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*Preserving Oakville's  
Historical Heritage  
Since 1953*  
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With Kind Remembrance  
Hearty and Sincere  
Good Wishes for your  
Christmas  
and your New Year.



## **THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

**DECEMBER 2006**

**Volume 40: Number 4**

## SPECIAL EVENTS

December 1<sup>st</sup> 2006  
6:00P.M. – 9:00 P.M.

Members Wine & Cheese,  
OHS Office, 110 King Street  
*All Members are very welcome*

March 28<sup>th</sup> 2007

Annual Meeting & Pot Luck Supper

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

2007

February 21<sup>st</sup>

*“Major General James Murray – 1<sup>st</sup> Governor of Quebec”* – Portrayed by John Rutherford.

May 16<sup>th</sup>

*“The effects of British History on the settlement of Oakville”* by Professor Neville Thompson – Retired Professor of History, University of Western Ontario.

October 17<sup>th</sup>

*“Oakville Heritage Committee”* – a panel discussion with Harry Barrett and friends.

November 21<sup>st</sup>

*“Remembering Trafalgar Township”* – Ruth Blair Archival Research.

Note: All presentations held at Knox Presbyterian Church @ 7:30 P.M., unless otherwise noted.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Congratulations are due to **Mary Noad** for all her hard work on making the Volunteer Memorial Fountain a reality. Mary has worked hard on this project over the past three years and at last the fountain is in and the water has been running. Our sincere thanks to **Jamie Macrae** and his staff for all their hard work digging the hole, hauling the gravel and pouring the concrete. Town staff have been hard at work on the landscaping.

Last month I was asked to meet with **Ms Claire Loughheed**, who is the new Manager of Culture and Heritage at Town Hall. She had a tour of our office and we talked for some time about the role and work of the Society. She has pledged to assist us in any way she can and is very keen on bringing all the heritage organizations in the town together to speak with a common voice.

In September and October respectively **Ann Reynolds** and I spoke at the monthly meeting of the Etobicoke Historical Society at Montgomery's Inn at Islington and Dundas. It was interesting to compare notes with their president, **Greg Wowchuk**, and find that we share some concerns, a major one being aging and declining membership. This will be a focus of discussion at future board meetings. Suggestions are welcome.

Our **Ghost Walks** this fall have been very well attended and some have been overbooked. Our volunteers, including **Francine Landry, Barb Savage, Wendy Belcher** and the refreshment ladies, have put in many hours to make these walks a success. Attendance on our other three walks was down significantly this year primarily due to poor weather – rain and/or heat.

Our **Annual Christmas Wine and Cheese** is coming up soon and I hope to see many of our members there. It is always a fun evening and a good start to the Christmas Season.

As always, if you have comments or concerns about your society, please contact me.

Oakville Historical Society E-mail  
info@oakvillehistory.org

George Chisholm  
905-842-5385  
georgechisholm@sympatico.ca

**COVER PICTURE:** Christmas card from “The Society's” collection of greeting cards, 1914-1930.

# *The House Detective*

Although a house can be just considered something with four walls and a roof that keeps you warm in the winter and cool in the summer, for those interested in their town's history, these buildings tell a story. They reflect the hardship and effort that went into making our town the viable place it is today. Part of the task that those within the **Oakville Historical Society** have taken on is the research of a home's past, partly for the benefit of the society but also to satisfy the curiosity of those who live within the home. Although there are professionals that do this daily, if you are so inclined, you also can research a home. Hopefully, after reading this article by **May Isaac**, you will see how it can be accomplished and be inspired to further your knowledge about your own home.

Lance Naismith

## **Historic House Plaques in Oakville**

Owners of historic houses can apply to the Oakville Historical Society for an exterior house plaque. Plaques show the name of the original owner, his occupation, and the year that the house was built. Houses eligible for plaques can be anywhere in the Oakville area and must be **100+ years old**. They do not hold the owner to any rules or regulations but are simply a recognition of our history. (See example on Page 7)

## **Amos Biggar House / The Cork House**

Dundas Street, originally known as '**The Governor's Road**', was the inland route proposed by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1793, for military purposes. It was intended to provide the safe transport of supplies and troops as a protection against a possible invasion from the south. The road was little more than a trail and needed constant maintenance.

To encourage new settlement and to maintain the road, the Crown acquired a tract of land from the **Mississauga Indians** in 1806. Deputy Provincial Surveyor Samuel Wilmot surveyed the area into three townships, one of which was Trafalgar Township. Using Dundas Street as a baseline, the land was divided into concessions 1¼ miles apart and into 200-acre lots, with a regulation sixty-six foot wide roadway. Settlers were obliged to clear five acres, fence in their lots, and build a house, usually a log cabin made of the

trees that were cut down. If the lot bordered the road, trees had to be cleared within one hundred feet of the road, and landowners were responsible for making improvements to the road.

The 1806 Wilmot Survey shows the early settlers who signed a Condition of Settlement. **Daniel Shannon** signed for Lot 20, 1st Concession, South Side of Dundas Street. Acquisition of the lot was completed in 1808, presumably on meeting all of the conditions. At this time, there were a total of thirty-three landowners.

In 1815 the property was sold to **Amos Biggar**, whose family were **United Empire Loyalists**. His father, John Biggar and mother Jemima Pettit, moved from Bethlehem, New Jersey to Upper Canada and settled in Saltfleet Township in 1791. John was active in local affairs and like other Loyalists, he and his sons served in the War of 1812 with the West Lincoln Regiments. Amos is listed on the roll of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lincoln Militia when it was first established. In April 1816, Justice of the Peace, Robert Nelles, married him to Margaret Pettit.

It is believed that he built the central portion of the house at **502 Dundas Street West**. The house is considered to be a fine example of a Loyalist farmstead. The original section is a 1½ storey and features narrow weatherboard siding, multi-paned windows, and a classically inspired doorway. The house was enlarged with additions to both sides of the house, possibly made by the next owner, **Phillip L. Box** who purchased the farm in 1843.



**Amos Biggar House – seen as Cork House**

Charles and James, Amos Biggar's two brothers, also owned nearby lots in the township. In the 1817 statistical survey by **Robert Gourlay**, the three brothers were among landowners who responded to the survey. As an indication of the growth of the area, they reported that the population totaled 548 and that there were 97 houses, 3

schools, 4 taverns, 1 grist mill and 4 saw mills. There were no stores or medical practitioners or churches. They were very candid in their appraisal of what improvements were needed which alarmed government authorities. Robert Gourlay was arrested and the survey was suppressed until 1822.

By the 1820s, Dundas Street was the main east west route between Toronto and Dundas. Traffic had increased considerably and there were links to the lake ports to expedite the export of farmers' produce. By this time there was a regular stagecoach service providing mail delivery and, the opening of many taverns and inns to accommodate travelers.

Amos Biggar was included in the first census in Ontario in 1841, taken at a time when Upper Canada became **Canada West**. He is listed as a "farmer, proprietor of Lot 20, 1<sup>st</sup> Concession, S.D.S., self, wife and eight children born in Canada".

The house and the area had two associations with the **Rebellion of 1837** and is one of the few homes that remain in Trafalgar Township from that period. After the failure of the uprising at Montgomery's Tavern in Toronto, **William Lyon Mackenzie** used Dundas Street as his escape route to Niagara. He would have passed directly by the house. There are several colourful accounts of his travel through Trafalgar Township, but it is believed that he stayed in the nearby village of "**Sixteen Hollow**" before continuing his flight and may have hid out at a neighbouring farm.

**William Young Pettit**, who owned the neighbouring farm and would purchase the Biggar house in 1853, was the brother of Jonathan Smith Pettit, also of United Empire Loyalist heritage. Following the Rebellion, as a prominent Tory, William chaired a meeting of local farmers gathered to protest a bill to compensate losses in Lower Canada. With Loyalist sympathies, they were outraged at the prospect of people being compensated who may have participated in the Rebellion against the Crown. The unruly meeting was reported in the press.

In 1903, **George King**, an area farmer who lived on the north side of Dundas Street, purchased the property. He was British born and immigrated to Canada with his family when he was 18. He moved with his wife from Toronto to Trafalgar Township around 1890. They had nine children, all of whom lived on the farm at one time. The King family sold the farm to **Harriet Pierce Bunting** in 1936, who sold the property in 1949 to Taymouth Industries Limited.

## Recent History:

In 1995, the house was designated by the Town of Oakville as a 'property of historical, architectural and contextual value and interest' under the Ontario Heritage Act. For some time after 1996, the house stood vacant and was subjected to vandalism and vagrants living in the house. **Gail Cherrington**, a granddaughter of George King, kept a close eye on the house and advised the Town as problems occurred. Without this monitoring, the house may have been lost.



The land was purchased for a shopping mall by a development company which was required by the Town to move the house to a nearby location and to board up the windows and doors. In 2000, the house was moved from its original location to 2441 Neyagawa Blvd. The house was acquired by **Jelinek Cork Group**

who restored the building with great care to preserve the spirit of the house. This is a wonderful example of how history can combine with commerce in the interests of the community. '**The Cork House**' as it is now known, is used as a product showroom.

In September 2006, Jelinek Cork Group had a public unveiling of the historical plaque provided by the Oakville Historical Society. Invited guests included the Mayor of Oakville, friends, and members of the King family and others who had connections to the house. The Jelinek Cork Group are to be congratulated for their dedication in the restoration of this heritage building which is believed to be the oldest house in Halton.

May Isaac



## **Do it yourself researching of your house:**

Listed below are useful sources for researching a historic house in Oakville. Many of the sources were used for the articles in this newsletter.

Oakville Historical Society - housing inventory files may contain photographs, Parks Canada 1971 heritage inventory data, and biographical details of owners.

Assessment Office at the Town of Oakville - to get your pin # and print out associated with your property. Take this information to the Halton Land Registry Office in Milton.

Ontario Census Data - some census data include occupation. Available at the Oakville Public Library

Historical maps - The Wilmot Survey, 1806; Map of Town of Oakville, 1837; Tremaine Map, 1858; Historical Atlas of Halton County, 1877

### **Books:**

Ahern, Frances Robin. Oakville: A Small Town 1900-1930. Oakville Historical Society, 1981

Byers, Mary and McBurney, Margaret. The Governor's Road, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.

Mathews, Hazel C. Oakville and the Sixteen, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition contains an addendum listing the changes in street names and street numbering.

Peacock, David & Suzanne. Old Oakville - a character study of the town's early buildings and of the men who built them. Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1979

### **Internet:**

Knoll, Michelle - History of Ward 5 Communities (Trafalgar Township). [www.jeffknoll.ca/history.html](http://www.jeffknoll.ca/history.html)

Oakville Public Library - Genealogy and Local History. [www.opl.on.ca/history.php](http://www.opl.on.ca/history.php)





## *AROUND THE SOCIETY*



### **The Volunteer Memorial Fountain**

It seemed to be a simple programme to complete. We had purchased an antique fountain, a pool for it and its location had been established. The Town had designed a pool and had set its location, but the price was too high to erect the system with Town labour, etc. The **Fountain Committee** enlisted the help and talents of Jamie Macrae to design and build a less expensive arrangement.

Finally, numerous approvals were obtained. The location, selected by the Society, and agreed to by the Town, was suitable.

This could not be!! We were advised by the Provincial Ministry of Culture that an archaeological study around the Erchless Estate had identified a number – we were told eight – of sensitive locations which would require archaeological investigation, including excavation, before any of the sites were cleared for use. The location we had selected for our Fountain was one of these sites.

Our Committee chose an alternative site, which would not impinge on the “sensitive” locations. The installation problem was again its expected cost. We were pleased to obtain **Jamie Macrae** as contractor for the fountain and pool, and the costs set by an arrangement satisfactory to the Society and to Jamie.

As we write, the stonework surrounding the pool is underway. In the spring of 2007 the site will finally be finished with landscaping. An identifying plaque is being made and will be placed adjacent to the Fountain. A Memorial Book has been started and names will be added as appropriate. It will be placed on a shelf, designed for its use, at the Offices of the Society.

A modest “Sod Turning” was held on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 – a celebration of the start of pool work. The Fountain and Pool will be ready for formal Opening Ceremonies, which the Board will plan and execute, early in 2007.

The Society owes a vote of gratitude to Committee members **Harry Barrett, Harry Buxton and Mary Noad, as well as to Jamie Macrae.**

## Outreach

In October **Ann Reynolds** visited the Etobicoke Historical Society at Montgomery’s Inn and spoke to their members re Canadian Pioneer Women in the 1800s. **George Chisholm** spoke to their members re the history of Old Oakville in November.

**Wendy Belcher** told Ghost Stories during October at Kerr Street Senior Centre, Post Inn and Northridge nursing homes while **Barbara Savage** spoke at Captain Robert Wilson School to 63 grade 8 students and to the Kerr Street Camera Club re Oakville’s history.

**Pat Mack** welcomed 50 visitors from the Royal Ontario Museum to the Thomas House.

Barbara Savage

## Membership Renewal

Your membership renewal for 2007 is now due. To renew your membership, please complete and return the enclosed renewal form - together with your cheque, to the address on the form. Thank you for your continued support.

As a member we know that you appreciate the benefits of membership. You and your family have access to a rich record of Oakville's past, in the form of old diaries, letters, photographs, wonderful historical artifacts and period clothing, which delight young and old alike. You may want to consider giving a **gift of membership** to someone on your Christmas list.

If you haven't yet become a member you may want to consider joining. Just drop by our office at 110 King Street any Tuesday or Thursday afternoon, or contact us by phone at any time at 905-842-8066.

Andrea Stewart

### Presentations

Come meet, and hear **Major General James Murray**, the first Governor of Quebec, who had assumed command on the Plains of Abraham after General Wolf was killed. The Major General has agreed to come in uniform. Please be seated by 7.30 pm to greet him on February 21st 2007 at Knox Church.

Barbara Savage

### Solution to “The Way Things Were” – Sept 2006

The image on the back page of the September newsletter was found in the Historical Atlas of Halton County, 1877. The **Canadian Hotel** was built in 1857 by John Williams. It had twenty-one bedrooms and four public rooms to accommodate the increasing number of travelers and local events. Ownership of the hotel changed numerous times, including John Anderson who became the owner in 1875. In 1896, Murray Williams, nephew of the original owner, purchased the hotel and renamed it The Murray House Hotel. The building, located at the corner of Navy and Robinson Streets, is now used for business offices and is known as **The Murray House**.

May Isaac

### The Newsletter

If you have an interest in history and have always wanted to be published, why not write an article for this newsletter and share your interest with our readers - even if you have written something in the past. If you're interested, contact the editor at [lanceoak@hotmail.com](mailto:lanceoak@hotmail.com) or leave a snail mail at the office and we will let you know what is required from an editorial point of view.

Lance Naismith

## *THE WAY THINGS WERE*



1. Where is this house located?
2. Who built it and when?
3. What family had the longest association with the house?

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