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

SEPTEMBER 2013



Volume 47 Number 3

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

**Wednesday
October 16** **Mr. John McKenty** author of *Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story* will speak about the part the company played in our lives. Skates in winter, bikes in summer....

**Wednesday
November 20** *The Art of Industry* authors **Mr. Tom Bochsler** and **Mr. Bob Chambers** will present anecdotes and comment on the 117 years of press and industrial photography showing the gamut of celebrities, politicians, steel, forests, mining, architecture and much more; not to mention the change from the now seemingly ancient equipment of the 1950s to the digital photography of the 21st century.

Above presentations held at St. John's United Church at Randall and Dunn and begin at 7:30 pm.

Thomas House is open September every Sunday 1:30 to 4 pm and on Saturday, the 28th for the Harvest Bake Table, 11 am to 4 pm. Donations of any sort of delicious baking and preserves are welcome. Please deliver them to the OHS office the previous Thursday and Friday.

Ghost Walks provide an eerie spine-tingling sensation with a dash of old Oakville history. These walks start at 110 King St. and are about one hour. Drinks and cookies are served after the walks at our offices. Reservations are required. Phone (905)844-2695.

2013 Schedule

October 15,17,19 7:00, 8:30 pm

October 22,23,24,25,26,28,29 6:00, 7:15, 8:30 pm



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Quite the season of mixed weather this past summer. A two-week heat wave followed by nights in the low to mid-teens. It hasn't however, affected attendance at our events and at the Thomas House. The Mayor's Picnic, operated by your Society, went very well. Attendance was good, the weather cooperated, the music was great and the Oakville Scottish Country Dancers performed in their usual exemplary manner. (I'm a bit prejudiced.)

We've had the benefit this summer of at least ten young volunteers to the Society. You'll read more about them elsewhere but it is certainly refreshing to see young people working at the Thomas House and at the office. It was particularly good to see Thomas House volunteer Eileen Za passing on her knitting skills.

Mary Davidson has two excellent speakers lined up for the fall and is hard at work setting up speakers for 2014. Also coming this fall is our new walking tour through Oakville and St Mary's Cemetery. With all the Ghost Walks scheduled, October will be a busy month.

We are still looking for some volunteers to help out as speakers at retirement homes and schools as we get a fair number of requests. In some cases we've run out of topics. If you have an historical topic that you would like to speak about, please let us know. *George Chisholm, President*

Our June issue featured a photo of Mrs. Hazel Chisholm Mathews laying the corner stone of the Post Office at the corner of Church and George Streets, May 1958. The building is now empty.

Cover Photo: Drawing of Mrs. Neal's House by her grandson Dylan Neal.

The People Of Early Kerr Street

IT is believed that Kerr Street was named, around 1850, for Mr. Robert W. Kerr, who had been commissioned by William Chisholm to carry out the official plan for the new town of Oakville. Joyce Burnell's book, *Street Names and Landmarks*, records that initially Kerr Street was the major route from the harbour to Lower Middle Road, now the Queen Elizabeth Highway, but as shipping and industry moved from the area, Kerr Street's growth was halted for a time.

Unlike the historic downtown, Kerr Street has few older buildings and little to remind us of early Oakville, so I set out to speak to early resident, Catherine (Cay) Neal (née Laing), aged ninety-one, to learn about life in the Kerr Street neighbourhood. Joining Catherine were her

brother Gerald Laing and her brother- and sister-in-law Earl and Georgina Grant.

Catherine lives on Stewart Street in a house built by hand in the 1940's on a property adjacent to her parents' house on a lot that cost \$75. She and her husband, Orville, lived in the basement while they finished the upstairs. Orville served in the RCAF during the war.



Catherine Neal, Gerald Laing
& Earl Grant



Stewart Street

Catherine grew up in a farmhouse on the large Stansbury farm, just up from Stewart Street, where the Dollar Store is today and where the Stansbury family ran commercial gardens. Beyond Stewart Street, both North and West, was farmland where sugar beets, asparagus and strawberries were grown. They recalled Ukranian refugee workers, most of them women, living in tents on the property.

Many of the residents in the area were employed at the jam factories which produced jam from the strawberry crop, at the basket factory which produced baskets for the fruit, at the tannery and at the paint factory. Gerald worked after school at Glassco's jams.

Catherine and her brother spoke of the IOOF (Independent Order of Foresters) orphans' home (right) at the corner of Kerr and Bond Streets, which later became Ortona Barracks and later, Oaklands Centre for handicapped persons.

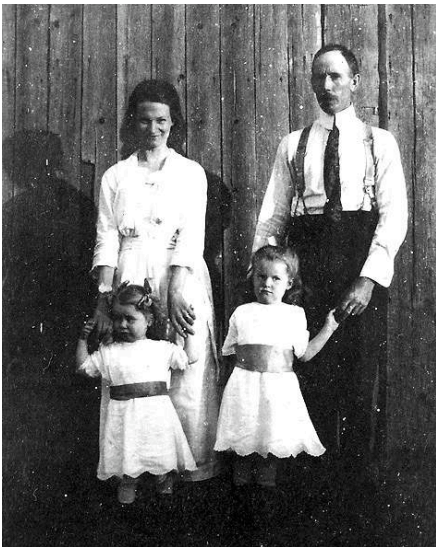


South of that was a swamp and near to that, Very's Flowers greenhouses.

Gerald remembered skating at the swamps, one between Morden and Fourth Line and the other at "Dummies' Bush", a copse of trees in the middle of asparagus fields. There were areas of quicksand, one where the Oakville arena was built.

Where Stoney's is now, there was a bowling alley and, around the corner, the original shop of Gerrie Electric.

In one of the stone buildings on the site of the new Rain condo complex at Kerr and Speers, lived a Mary Smith, sister of Charles Snowball Forsythe and who in the mid-40s, sang in the Presbyterian choir with Catherine.



Violet & Ernest Winzer with daughters. 1923

Catherine still maintains her house and plays the organ by ear. She and Orville were keen golfers who enjoyed membership at The Oakville Golf Club. They had two children, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Coincidentally, around the time we began to research the history of Kerr Street, we received a visit at the historical society, from Dr. Jack Winzer from Barrie who had lived at the old house at 371 Kerr Street from 1944 to 1974. The Winzers lived in Oakville for almost 100 years. Jack's grandfather, Ernest Winzer, born in England in 1885, came to Oakville in 1913 and became a gardener for the large estates along the lakeshore, including the Scaddings and the Dunwoodys. During the winter he cleaned chimneys and was part-time caretaker for various buildings including the old Central school. He married Violet Warner in 1916. Three daughters followed: Margaret, Dorothy and Ethel.

In 1920 Ernest and Violet purchased the house at 371 Kerr Street, on land originally owned by the Chisholm family, and later purchased an adjacent property. The house is a two-storey frame building, built in the same vernacular style as the other houses on along Kerr Street at the time. Its horizontal wood siding was later covered by Insulbrick in the 1950s. When the house was built, the majority of Kerr Street was residential,



Ernest Winzer 1920

with farmland to the North. Now the house is for sale, probably for commercial use.



371 Kerr St. 1935 before present Insulbrick cladding

Jack remembers an apple orchard to the east of the property which extended to a bush known as the Forster Survey. There was a

vineyard on the west side of Kerr Street, and Very's farm on the east side of Kerr Street south towards Westwood School. Up until the early 1950's, the present Kerr Street, which was then known as Kerr Street North, ended at Rebecca Street. There was a small ravine separating it from Kerr Street South which extended south from Colborne Street (now Lakeshore Road), down to the lake.

The harvest picture (page 7) was on the dining room wall at 371 for almost a century. He believes the photograph was

taken around 1915 by what is now Speers Road.

The railway tracks across the top of Kerr Street were a great fascination for Jack in the 1940s. He recalls his Aunt Ethel taking him, nearly every evening, to watch the steam engines and exchange waves with the engineers.



Winzer girls 1930

Stargazing was to become a great interest. The gift of a telescope in 1955 from his Aunt Ethel fostered in Jack a great interest in astronomy; from the back yard on clear nights he looked at the moon, planets and stars and from the boardwalk at the front of the house, he could observe Saturn.



(Obviously Kerr Street was not as busy as it is now!) This interest led Jack to a Ph.D in astronomy from the University of Toronto.

Jack recalls that the residents in the 1950s of the old stone houses south of the railroad tracks, were the Smiths and the Bacons. He remembers the IOOF orphans` home having been known, during the 1940s, as the “Home Corner”. This building later became the centre of Ortona Barracks and Central Army Command Headquarters and eventually Oaklands Centre.

The late R.O. (Bob) Hughes in *Oakville Memories Old and New*, moved to 52 Kerr Street between Westside Dr. and Harold Ave. between Penman’s store and Bamber’s Red and White store. As a boy he was employed hulling strawberries at Stansbury’s just north of Bamber’s Store. Mr. Cecil Taylor who owned a farm at the top end of Kerr just below the Lower Middle Road (now Queen Elizabeth Way) used to drive his Model T Ford down Kerr Street to pick up the waiting pickers who hung onto the running boards and sprawled on the rear and front fenders as he brought them to work. Some of the strawberries went to market and others to the two jam factories in Oakville: Glassco’s near the railway station and Jacobs’ on Randall, near the Scout Hut. He recalled the First Nations people who came from Northern Ontario to do the picking and were accommodated in a shack in the middle of the patch.

From these memories from the 1930s to the 1950s, we get some sense of the evolution of Kerr Street. It seems that the north part of the town only began to develop when the Stansbury family sold much of their farmland for residential and commercial use. In 1933, they had purchased a large tract of land which they farmed until 1947 when they began to sell some for residential lots and the portion on the North part of Kerr Street for commercial and retail use. There is a photograph in The Oakville Journal Record, October 1971, showing Leonard Stansbury ploughing a field, presumably prior to 1947, in what was to become Kerr Street North Business Community, “Oakville’s central community.” Kerr Street is now a commercial area, most of the residential buildings having been demolished in the 1950s and 1960s.



Kerr St. c1960 looking north. IOOF is top left with Westwood school (Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides), centre.

The old stone houses (below), referred to by Mrs. Neal and Dr. Winzer, Nos. 531 and 533



Kerr Street, have been designated and remain on the site of the Rain condominium development awaiting relocation and restoration by the new owners of the property. They were built by the Smith family, first generation Scots settlers who came to Canada in 1907. No. 533 was built in 1911, to resemble their parents’ house in Aberdeenshire and 531 was built twenty years later. These are thought to be the only known indigenous shale stone

houses in Ontario, a practice which stopped around World War One with the reintroduction of concrete.

Many improvements have been made to Kerr Street, now known as Kerr Village. A Community Improvement Plan has been recently approved in principle, pending budgetary approval, as a partnership between the business owners and The Town, to further improve the appearance of the business district. The active community organization, The West River Residents Association works closely with local businesses and The Town to organize social and cultural events and to bring the community together.

Grateful thanks to Mrs. Neal and Dr. Winzer for providing photos. For anyone interested, these and a number of others are available in our files. Andrea Stewart

New Volunteers

University Volunteers, Steven Davidson and Marco Ilaio have come to us this summer offering their expertise. They will be working on a new look to our Historical Walks Presentations which we are hoping will be available for our 2014 Walking Tours.

We have a project involving students to digitize the reference books in our Library, eventually get it on line, and to show indices – this is a work in progress! The following students responded to my request to all High Schools in Oakville and I would like to thank them for their enthusiasm – we are learning from them if truth be known!



Alvin Leung (R), Iroquois Ridge High School
Olivia Kumar, Iroquois Ridge High School
James Lane-Davies, MacLachlan College
Katharyn Stevenson, St.Mildred's Lightbourn
Dean Barsenbach, St. Ignatius of Loyola
Ryan Heinzl(L), Garth Webb Secondary School



Clare Fiala and **Brayden Ross** are two young women who have been spending precious vacation time at the Thomas House very ably instructing visitors the duties required of settlers their age in the 1850s. We look forward to seeing them next summer when we need kindling gathered and butter churned. *Mary Davidson*

Spring Presentations

Maureen Jennings, the celebrated author of the *Murdoch Mysteries* TV series proved a most popular choice as it was standing room only at St. John's United. Ms. Jennings proved to be not only a great writer, but also a very entertaining speaker. We were sorry to hear that her other TV series *Bomb Girls* was not to be continued, however there is a Movie of the Week coming up which will retell the story – and who knows – perhaps encourage the powers-that-be to continue with the series. A special treat was to welcome one of the original Bomb Girls who attended our meeting.



Maureen Jennings (above right)
greet fans

Don Smith, one of our members from Calgary, was the special guest at our June meeting held at the Central Branch of the Oakville Public Library and a very special place for our speaker as it was the site of his primary school; another standing-room-only event. We also had Dr. Allan Sherwin whose book *Bridging Two Peoples* is the biography of Dr. Peter E. Jones, son of the Peter Jones of Don Smith's *Sacred Feathers*, and also covers the use of plants for medicinal purposes used by First Nations people. Both authors are to be congratulated on the research which has gone into these two works, "a step towards giving the First Nations people recognition and respect." Thank you also to Mississauga Historical Society who handled the selling of both books. *Mary Davidson*



Dr. Smith (above left) enjoys
comments from an interested
audience member.

Around The Society



IN addition to older buildings we have been preparing plaques for more contemporary structures pre-dating 1970, buildings that have something unique about their architecture: they might be representative of a certain design associated with a period like the so-called “war-time houses.” We thank June Hitchcox and assistants for their diligent research, George Chisholm, our president, for constructing the plaques, Claudette Shaw (shown left) for her expert paint skills and Jamie Macrae for handling inquiries as well as securing them to buildings. *Philip Brimacombe*

We were delighted to have received an overshot coverlet (right), a gift from Mrs. E. Ruch, who writes, “I received the blanket from a cousin who was exactly the same age as my mother (born 1897). The cousin was born when her mother (born approx. 1856) was in her early 40's. I assume the age of it (1838) is that which is woven into the blanket.” The coverlet will be displayed in the Thomas House.



A new addition to our Fireplace Room is the table, pictured left, a gift from OHS member and archivist Margaret Buxton. When she and her husband Harry moved into their house on West Lynn Rd. in 1972 this table was in the basement where it stayed until Margaret left the house last year. Since Mr. Reg Smith owned the house previously and he came from the original Smith farm west of Fourth Line by Rebecca St. it is believed the table was part of that property. Under the metal covering that Mr. and Mrs. Buxton removed were newspapers from 1917. Thank you Margaret for your generous gift.

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. Where is this building?
2. When was this picture taken?
3. What was the event?

Oakville Historical Society 110 King Street, Oakville

Archive Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 4:30 pm

Third Sunday of the month 12:30 to 4:00 pm

(905) 844-2695

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