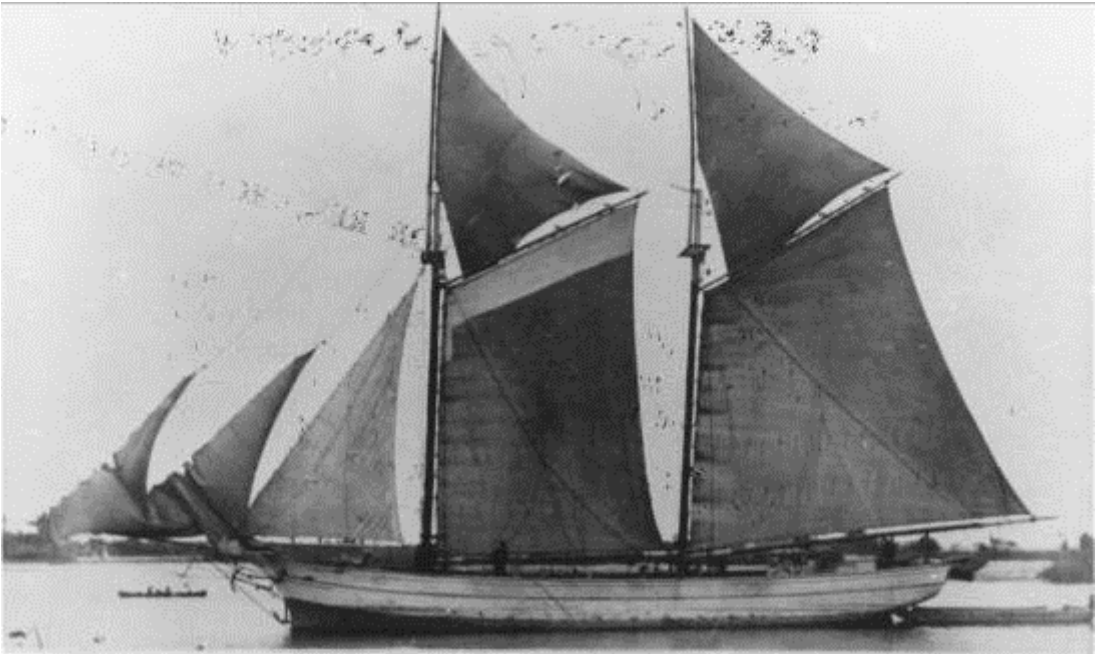




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*Preserving Oakville's  
Historical Heritage  
Since 1953*  
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THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2013



Volume 47: Number 1

SPECIAL EVENTS

Wednesday, 13th March

OHS Annual General Meeting and Pot Luck Supper starting at 6:30pm at St. John's United Church.

Sunday, 19th May

Thomas House opens for the Season (Victoria Day weekend).

Sunday, 9th June

Mayor's Annual Picnic hosted by the Society at Lakeshore Park, Oakville from Noon to 4:30pm.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

2013

Wednesday, 15th May

Speaker: Maureen Jennings, Author - Murdoch Mysteries! (There will be a \$5 charge for this meeting).

Monday, 24th June

Speaker: Don Smith, Author, speaking about his sequel to "Sacred Feathers" – called "Mississauga Portraits" – highlighting 6 important Ojibwa Chiefs. NOTE: The meeting will be held in the Auditorium at Central Library, Navy Street, Oakville. The time is 7pm to 8:30pm.

Wednesday, 16th October

Speaker: John Kenty, author of Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story - Bikes in Summer, Skates in Winter!

Wednesday, 20th November

Speaker: Tom Bochsler & Bob Chambers – The presentation will describe the visual impact of two experienced photographers and, covers the gamut from the ancient equipment of the 50's to the digital photography of today.

All programs will be held at St. John's United Church (Lusk Hall – Randall & Dunn) and begin at 7:30pm, except the March 13th program (6:30pm for Pot Luck, 7:30 for AGM).

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COVER PICTURE: Stonehooker schooner "Newsboy" - 1910

Advertising insert artwork and compilation by Carolyn Naismith.



Atex Printing & Graphics -Proudly putting quality images on paper! - 2070 Speers Road #1, Oakville, 905-465-3220 <http://atexdigitalprint.com/>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This issue of the Society's newsletter is the last to be created by Editor Lance Naismith. Lance has been editor for some years having taken it over from Harry Buxton. Lance tells me that he would like to move on to some other projects dealing with his family history. Under his leadership the newsletter has acquired several advertisers, has introduced the use of colour in some issues and has split to two versions of the same issue. The online version is somewhat amplified and contains more photos. Fortunately, we don't have to search for a replacement editor. Vice President Susan Wells has agreed to take it on. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank Lance for his hard work during his tenure as editor and welcome Susan to the position.

Over the past few months your Society has been increasing its exposure to the community. One method has been through opening the Thomas House on more days. After an absence of some years, the Thomas House reopened at Christmas this year. It was also open for Family Day on 18 February. Both opening days were well attended. We are also working with the Oakville Museum to open for more school events. This year we'll be keeping it open on weekends in September because of increased traffic in Lakeside Park. Sadly, the Thomas House is starting to look a bit run down. The do-list includes painting the outside, repairing the hearth and repairing some of the shutters. If you would like to help with any of these jobs, please let me know. The building is also settling somewhat at the northwest corner. We've been agitating to have the stone-faced bank behind the house moved back to improve airflow and once that's done we'll be able to have a better look at what's required to repair the foundations. For a building that's 184 years old, it's not in bad shape.

2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of agreement between the Town of Oakville and the Society. I'm very happy to say that, thanks to our dedicated volunteers, the Society is very healthy. At a budget meeting last week it was noted that our actual income for 2012 was within \$100 of our projected income. We are, however, very much in need of a treasurer and have been beating the bushes for some time. If you have any suggestions, we would very much like to hear them.

I hope to see many of you at our Annual General Meeting set for 13 March at St John's. As usual, the meeting starts with a pot-luck dinner at 6:30.

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

The Mosquito Fleet

It was a mild, sunny May morning in 1900 when a passenger aboard the Hamilton Steamship Company's "Turbinia", en route from Hamilton to Toronto, wrote this observation of the Lake Ontario shoreline from Port Nelson to Port Credit.

"I could observe long lines of rough-looking schooners anchored offshore. It was a calm morning and the water was crystal clear. They lie there with their patched and blackened sails, brailed up, swinging in apparent idleness at their anchors while at some distance from them 2 or 3 solitary-looking men in a scow angled with long poles, which they thrust down in the water. The vessels were mostly scow-built, that is, flat at both ends and schooner-rigged with, I am told, a capacity of 2 to 10 ton of stone. On account of their heaviness when loaded with stone, they carry long raking masts and an immense spread of canvas, which is all right as long as they are loaded, but makes them unsteady when running light in a gale.

Such is the so-called "Mosquito Fleet", a collection of over 100 stonehooking schooners engaged in a commercial activity unique on the Great Lakes and for that matter, in the entire Dominion of Canada."

Such a scene was repeated countless times during the stonehooking era. From the 1820's to the 1920's these craft worked the lake bottom between "The Highlands" (Scarborough Bluffs) in the east to Port Nelson in the west. The main stonehooking ports were Port Whitby, Frenchman's Bay, Port Credit, Oakville and Bronte.

Dundas Shale, a grey blue stone, was retrieved from the inshore. It formed in layers which, when worked on, cracked into rectangles. Among the Dundas Shale were the Glacial Drift boulders of granite ("Hardheads") left by the last ice age. Local stone, being soft red shale and sandstone, was not much good except for filling cribs, so the Bronte and Oakville stonehooker fleets quarried the lakeshore easterly where blue limestone provided superb building material.

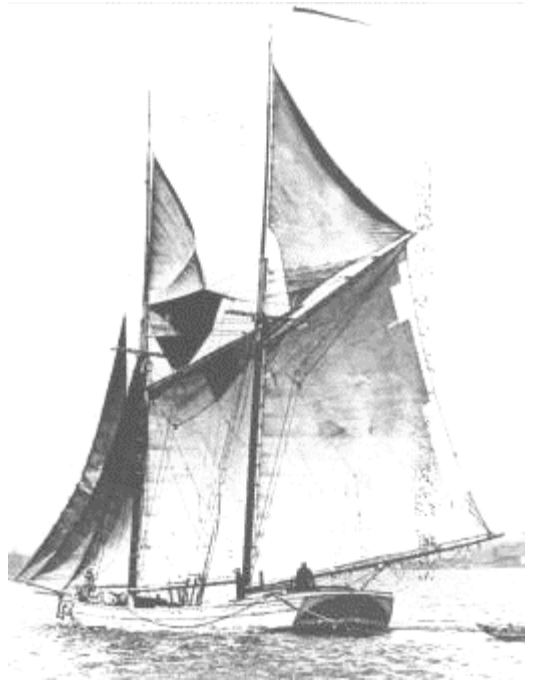
Our first structures in Ontario were built from wood, soil and stone. However the constant threat of fire soon made stone or brick construction a necessity in the building trade. Stone as a building material became more fashionable after 1840. It was the common building foundation that found the most utilitarian use for stone.

A half-century of clearing land had exposed shale - the perfect foundation stone for the growing number of stone and masonry houses in our province. Along the shores of Lake Ontario blocks of shale were available, not just from bedrock land deposits, but from the lake bottom. Submerged stone, retrieved from Lake Ontario, could also be used for roads, sidewalks and pavements.

There were 3 methods of securing the stone - quarrying, raking and "blind stavling". Quarrying involved going ashore and breaking away pieces from the low cliffs with sledgehammers or picking stone off the beaches. When raking they moved along within a short distance of the shore, where they could see the lake bottom and pick up the stones they find with long-handled rakes or

hooks. When stone was scarcer, they moved out into the deeper water and dragged their hooks along the bottom, putting in all they could catch. This is called "blind stavling". However, if the wind stiffened, as it usually did mid-morning, it would discolour the water so much that raking soon became impossible, while rough water made blind stavling hazardous.

In Bronte, for example, the foundation of many 19th century buildings were made of shale including the beautiful old stone building still standing at the southeast corner of Bronte Road and Marine Drive. Many of the old walls lining the estates along Lakeshore Road East, as well as the foundation of the barn at Appleby College, are examples of the use of lake stone.



Rapid City - 1910

During the first half of the 19th century there was a coastal and international trade for small schooners carrying grain and wood products. When these lines of trade languished with the coming of the railway, many crews along the lakeshore became active in the stone trade. As arduous as it was, the stonhooking trade attracted many "landlubbers" as well as seasoned mariners who were anxious to partake of the profits. A boat had to be secured, any type of boat that would float with cargos of stone. As scow models were the easiest and cheapest to build, they became the mainstay of the "Mosquito Fleet". It was said that a local shoemaker, carpenter and a blacksmith were attracted to the trade. A writer at the time described the scow-building mania as follows:

*"McCurdy laid by his lap-stone,
McAuliffe threw down his plane,
George Johnson gave up his horse-shoeing
For they all had scow on the brain."*

The stonhookers brought the sand, stone and gravel to the Queen's Wharf at the foot of Bathurst Street or the West Market Slip in Toronto. The stone was piled in rectangles, one toise was 6 feet, by 12 feet by 3 feet high, 216 cubic feet weighing 10 tons.

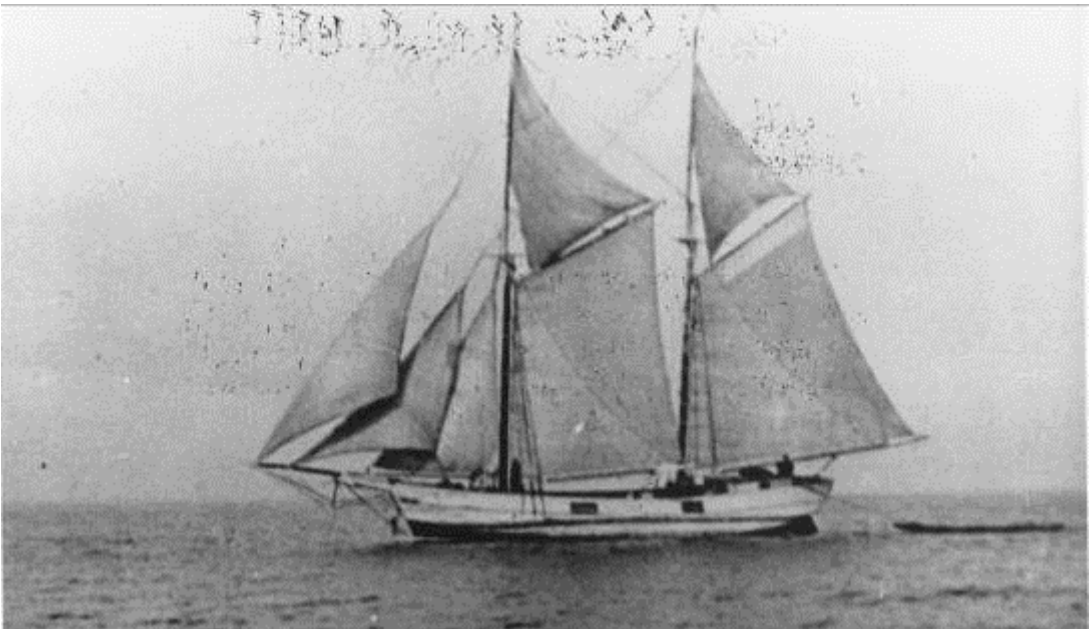
In the 1840's the stonhooking fleet was carrying 43,000 tons per year into Toronto. One observer noted that the specially-built scow schooners had low freeboards and the hold was only 4 feet 6 inches deep on average. This made for easier "tossing" aboard the stone, handling and trimming below. He added, "They were built by the mile and cut into lengths as needed."

Perhaps the most beautiful stonhookers were built by Lem Dorland at Bronte between 1880 and 1885. They included "Madeline", "Newsboy", "Rapid City", "Northwest" and "Maple Leaf". Sam Adam's ledgers from his blacksmith shop in Bronte still exist. They refer to the iron work for the Bronte stonhookers. Some entries include: "ironing deadeyes' \$3.00", "12 chainplates \$4.50" and 2 travellers \$1.50."

The "Homing Birds" referred to the stonhooking men in more modest craft who guided their scows along the lakeshore and then returned to port to fill up the deck of their stonhooker. After as many as 5 weeks loading in port they would sail to Toronto to unload. The "Far Flyers" used better-built vessels often built at Bronte and designed specifically for the trade. They would venture anywhere for sand, gravel, hardheads, cobbles, pavers, builders or crib stone.

The "Maude S" was another local stonehooker. Her stem, keel and stern port came from the Gooderham yacht "Geraldine". She was also one of the "Honey Carriers" carrying manure from the 1000 horses owned by the Toronto Street Railway from Toronto to farmers' fields at Clarkson, Oakville, Bronte, Grimsby and Jordan Harbour.

On the same day Oakville was incorporated as a town in 1857, the United Government of Canada West and Canada East enacted the "3 Rod Law". This prohibited the harvesting of stone within 3 perches (1 perch equals 17.5 feet) of the low water mark in the Counties of York, Peel and Halton. Farmers whose land fronted Lake Ontario were especially upset when they saw their shoreline eroded as a result of the stonehookers' activities. Even cemeteries, like the one in Bronte, suffered from such erosion. The statute did not however eliminate inshore stonehooking. Instead, it encouraged the stationing of a lookout in the rigging to watch for approaching government vessels or landowners. Even 40 years later statistics show that between 2500 and 5000 toise of stone were removed from the lake bottom every year.



Lillian – Last of the Stonehookers
1925

The introduction of concrete precipitated the decline of stonehooking and improved quarrying methods, as well as better road transport, helped it along. Around

1900 the gradual introduction of steam power at the inland quarries, together with the introduction of better-quality Portland Cement, led to concrete becoming the preferred building material.

The last stonehooker to see service was the old "Lillian" which had survived over 70 years on the lake after having been built at Henderson, New York in 1856. She was transferred to the Hamilton Sea Cadets as a training vessel in 1929. Another old timer, "Northwest", was operating out of Midland, Ontario as a camp boat in the 1930's.

Our gratitude is extended to C.H.J. Snider who wrote 1300 weekly articles for the old Toronto Evening Telegram between 1931 and 1956, including many on the stonehooking industry. Through his interviews with members of the stonehooking families years ago like the Blocks, Hares, Naishes, Peers, Blowers and many others, we are afforded a valuable insight into this fascinating part of our local marine history. We are also indebted to Dr. Lorne S. Joyce of Port Credit who has carried on invaluable research into the marine history of Lake Ontario over the decades and has always been so willing to share his vast knowledge with us.

Phil Brimacombe

HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS AND GHOST WALKS

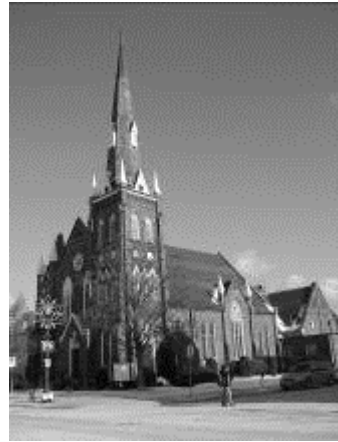
**Planning your summer and fall events – relatives/friends visiting?
Check our website at www.oakvillehistory.org for the 2013 Schedule.**

This will be my last edition of the OHS Newsletter. It has been a pleasure to present a public face of the OHS to not only members of the OHS but also those who read the newsletter at the Library and Town Hall and, on the web. I am grateful to those who have supported me in preparing historical articles and information pieces for publication as they have enhanced the quality of the newsletter. I appreciate Harry and Margaret Buxton's efforts in building a very strong foundation upon which to build this newsletter and, I look forward to our new editor, Susan Wells continuing this important OHS document. Please give her all the support I received.

Lance Naismith, Editor

Please take time to look at our advertiser's insert. Their sponsorship has been the reason we have our COLOUR December edition. It would be appreciated if you were to stop by and thank them.

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were” – December 2012

The young lady in the picture on the last page of our December edition was our own, Evelyn Bullied, a longtime resident of Oakville and member of the OHS. It was a winter picture (20F below) taken in front of Dunn’s Drug Store where she managed the soda fountain and also was a pharmacist’s helper. There was no hospital at the time in Oakville and 4 drug stores serviced the town. Doctors either did surgery in their homes or, made house calls. Drug stores would take turns for overnight service.



Eve Bullied inside Dunn’s Drug Store

Lance Naismith

Society offices are open every third Sunday of the month – 1:30pm to 4:00pm

Membership Report

We welcome the following new members who have joined since September 2012.

Lynne Ball Emily & John Cates John Caufield
Pauline & Richard Hadfield Heidi MacLellan & Family Rob Windmill

We look forward to seeing all of you at our upcoming events.

For those members who have not yet renewed, we urge you to do so before the March Annual General Meeting so that you will be entitled to vote.

Andrea Stewart

November Presentation

Mrs. Elaine Guther is committed to telling the story of her mother and thousands like her who arrived in Canada with a tin box and not much else. They were the children of Barnardo's, a charitable organization in the United Kingdom dedicated to helping destitute and orphaned children.

Alice Taylor (1909-1992) was born in Notting Hill, London and sent to Barnardos house, Hazelbrae, Peterborough, Ontario at age 12. Mrs. Guther travelled from Grimsby to give us a very moving and informed talk about her mother. There are thousands of stories like Alice's and that is not surprising considering it is estimated 12% of Canada's population are descendants of these young immigrants. Thank you, Mrs. Guther. (Picture: Greg Munz (L) & Elaine Guther)



Susan Wells

Yard Sale (White Elephant Sale)

The Society will hold its Annual Spring Yard sale on Saturday, May 11th, from 9:00 a.m. till 2:00 p.m. with no rain date. If you or any family and friends are moving/downsizing or just doing a basement/garage clean-out and have some

good, saleable items (no clothes, large furniture or appliances, please), please call Jim Young at 905-337-7001 (office) or 289-259-0955 (cell) and leave a message to arrange for pick-up. He will even pack for you.

Volunteers are also needed to set up for the Sale on Friday, May 10th starting at 9:00 a.m. and/or on Saturday, May 11th starting at 8:00 a.m. on the day of the Sale. It is always a fun day and proceeds of the Sale go towards funding equipment and other things used in the day to day operation of the Society and its work in preserving the history of Oakville for future generations.

Thank you so much in advance for your continuing support. It is very much appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jim Young

Heritage

There is a common misconception that the Oakville Historical Society prevents owners of designated properties from making changes to their property or has a lot of say in what can and can't be done with designated properties. This is untrue.

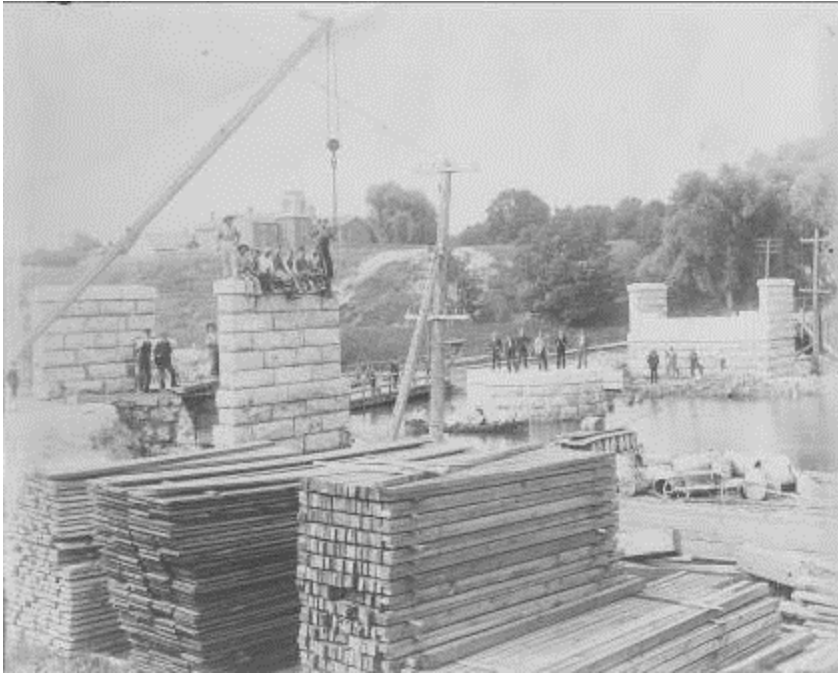
Since the 1950s we have provided our black and white historic building signs to property owners but they do not imply any form of designation. They simply show pride in ownership and give the public some history of the property. For further information please refer to our web site, www.oakvillehistory.org or to the town's webpage <http://www.oakville.ca/business/heritage-planning.html>

George Chisholm

NOTE: SPECIAL DATES

May 19th	Thomas House Opening (Victoria Day Wknd)
June 16th	“Special” Doors Open events in aid of Alzheimer Society
Sept 28th	Thomas House – Harvest Festival Bake Table
Sept 29th	Last day of season – Thomas House
Oct 15 – 29th	Ghost Walks
Dec 6th	Members Christmas Party – 110 King St. W, 6-9pm

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. What is being built here?
 2. When was this built?
 3. What is the building in the upper left corner background?
- ~~~~~

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

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