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

DECEMBER 2007

Volume 41: Number 4

## SPECIAL EVENTS

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007

### **Annual Wine & Cheese Party**

- All members are invited to come out and enjoy this event at OHS Society Headquarters, 110 King Street from 6PM to 9PM..

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

2008

February 20<sup>th</sup>

### ***“The History of Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott”***

– The first black doctor to graduate in Canada, he practiced medicine in Oakville for one year. During the Civil War, he became a close friend of Abraham Lincoln. An interesting unknown Canadian hero whose history will be presented by his Great-granddaughter, Kathy Slaney.

March 26<sup>th</sup>

### **Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper**

May 21<sup>st</sup>

### ***“Pioneer Cooking”*** – Dorothy Duncan

October 15<sup>th</sup>

### ***“Gun Boats on the Great Lakes”***

– Cheryl MacDonald

November 19<sup>th</sup>

### ***“An Evening with Mike Filey”*** – Mike Filey

**Note: All presentations are free and open to the Public, and held at Knox Presbyterian Church @ 7:30 P.M., unless otherwise noted.**

**Background Picture:** Known as the Slacer Cabin, this 1830's era log cabin located on Burnamthorpe Rd. W. (Glenorchy) was originally settled by George and Frances (nee Cruise) Ludlow. One of their daughters married a Slacer. Info thanks to Jane Watt and Michelle Knoll.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**B**y the time you read this, Christmas will be fast approaching and events around the Society will, we hope, be slowing down a bit after a very busy summer and fall. Our **Volunteers' wine and cheese party** will have been its usual success.

Our **Ghost Walks** are now over for the season and have shown considerable growth. Several have sold out and some have been overbooked. Wendy Belcher, Francine Landry, Barb Savage and our newest leader, Carol Gall, have dealt with large groups. A different group of people from Oakville and beyond has visited our office. One visitor came from The Beaches in Toronto for a Ghost Walk and also attended our other three walks.

Your Society, through our representative Barb Savage, is the lead member of the new **Doors Open Committee** and is working very closely with Town staff and other committee members to prepare for Oakville's first Doors Open next September. For further information on this very interesting programme, visit [www.doorsopenontario.on.ca](http://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca). We will require a lot of volunteer assistance for the event next year. Stay tuned for further information.

The Society is also working toward the designation of the **Main Street** as Oakville's fourth heritage district. June Hitchcox and her group of volunteers have been gathering information on the history of individual buildings to assist with this designation. Our October Speaker's Night featured **Sean Fraser** from the Ontario Heritage Trust who spoke about some of the advantages of Heritage Designations. Further information can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

On behalf of the Board, I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Happy Hogmanay.

As always, your board seeks your input. If you have suggestions or comments, please contact me.

Oakville Historical Society E-mail  
[info@oakvillehistory.org](mailto:info@oakvillehistory.org)

Archive Hours \* Tues & Thurs –  
1PM to 4:30PM at 110 King Street.

George Chisholm  
905-842-5385  
[georgechisholm@sympatico.ca](mailto:georgechisholm@sympatico.ca)

**COVER PICTURE:** The Christmas Card is representative of the 1920's and was sent to the "New" family of Oakville. It is part of our collection.

## *A Pioneer Christmas in Canada*

**L**ong before the town of Oakville celebrated its first Christmas in 1857, early explorers and fur traders have recorded in their journals that they paused on Dec. 25, remembering the religious significance of the day. Mention was also made, that whenever possible, on ships or in camps, they enjoyed the company of friends, and a special feast.

We continue these traditions, enriched over the years by many cultures, often without much thought of our earliest settlers' struggles to provide their families with some semblance of cheer at this time.

Faced with the monumental tasks of clearing the land, establishing farms and towns such as ours across the country, the thought of Christmas cheered them as they struggled to survive. After the harvest was in, and the root cellars stocked, preparations for the festive season could begin. Hams and pork shoulders were dried and hung by the fireplace, and apples were packed in straw or dried along with an assortment of herbs from the garden.

From 1850 when glass jars were first produced, it was possible to keep over other fruits and berries as well. Geese were fattened in the rice beds, and pigs foraged in the forest. Turkeys and beef cattle were only raised on the more established farms, and rarely on the menu, except for the more affluent. Fish were plentiful in the rivers and lakes, and most families kept a few chickens, and a cow for milk and butter.



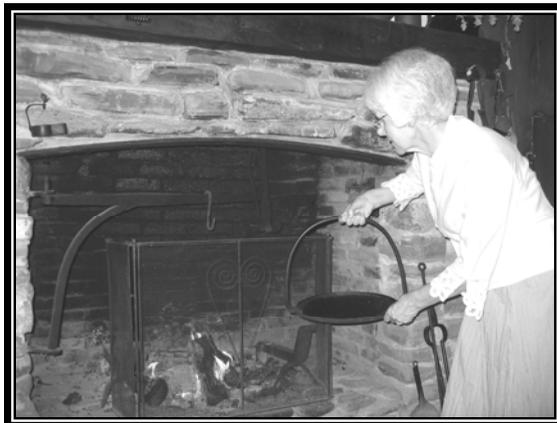
*Butter Churns*

The fall and early winter were relatively a time of plenty, for by late winter, with stores depleted, many survived on potatoes and grains. In this “waste not” society even rotting wheat that could not be milled for flour, was used to make whiskey, providing some comfort to some! It was cheap and readily available. Corn that could be ground at home was plentiful, and used extensively instead of other grains.

The settlers started collecting scarce items weeks before Christmas. Sugar was very expensive, available only in cones, so maple sugar, molasses and honey were set

aside for the sweet dishes. Raisins, oranges, spices and nuts were more available at this time, as the shopkeepers ordered these in especially for the holiday. By 1835, Oakville was a thriving little community and in 1846, records show 550 inhabitants and, shops of one and two stories were situated on the main street. Local women could bring their eggs and butter to barter for needed goods. Christmas puddings, cakes, and mincemeat were made well in advance and stored in a cool dry place.

The earliest settlers built stone fireplaces into their log cabins, and later into their more substantial frame houses. These not only kept them from freezing, but also provided a heat source for cooking. Some had small ovens on one side, and all were dangerously challenging. An iron crane with a long arm could be swung out in the room and then back over the fire. Kettles and pots were held on the arm with hooks. Sometimes the cooks of the day used flat bottom pans that sat right in the fire, or pans with long legs called spiders.



*Volunteer Margaret Bucknall*

The Industrial Revolution in the early eighteenth century resulted in the relatively cheap availability of iron stoves and pots. Ironically, this same revolution had cost many of these young workers their jobs and was part of the reason for the mass exodus from Britain at this time.



*Roaster, Griddle & Toaster*

In the weeks before Christmas industrious women knit mitts and hats for their children, after carding and spinning the wool. Gifts were mainly for the young people, and sometimes an orange or a few nuts left on the table would be all that was possible to provide. As they prospered, pin cushions, jet jewellery, imported china, and books were exchanged among the adults. Children were given sleds and wooden toys. By 1859 The Toronto Globe was advertising that skates, rocking horses and toy tea sets were available for gifts.

The image of Santa we recognize today had evolved by 1860. The tradition of

hanging a stocking to be filled with gifts, started with the poem “The Night Before Christmas”, which was published in 1823.

The Christmas many of us celebrate today, is based on the blending of our pioneer traditions. The Yule log and the Twelve Days of Christmas, mince pies and plum pudding came from the English. The candle in the window, lit by the youngest child or one named Mary, was to symbolically welcome Mary and Joseph or a Priest needing shelter and was said to be from the Irish. The German settlers lit candles in evergreen branches and trees. The Christmas Tree was introduced to England by Queen Victoria’s german Prince Albert and then, to North America. For the Scottish people it was a religious day. Attending church when possible, they reserved their celebrations for New Years, and on Hogmanay, enjoyed spiced ale, sweetened oak cakes and black bun.

By the mid eighteen hundreds, carols were sung in the churches and schools. Most are familiar to us still. Cards were first sent in England in 1843 and by 1880, production increased and they were in use in Canada.

From the earliest efforts to decorate their homes with evergreen boughs and berries, to the practice of making colourful paper chains, stringing popcorn with cranberries and making small baskets to fill with sweets, and hang on the tree, our forbearers tried in the true spirit of Christmas to keep their traditions’ alive and pass them on to their children.

Christmas Day in the middle of the nineteenth century was spent with family, going to church when possible, enjoying their dinner mid day with friends. After exchanging gifts, skating and sledding were popular pastimes, and in some cases, dancing in the evening ended the day.

Joy Sanders

The Oakville Historical Society has been going through exciting times in the last year, fortunately with support from our Volunteers. One area of special notice is our **new website** under development by our webmaster, Norm Sadler. I can tell you it is very exciting to look at and will offer a lot to those who wish to visit it and learn more about the Society. It should be on-line by years end. Please visit [www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org) and see the enlarged and colour **December version** of our Newsletter.

The Editor

## RECIPES

Many recipes still exist from these early days, but cannot be used without considerable altering. The refining process of sugar and grains has changed dramatically, as have heat sources for baking.

With this in mind, the following recipes have been adjusted to compensate for this.

### **Mrs. Savage's Pickles**

(Barbara Savage)

1870

One quart of raw cabbage chopped fine; one quart of boiled beets chopped fine; two cups of brown sugar, one teaspoon of salt, one half teaspoon pepper, and grated horseradish to taste, two cups of cold vinegar, and keep from the air.

### **J. Stewart's Cloud Biscuits**

(Nova Scotia)

Two cups flour, one tablespoon sugar, four teaspoons baking powder, one half teaspoon salt, one half cup shortening, two thirds cup of milk. Sift dry ingredients, cut in shortening, and add milk mixed with one egg. Turn

dough out on floured board; knead gently by hand twenty times. Roll three quarters of an inch thick. Place on baking sheet and bake at 450 degrees, 10-12 minutes.

### **B. Browns Butterscotch Squares**

(Irish immigrant from Sligo)

Sift together 1 ½ cups flour, 1 tsp. baking powder and 1/3 cup white sugar. Cut in 1/3 cup of butter, to coarse crumbs. Stir in 2 lightly beaten egg yolks. Pat mixture into greased 8X8 cake pan. Top with 2 egg whites beaten stiff, to which 1 cup of brown sugar has been gradually added. Fold in 1 cup chopped walnuts or 1 cup coconut or ½ & ½. Bake 20-25 min. in a 350 degree oven.



# ***AROUND THE SOCIETY***



## Solution to “The Way Things Were” – September 2007

The young girl, Barbara Savage (nee Thornton), was born and raised in Oakville. Her father owned Thornton's Bakery on Lakeshore Road. Barbara is currently the Vice-President of the Oakville Historical Society.

The photo, taken in the early 1940's, shows Barbara standing in the sports field of **Oakville Trafalgar High School** while wearing a cadet uniform designed by the school during WW2. The hat was modeled after the Lorne Scots uniform. Cadets were given training in marching drills and were taken to the rifle range at the Armoury.

May Isaac

## Membership Renewal

Your membership fees for 2008 are becoming due. For your convenience a renewal form has been enclosed for this purpose. Thank you for your continued support.

Andrea Stewart



Another season has come to a close for the Thomas House. I suspect most who read this newsletter, have visited the Thomas House at one time or another and I know that some actually make a point of visiting yearly.

Our volunteers are much appreciated for their efforts to give to those that visit, some from foreign countries, some insight into pioneer Oakville life.



Too many to name here, I'd like point out two who added something to the tour. Phillip Brimacombe graphically showed the layout of old Oakville and Donalda Fordham gave a working display of rug hooking. Others have gone so far as to show pioneer cooking over the fireplace.

**Phillip Brimacombe & Donalda Fordham**



Another aspect of the Thomas House is the opportunity it gives students to accumulate required community hours in order to graduate. Spring cleanup, painting and, acting as one of the Thomas children are only a few chores that will earn these valuable hours.

As well, the Society can offer opportunities for students at events and other activities. Do you have a child or grandchild needing to build up some community hours?

**“You’re in the movies now”** - During the summer, the Thomas House was used as a setting in the award winning show “Instant Star”, produced by CTV and Epitome Pictures. See if you can recognize it this fall/winter on TV.



Lance Naismith

## Harvest Festival

This years Harvest Festival was blessed with beautiful weather - cool and sunny. The Thomas House was opened, with fire cooked scones being offered, along with some tasty apple cider.



**May Mack (L) and Joy Sanders baking the scones.**

In addition to this, visitors to Lakeside Park were able to purchase Society post cards and literature, Save the Tree T Shirts and other items. Victorian games were showcased for the kids (and those parents still enjoying their second childhood) and the ever popular bake sale was active. Along with a display highlighting the Society, bookmarks, information brochures and copies of the Newsletter were also available.







## Ghost Walks

Halloween was just around the corner and the ever popular Ghost Walks were being offered. Lead by Ghost Leaders Wendy Belcher, Carol Gall and Francine Landry, with support from Society Volunteers, these walks add a spooky side to our historical buildings.

The fog rolled in, on some nights - the Oakville Harbour foghorn moaning its welcome. Something to plan for in 2008 – *the ghosts will be waiting.*



Lance Naismith

**Foggy Night Ghost Walk led by  
Esther Silverthorn (Wendy  
Belcher)**



## Heritage Conservation Districts – October Presentation

On October 17, Sean Fraser made a very comprehensive presentation on how the Province of Ontario establishes Heritage Conservation Districts. Sean is the Manager of Conservation Services, Ontario Heritage Trust.



**Sean Fraser & long time member, Marguerite Murphy**

The procedure involved is quite different from the very detailed specific basis for designating individual heritage properties. The approximately 50 people who attended learned that many factors are taken into account in protecting a heritage district: historical background, the natural landscape and general ambience within the community, as well as heritage architectural attributes.

Not only interesting but, very relevant for Oakville.



Walter Jennings

## **Christmas?? Just around the corner!!**

**A**re you worried about what the history buff might want for Christmas? Why not visit the Society and purchase some of our books. Just the thing for that special gift. In addition to our regular offerings, we are now selling **“Our Oakville”**, whose Editor in Chief is our own Wendy Burton. A beautiful book well worth reading and only costs \$10. for members. A worthwhile keepsake.

Also available is a new book by Julika Winkler, also one of our members. Called **“Seven Sundays”**, this book is about churches and the history along #5 Highway (Dundas Street). It is available from Julika at 905-315-8916.

Don't forget we also have note cards available for sale – **historic sketches by Don Sutherland**. These will be for sale at the Christmas Party and are always for sale Tuesday and Thursday afternoons at the Society.

Barbara Savage



## *THE WAY THINGS WERE*



- 1: What is the name of the store and its location?
- 2: What is covering the floor?
- 3: Can you guess the price of turkeys in the early 1900s?

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**The Oakville Historical Society: 110 King Street, Oakville**

**Archive Hours: Tuesday & Thursday \* 1PM to 4:30PM**

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