

Oakville Historical  
Society  
since 1953

# Historical Society News

[www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)



## The Oakville Basket Factory, Oakville Wood Specialties and a sawmill in the Haliburton Highlands

Volume 59 Number 3

Fall 2025

# The Oakville Basket Factory and a sawmill in Haliburton

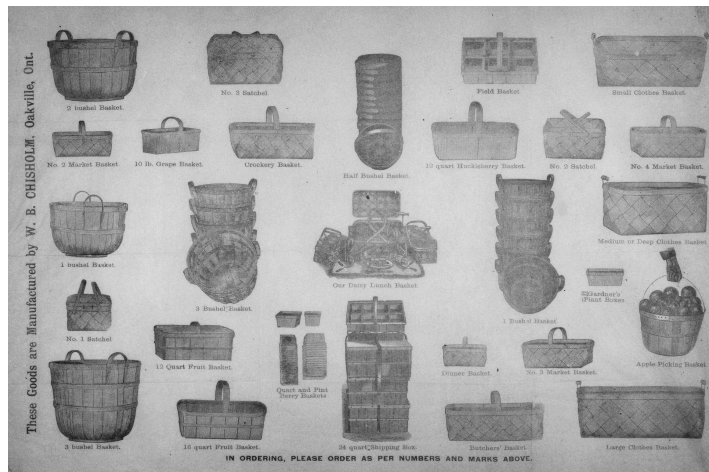
Bruce Norman

This is the tale of two Oakville businesses, successful in their time; the Oakville Basket Company and Oakville Wood Specialties Limited with its sawmill in the Haliburton Highlands of Ontario. The three companies collectively operated for 117 years between 1871 and 1988. Logs and water were the common elements in all three businesses.

Let us begin with a look at the Oakville Basket Factory which became Oakville Wood Specialties Limited and finally, their connection to a small sawmill 280 kilometers away in the Haliburton Highlands.

In the mid 1800's, Oakville was a farming community and it became well known for its strawberries. Two strawberry farmers, John Cross and John Chisholm began making baskets on their farms to sell their produce. The necessity of this cottage industry arose from the fact that there were no appropriate vessels to pack and ship delicate fruits such as strawberries available in Canada at the time. Demand grew and in 1874, John Chisholm's sons, William Biggar Chisholm and Charles Pettit Chisholm purchased the old Victoria Brewery and converted it to a basket factory.

The basket factory was located on the west side of Trafalgar Road at Macdonald Road. They employed technology that Charles Pettit Chisholm had invented when his father was making baskets on the farm. This machinery was capable of shaving wood very thinly specifically for fruit basket production.



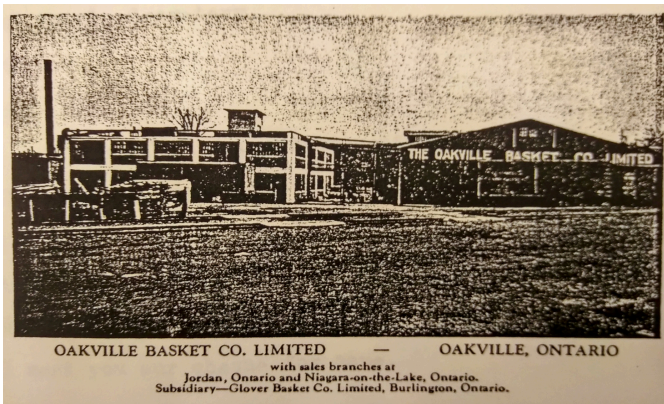
Promotional material for the  
Oakville Basket and Veneer Company

## Oakville Basket Factory

(continued)

The Sixteen Mile Creek near the factory allowed local logs to be transported to the plant. The logs were stacked along the bank and road causing problems for those passing by on sleighs and horses but because the town's prosperity depended heavily on the factory, nothing was done to stop the practice.

The factory became a major employer in Oakville. Fire destroyed it several times; given the hazard of extremely high temperatures and steam which was required to 'cook' the raw logs in the drying kilns. They also burned sawdust and unusable scraps of wood, increasing the fire risk. This 'cooking' of the logs allowed them to be transformed into veneer to make the baskets. The factory, after each devastating fire, was rebuilt on the original Trafalgar Road site. In 1893, it was rebuilt with metal siding to decrease the risk of the building burning.



Oakville Basket Company post 1893 with metal siding

As the demand for baskets grew and the supply of local logs diminished, the basket company created a forestry operation for cutting, transportation and finishing of logs and lumber. A new company, the Oakville Basket and Veneer Company, was registered in 1914 as a private company and

significant capital was raised. In 1920 it was relocated to the present day northwest corner of Trafalgar Road and Cornwall Road. The company was sold in 1949 and the new owners incorporated it as Oakville Wood Specialties Ltd and began using new technological breakthroughs in wood slicing technology.

In the 1800s, there had been an abundant supply of logs in and around Oakville to support the Oakville Basket Factory. By the late 1920s the local

---

## Oakville Basket factory

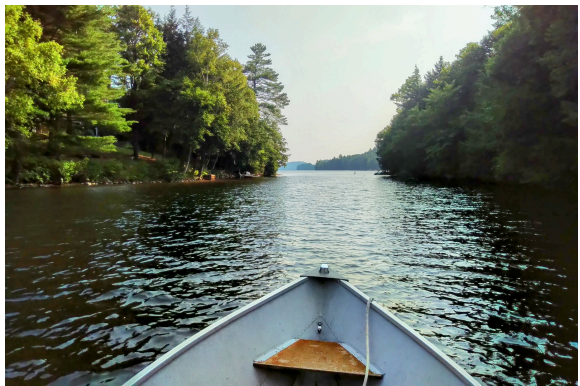
(continued)

supply of hardwood logs such as maple, birch, basswood, beach and elm used to make the basket veneer diminished and the company needed to find an alternative source. This is where the Oakville Wood Specialties sawmill on Loon Bay of Kawagama Lake in Haliburton comes into this story.

Jobbers had been used to bring logs to the factory during the depression of the late 1920s. The company then decided to bring the logs directly by truck from all over Ontario, including Kawagama Lake in Haliburton.

The Oakville Wood Specialties Ltd. sawmill was located at the west end of Loon Bay of Kawagama Lake. It operated into the 1950s using timber from private holdings in Dysart Township in Haliburton, Ontario. The logs were a mix of hardwood and some softwood. The softwood pine logs were hauled to Kawagama Lake in the winter, dumped on the ice, and in the spring, they were floated down the lake to the mill. Unlike the lighter pine logs, hardwood logs could sink in the lake before they reached the mill so they were transported on the company's large steel barge, often pulling a boom of pine logs behind it. Sometimes hardwood logs were tied to pine logs to keep them afloat in the booms. All of the logs had to pass through a narrow channel on the lake to the far end of Loon Bay where the sawmill was located. The logs were lifted into the mill by a jack-ladder. It was an inclined, ridged trough that pulled the logs

up from the lake using a continuous chain. The softwood was cut into lumber by a large diesel-powered saw. The hardwood logs that had been bush-cut in 16-foot lengths were loaded directly onto the Oakville Wood Specialties truck and driven 280 km south to the basket factory by a Bracebridge logging contractor.



Narrows at Kawagama Lake  
Courtesy of Bruce Norman

---

## Oakville Basket factory

(continued)

The massive 15-foot flywheel is all that is left of the Oakville Basket Factory today. The steam engine operating it was bought in 1932. The flywheel itself was built around 1896 by the Galt firm of Goldie & McCulloch and reconditioned for the basket factory. This mighty wheel weighs about 40,000 pounds, or 18 200 kgs.

The 75 horsepower action it produced ran the plant's entire operation. Steam from the boiler heated the plant while making steam for the drying kilns and tanks used for "cooking" the raw logs. The aroma from burning maple wood was the hallmark of Oakville. This faithful workhorse



Courtesy Bruce Norman



promotional material for  
Oakville Wood Specialties

came to rest in October 1967 when the plant power was converted from steam to electricity, a much safer energy source. The factory closed in 1988 and on April 29, 2002, Domenic DiRisio of D.D.R. Landscape Contractors Ltd. moved the 20-ton wheel across the street. It now rests on three concrete pedestals, reinforced with steel in the parkette part of the Heritage Trails system. It is a wonderful memorial to the Oakville Basket Company and a fine visual focal point for the parkette which itself is made in a wheel design.

*Bruce would like to acknowledge Roy MacKay of Dorset, Ontario for sharing his enthusiasm and vast knowledge of sawmills in the Haliburton Region.*

## Ghost Walks

We had another very successful ghost walk season at the OHS. This year, we led 42 groups along the haunted streets of Oakville, from October 14th to the 30th. Our walks were fully booked with 627 tickets sold. Most of the participants were adults and families with children, but we did have large groups of Girl Guides, Beavers, Cubs and Pathfinders. After the walk, as per our tradition, everyone was welcomed back to the offices where they were treated to a spooky Victorian decor and offered cookies and hot cider.



In addition to our regular ghost walks, we led additional groups on 5 separate nights as part of the Boos and Brews tours booked through the BIA. As well, we provided ghost-themed bus tours and power point presentations to a number of retirement homes for residents unable to join in a physical walk. Ghost walks remain the OHS's largest fundraising activity and

would not be possible without the hard work of a large number of volunteers who devote an enormous amount of time and effort to plan and carry out the walks. We would especially like to thank our ghost walk executive committee members; Wendy Belcher, Carol Gall, Sheena Curran, Charlena Tucso, Marci MacDonald, Mary Ellen McClure and Marie Descent for making this such a great success.





**BLACK FOREST  
PASTRY SHOP**

184 Lakeshore Rd. E.  
Oakville, ON L6J 1H6

**905 337-1671**

[www.blackforestpastryshop.ca](http://www.blackforestpastryshop.ca)  
[john@blackforestpastryshop.ca](mailto:john@blackforestpastryshop.ca)



TRADITION

Handmade Porcelain Dolls & Vintage Watches

- >Dollmaking Courses [www.Traditiondolls.com](http://www.Traditiondolls.com)
- >Dollmaking Books & Patterns
- >Appraisals
- >Watch and Clock Repairs
- >Doll Hospital

114 Bronte Rd, Oakville ON L6L3C1 Phone: 905-465-1350

# Kudos

On Sunday September 14, His Worship, Mayor Burton, presented our President, George Chisholm with the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers on behalf of the Governor General of Canada. A ceremony was held at St. John's United Church followed by a luncheon for invited guests. Peter Lowes from 1360 Team Orbit Robotics and Mark Verlinden from the Oakville Historical Society spoke of George's many hours of service to the respective organizations and Fred Hayward acted as Director of Ceremonies.



Mayor Burton presenting the Sovereign's Medal to George Chisholm

*The Sovereign's Medal recognizes the exceptional volunteer achievements of Canadians from across the country who have made a significant, sustained and unpaid contribution to their community. George's citation read as follows: "For more than three decades, George Chisholm has been an enduring leader and mentor with the Oakville Historical Society and FIRST Robotics. His invaluable contributions have resulted in aspiring engineers attending world championship events and securing post-secondary scholarships, and ensured a local museum can continue to offer educational public programs."*

Congratulations George on receiving this well deserved honour!

**barkley**   
**design print & copy**  
 Putting ideas into print since 1992

- We Design
- We Print
- We Care

905-844-2226  
 design@barkleyprint.com  
 barkleyprint.com  
 480 Morden Rd., Oakville

## *Festive Gathering Open House*

Sunday November 30

2-5 pm

110 King St

Please drop in  
for some nibbles  
and a glass of cheer!



## *Victorian Christmas Tea*

Sunday December 7

Tickets available on  
Eventbrite

For menu and further  
details please check  
the website

### **Office hours:**

**Tuesday, Thursday and third Sunday of the month 1:00 -4:30**

**[www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)**

**[historyoakville@gmail.com](mailto:historyoakville@gmail.com)**

**905 844-2695**

**110 King St**

**Oakville ON**

**L6J 1B1**

#### **STORIA**

Auctioneers & Appraisers

#### **Turner Chapel Antiques**

Appraisers of Gold, Sterling, Fine Arts & Estates

**Jed Gardner, Owner**

TCA est. 1992 (905-338-3252)

37/41 Lakeshore Rd.W.  
Oakville, ON L6K 1C8

[storiaauctions@gmail.com](mailto:storiaauctions@gmail.com)  
[storiaauctions.com](http://storiaauctions.com)



COMMUNITY FUNERAL HOME INC

**TERRY C. COOKE**

MANAGING DIRECTOR