleaned, and all garbage removed from their yards. The notice stated that the use of lime was recommended and that it could be supplied for 25 cents a bushel. The lime would be provided at no cost to anyone unable to afford the price. In those days, householders used to pile their ashes in their back yards during the winter and have them taken away in the spring. Sometimes they would dump them in the street. This practice provoked the following editorial comment in a newspaper: "No doubt it is very convenient to dump coal ashes on the street, and thus get rid of it without further trouble or annoyance. Quite a number of people are in the habit of doing so with unfailing regularity. They are not aware that a heap of coal ashes is a dangerous impediment, and spoils the sleighing on that part of the road disfigured by its presence. Many citizens are crying out against this evil and the council would do well to put a stop to it."

Pumper Truck



Fire Station #3, formerly at 125 Randall Street, is now situated in a more accessible and visible location at 168 Kerr Street. Residents are invited to visit the station's multimedia education centre to view curated museum pieces that reflect the history of the Oakville Fire Department including a vintage pumper truck (above).

Oakville Travel

1849 Plank sidewalks are laid on Colborne St. (Lakeshore Rd.)

1855 The first Great Western train passes through Oakville.

1915 Lakeshore Rd. connecting Oakville to Toronto is paved.

1953 Ford Motor Company establishes a plant in Oakville.

Membership

Andrea Stewart and Marie Descent

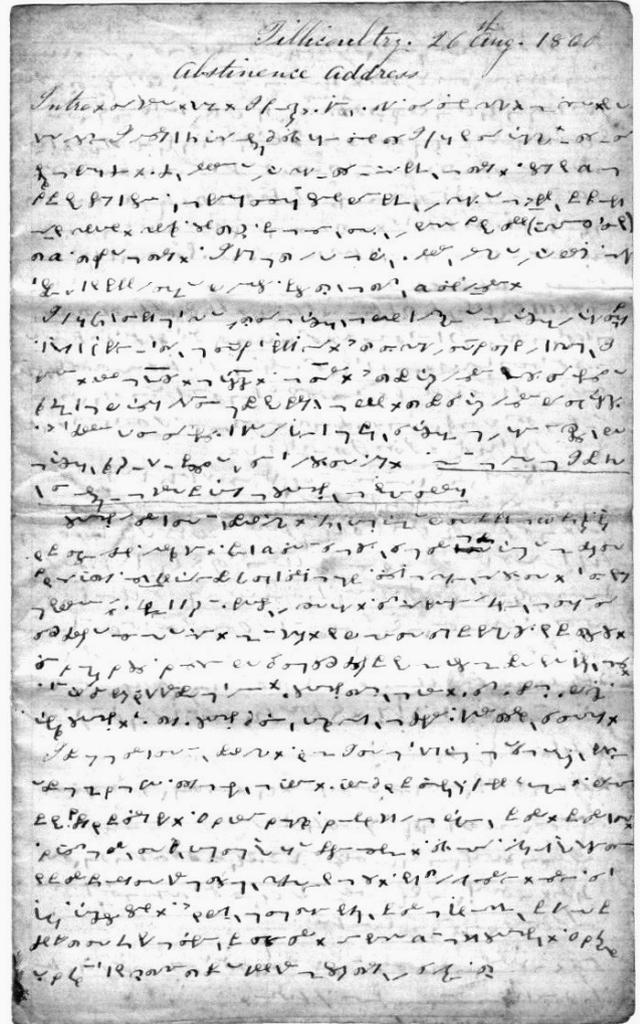
We would like to welcome the following new members who have joined since our December 2018 newsletter:

Susan Young, Patricia Stephenson,
Kim MacKay, Jennifer Graham,
Bruce and Barb Norman

Our total membership count is 245, ninety nine of whom have yet to renew. If you think you may have forgotten, please phone the office 905 844-2695 and we can arrange for your renewal.

We are very pleased to welcome Susan Bowen, a new volunteer on our Memberships team.

Recent Acquisition



Tillicoultry [Scotland] 26th Aug. 1860
Abstinence Address

The OHS recently acquired this letter written in script. Unfortunately, we cannot decipher it. Can our readers offer any clues? If you need a better copy, give us a call and we will provide one.



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Family Day

Mary Davidson

The sun shone, the ice beaten into submission, (after heroic efforts by Carol, Mary, Andrea and Susan), the fire was lit, the cider warmed, all the “family characters” were cut out, and the fabric dolls were ready for the children to make their own. Family Day at the office turned out to be one of the best days I have experienced, after much worry about whether the weather would even allow us to open. Around 60 to 70 visitors toured through the offices, from surrounding areas of Richmond Hill, Brampton, Mississauga and beyond, many for the first time.

Andrea and I played the part of Juliet and Hazel, the two original occupants of the offices when it was their home. We hope we gave a convincing history of their lives, who we have to admit were quite remarkable, and made us want to know more about these two great-granddaughters of our town’s founder.

Bravo to the three students Madeleine, Brooke and Ruby, who cheerfully worked with the children and their crafts, under the tutelage of Carol Gall, our new Children’s Events Co-ordinator. You may know Carol from her days at the Parks and Recreation Department not to mention her many years at the Thomas House. She comes well qualified and will inject more “child friendly” activities into our events throughout the year.



Madeleine Tomala, Brooke Nelson and Ruby Nelson entertained our visitors.



A Family Day visitor



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The *way* things were...



Do you know?

Where this is?

The history of the name?

The name of the road it joined to the west?

Look for the answer in our next issue!



From December 2018 The *way* things were...

Sharkey's Dockside Café was at the corner of Lakeshore Rd. W. and Forsythe St. Demolished.



The Alexander Apartments were at the corner of Speers Rd. and Kerr St. Demolished.

Archive Hours:

Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 to 4:30 pm
Third Sunday of the month 12:30 to 4:00 pm

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