

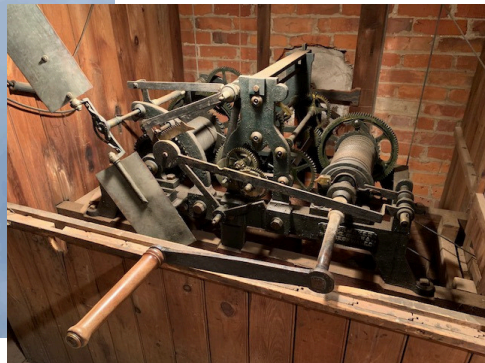
Oakville Historical
Society
since 1953

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St. Jude's Tower Clock



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St. Jude's Tower Clock

Ruth Verlinden

The clock on the tower of St. Jude's church was made by J.W. Benson Ltd., London, England, clockmaker to Queen Victoria. It was installed in the tower in 1906 at the same time as the bells. The face is 5 feet in diameter. It has a pendulum and weights, similar to a grandfather clock. It is not electric; the weights have been wound by hand every week over the decades. Currently this task is taken on by Dan Tregunno. Here is Dan's description of winding the clock:

Tuesday evenings are my time to wind the clock. You have to climb up the spiral staircase to the bell ringing level. Continue up the next set of stairs, then through a small trap door opening which gets you at the bell chamber, then up a ship's ladder and across a catwalk and up another couple of ship's ladders, and through another trap door, and then you are in the clock chamber. It is just under the roof of the tower and right at the level of the clock face when you look up at the clock from outside. There are two drive trains to wind, one for the hammer that sounds the hour, and one which drives the clock. The crank is quite large and it takes 10 minutes to wind both. There is a series of pulleys and steel cables that lift the weights when you crank.



Dan Tregunno winding the clock

Basically, it is a monster grandfather clock and you are standing inside it to wind it. The pendulum is about 5 feet long, with a heavy lead bob. It swings quite slowly and is controlled by a Graham's Dead Beat escapement which is extremely accurate. The clock only strikes the hour, on the biggest bell, the Tenor. I have been winding and looking after it since we moved here to Oakville in 1983. Lots of climbing and winding over the years!

The clock is slightly temperamental in very cold winter weather or exceptionally high winds which can affect the pendulum. It has been running continuously since it was installed, thanks to the many faithful volunteers who have been climbing the spiral staircase since 1906.

Ghost Walks



Our Oakville Ghosts are already beginning to stir, but panic not! Fall is when our ghosts will rise up and roam from October 14 – October 30. In anticipation, we need to organize and need more volunteers. Can YOU be a ghost leader, or help with serving cookies and cider to our walkers? Could YOU help distribute costumes to our student volunteers before the walks begin and help collect them after Halloween? Could YOU organize the decorations before the walks begin and put them away at the end of our season? Many hands (and hopefully younger ones) will make light work.

Anyone interested in volunteering in any capacity please contact Wendy Belcher at wendypan@usa.net.

Oakville's Riviera

Phil Brimacombe

By the 1850's an urban middle class was developing in Canada. Young people in particular began migrating to the growing cities of Canada West (now Ontario), especially Toronto and Hamilton. Many men and women re-located from farms and smaller towns as the local economy changed from agrarian to an increasingly industrial economy. They were joined by large numbers of immigrants from Great Britain and Europe. Both groups sought higher, more reliable, stable income in the cities as the Industrial Revolution in Canada followed the industrial renaissance in the United States, Great Britain and Europe. In addition, the "Wheat Boom" of the mid-1850's and the development of the first extensive railway networks in Canada hastened an era of unparalleled economic prosperity.

These developments resulted in the growing middle class of industrial, office, professional and retail workers earning sufficient wages to be able to enjoy leisure activities such as summer day trips to escape the heat, humidity and crowded conditions of the polluted industrial cities. Such trends in society gave impetus to a growing local tourism industry in the mid-1800's.

The western entrance to Oakville Harbour featured a high bank offering splendid views of Lake Ontario, fresh onshore summer breezes and a fine grove of natural pine trees to protect picnickers from the intense summer sun.

It comes as no surprise that this favoured location, known as "Chisholm's Grove", owned by Robert K. Chisholm, became a popular place for summer leisure activities such as picnics attended by locals as well as excursionists arriving by steamboat from Toronto and Hamilton.

In the 1860's Oakville became known as "The Newport of Canada" attracting yachters from around Lake Ontario as well as summer visitors who stayed at local guest houses or built summer cottages along Oakville's scenic waterfront. Day excursionists were arriving by steamboats in greater and greater numbers to enjoy a day's outing at "Chisholm's Grove".

By the summers of 1867 and 1868 the excursion steamer "Rothesay Castle" alone was transporting one or more excursions almost every day of the week from May through September. On June 3, 1869 a local newspaper commented:

"After landing, the Toronto Templars were conducted by those of Oakville to a beautiful grove to the east of Town ("Beardsley's Grove") which had been previously fitted out with swings, and other amusements. The usual games of running, leaping etc. were indulged in and prizes provided by the Town. A competitive game of baseball was played between the Oakville and Toronto clubs".

This article reveals that not only "Chisholm's Grove" but "Beardsley's Grove" attracted out-of-town day-trippers to Oakville. "Beardsley's Grove" was located in the present day vicinity of Maglegrove Rd and Lakeshore Rd.

"Chisholm's Grove" was closed as a picnic ground in the 1870's when Shubel Lewis purchased the property from Robert K. Chisholm.



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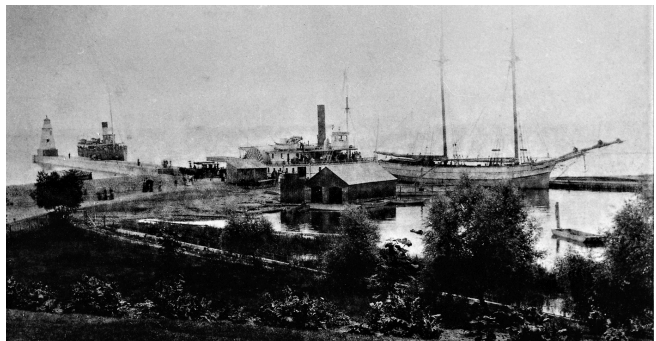
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Oakville's Riviera

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As a consequence, picnickers were obliged to make the trek to Beardsley's Grove or a new picnic ground which was established at George's Square in 1873 when Colonel George K. Chisholm conveyed the land to the Town of Oakville. Excursionists were an economic boon to Oakville especially during the harsh economic realities of 1870's Canada. As a result, the development of George's Square was a wise decision. A "Standing Committee on George's Square and Ornamental Trees" was formed and plans announced to "establish a Public Park and Pleasure Ground" in the Town of Oakville. The grass was cut, additional trees were planted and a well was installed with an iron pump. The park was then enclosed by a picket fence with turnstiles on each of the four sides to discourage bovines and other animals from entering the square as at that time farm animals were allowed to roam freely about the town. A baseball diamond was installed where the local team, "The White Oaks", commenced playing matches against other teams in the district.

Among the steamboats ferrying excursionists to Oakville during the late 1800's was the "Rothsay Castle". She burned in 1874 but was rebuilt and continued to serve pleasure grounds such as Oakville, Lorne Park and

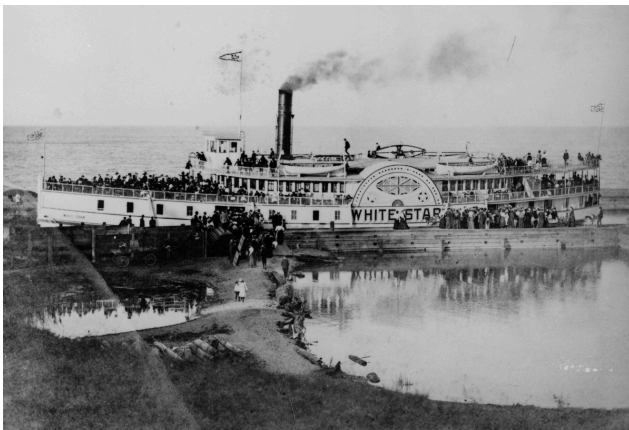


The Empress of India in Oakville harbour

others in the vicinity. In 1876 the excursion steamer "Empress of India" was launched. The 180 foot long steam side-wheeler began transporting people to Oakville for a round-trip fare of 50 cents per

person. She was later rebuilt and renamed “Argyle” and continued to call at Oakville from Toronto and Hamilton as an excursion boat.

In 1897 a group of Oakville businessmen, mostly large-scale local fruit growers, purchased the passenger-freight steamer “White Star” which had been built at Montreal in 1897. They formed “The Oakville Navigation Company” and operated the vessel on behalf of The Oakville Fruit Growers’ Association. While “White Star” carried local fruit to the Toronto Wholesale Fruit Market on Front Street, Toronto, the vessel was also used for scheduled passenger/freight runs as well as for excursions. Sunday School excursions were very popular and Oakville’s boat was nicknamed “The Sunday School Boat”. W.S. Davis, a prominent Oakville businessman, was appointed general manager, secretary and treasurer of the company. One of the White Star’s



The White Star

owners also owned the site of the former “Chisholm’s Grove” picnic ground. He began improving the grounds in 1897 as Shubel Lewis’ home on the site had burned in 1888 and the property had been sold. Its new owner named the property “Harbour Grove”. He installed a new

picnic/dance pavilion, a refreshment booth, swings and facilities for ping pong, tennis, baseball and “every convenience for a day’s outing”. Alan Kemp operated a boat livery at the north end of the east pier. He initiated a ferry service across the harbour entrance to transport excursionists from the east pier where the steamers docked to the West Bank of the harbour entrance at “Harbour Grove”.

Oakville's Riviera

(continued)

In 1889 the re-opened pleasure ground hosted the largest gathering of Royal Templars in Canada's history. 1200 attended from across Canada and camped for seven days. They were entertained by 40 speakers and three Royal Revival Bands. The park was lit at night, the first use of electric lighting in Oakville's history.

George Sumner, the Chief Constable and Harbour Master began to mention these excursions in his diary in 1874. He reported that there was an excursion arriving nearly every day, mainly from Toronto and Hamilton. Some were general audiences arriving on various steamers and others included religious and Sunday School groups, the Templars, labour groups such as machinists, brewers, shoemakers, book binders, printers, conductors and brakemen, carriage and harness makers, cotton mill workers, the Toronto and Hamilton Locomotive and Firemen, and fraternal clubs such as the Orange Lodge and the Foresters. He also specifically mentions a number of excursions of Black people coming from Hamilton. In August 1888 he records that an excursion of 4,000-5,000 Roman Catholics arrived and he employed 5 special constables for crowd control. Sumner reports, "Had some few fights but in all were not so very bad."

At first the excursions were welcomed, but Sumner soured on them, saying in 1878 that an end should be put to them as he was finding that they were often quite noisy and some drank to excess. In 1889 he tells us that he had to go down to the creek to stop "the roughs from molesting the excursionists". Later, in 1899, he recounts one of the worst situations; "a Catholic Excursion in today and had a big row. A.E. Cross got hit in the head with a stone. They were going to murder us at the dock with iron bars. Four of them arrested in Toronto."

Sumner also noted by 1902 that excursion traffic to Oakville was gradually declining. Newer and larger pleasure/amusement parks were drawing business away from the smaller parks like Harbour Grove. The larger parks, such as Burlington Beach, Toronto's Hanlan's Point, Lakeside Park at Port Dalhousie and Olcott Beach, New York, boasted hotels, restaurants, roller coasters, and amusement arcades making such destinations more exciting to visit.

On July 11, 1903 Oakville's "White Star" burned, thereby signalling the demise of scheduled steamboat passenger and freight service to Oakville forever. "Harbour Grove" was abandoned due to the decline in attendance. The site remained desolate for years with the beautiful grove of pines eventually disappearing. Thankfully the Town of Oakville in recent years acquired the property. It now serves as a park and lookout greatly valued by Oakville residents as well as visitors to our town.



View across the harbour of the bluffs at Tannery Park today, formerly "Harbour Grove" and "Chisholm's Grove"

Summer Interns

Our summer interns started their work on May 6. If you are in the neighbourhood, stop in and say hello to them!



Amanda Rundle has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Queen's University and a graduate diploma in business from the Smith School of Business. She worked as a tutor while studying chemistry and art history at the University of Toronto

to prepare for a Masters of Art Conservation, specializing in historic paintings which she will begin in September at Queen's. At the Historical Society, she has been documenting and creating digital records of artifacts in the Thomas House, and assisting with editing research into Oakville's historic estates. Amanda loves oil painting, embroidering, walking her dog in Old Oakville and reading about the Romans!

Chris Gismondi was born and raised in Oakville and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of New Brunswick after studying at McGill University and Concordia. His doctoral research focuses on Upper Canada Loyalists, Black diasporic slavery, and material culture. Chris has worked at the Ontario Heritage Trust, Government of Ontario Art Collection/Archives of Ontario, and La Guilde. He is excited to be home for the summer contributing to some great local history projects!



Fundraising

Burns' Supper



Our first fundraiser of the year was held on Jan 17 when we hosted a sold out Burns' Supper at St John's United Church. The pipes skirled, the highland dancers leapt and twirled, the

haggis was thoroughly and skillfully addressed and tatties, neeps and steak pies were devoured. It was a fantastic tribute to the Bard!

Spring Tea

Moving forward, we hosted our first annual Spring Tea on May 4 which sold out in 8 days! Ladies and Gents alike sported their finery and feasted on a spread of goodies fit for a Duchess (or a Duke). We received rave reviews regarding the venue,



the ambiance and the menu, so much so that we are planning a Christmas Tea to be held on December 7. Stay tuned, OHS members will have the opportunity to purchase tickets prior to the public.



Our next fundraising event will be the **Annual Yard Sale** on **July 5**. Collection of donated items commenced May 27 and continues on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday afternoons during office hours (1-4:30). Please email brendachisholm235@gmail.com with enquiries or volunteer offers.

This event is very popular with the community; last year we had a line of people waiting for us to open! Please spread the word and encourage donations, customers and volunteers. We need everyone to support us. Money from these events helps to pay the salaries of our summer interns and covers expenses such as repairs and upkeep to the office and the Thomas House.

We are open:

Tuesday, Thursday and every Sunday (summer only) 1:00 -4:30

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