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

SEPTEMBER 2007

Volume 41: Number 3

SPECIAL EVENTS

September 30th

HARVEST FESTIVAL – Thomas House
(Lakeside Park – 1:00pm – 4:00pm)

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

2007

October 17th

“Oakville Heritage Committee”

– a panel discussion with Harry Barrett and friends.

November 21st

“Remembering Trafalgar Township”

– Ruth Blair Archival Research.

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

2008

February 20th

“The History of Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott”

– the first black doctor to graduate in Canada. Presented by his Great-granddaughter, Kathy Slaney.

March 26th

Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper

May 21st

“Pioneer Cooking” – Dorothy Duncan

October 15th

“Gun boats on the Great Lakes”

– Cheryl MacDonald

November 19th

“An Evening with Mike Filey” – Mike Filey

Note: Some have inquired about the tree in the background. Located on Bronte Road, north of the Queen Elizabeth Way, it is the tree saved by Joyce Burnell and friends and, the Oakville Historical Society was a partner in sponsoring the “Save the Tree” Fund.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Another busy summer season is almost over and there have been several noteworthy events in the life of the Society.

The **Concert in the Park**, put on by the Friends to honour Oakville's sesquicentennial, was an unqualified success. The turnout was great, the music was excellent and the weather was good. I sincerely hope that this will become an annual event. Barb Savage and her crew of volunteers did an amazing job.

Canada Day saw a new attendance record set for the Thomas House. Wendy Belcher had **370 visitors**. We've been seeing a renewed interest in Oakville's history in other ways as well. Our membership is up this year.

I would like to welcome **Bill Nesbitt** as the new supervisor at the Oakville Museum. Bill comes to Erchless with many years experience at Fort York, Dundurn Castle and several other museums. Don't forget that your membership in the Oakville Historical Society allows you into the Erchless Museum for free – just another benefit of membership.

You may have visited our website, www.oakvillehistory.org at some point. Under the leadership of **Norm Sadler**, we are making steady progress with the new, improved version which should go live soon. Norm has put a tremendous amount of work into the website.

Many of you will be aware of a programme called "**Doors Open**" and Oakville will finally be included in 2008. Our representative on this initiative is **Barb Savage**.

Barb is a very busy lady and has also arranged for some excellent speakers this year. Look for further information elsewhere in this newsletter.

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

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

COVER PICTURE: *Turning over the Reins* – Joyce Burnell, long time Society member and volunteer Supervisor for the Thomas House, passes the baton to Pat Mack. Joyce's hard work on the Thomas House was appreciated.

As we celebrate Oakville's 150th, we see certain aspects of Oakville's history remembered and displayed for our interest. Some informs us of important dates and happenings within the Town. But what really is history? Traditionally we have recited the important dates and the people who have had an affect upon our lives but, what really is important and, reflects the true nature of history are the memories of day to day life. The kind of stuff we all lived. We are not all prime ministers, important scientists and business movers and shakers but, people who live out our lives, enjoying what we have before us. We are all living history and, although maybe not recorded in history books, it is still important history. The following are memories of a few of those who grew up in Oakville and hopefully some of you will share these memories. For the rest of us, I think we can relate to these memories a lot more than what we studied in school.

Lance Naismith

Memories of Oakville during the 1930's

Do you remember.....?

On March 17th, Mr. Priestman would walk to Oakville from Toronto to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. We would all wait for him to arrive. He would then go to the **Gibson House** (later called The Halton Inn) for a free beer.

In December people would drive down the Lakeshore to look at Santa Claus, complete with sleigh on the rooftop of Ryland News.



GIBSON HOUSE

S/E Corner - Lakeshore & Thomas Sts.

Every spring and summer at dawn we would bait our hooks and fish between the piers at the harbour.

During the summer, we would swim in the cold waters of Lake Ontario and never think of pollution.

Every Wednesday afternoon all the stores on **Colborne Street** would close and you could shoot a cannon down the street and not hit a soul.

Every Sunday morning all the church bells in town would ring, beckoning people to church.

In winter, we would skate on the Sixteen from the harbour to the old mill and warm ourselves at bonfires along the way.

The horse from the **Gilbrea Dairy** (Bill), who was stabled behind the dairy at the corner of Trafalgar and Church, could always somehow escape his stall and take a midnight romp around the block on the sidewalk. He would then return home to his stall. A young policeman was sent to capture the horse; instead the horse chased him and bit him in the behind. The young officer resigned and said he hadn't joined the police force to be bitten by a horse!

On Saturday night, farmers, some in wagons, would come to town and shop at the stores that stayed open until 10 p.m.

All night a policeman would walk the main street, check all the store doors and keep us all safe.

Every day **Mr. Wayner** would collect the garbage by horse and wagon and when he retired it took five men to replace him.

Hourly, the Grey Coach bus would drive through town and stop at the **Gibson House** to take passengers to Toronto or Hamilton.

Every time the **Beardmore's Factory** was dehydrating onions, the whole town would smell of onions.

Every day at 12 noon, the **Basket Factory** whistle would blow to tell us all it was lunch time and again at 1 p.m. to tell us all to get back to work. The whistle would also blow when there was a fire. A system of short and long blasts would signal location of the fire



Watching VE Day Parade

L/R Mary Margaret Nicol (Marten), Beth Wilson (Milligan), Diane Gordon (Kent)

for the volunteer firemen. At every fire, **Art Tuck** would arrive in the fire truck with one hand steering and the other one turning a wheel to blow the siren. Every year the firemen would block off Church Street for a street dance.

Every election year, **Tom Blakelock** would throw a picnic over at the fairgrounds (located behind the Oakville Arena near Kerr St and Rebecca St.). Everyone would then listen to his long speech.

When a strong wind blew, there was a smell of garbage. It came from the dump that was located in the centre of town beside the 16 Mile Creek. It was overrun with rats.



“The Little Rascals”

L/R John Black, Bob Dynes,
Harry Barrett, Bill Russell

Every summer, **First Nation** people would come to Oakville to pick strawberries and raspberries on the fruit farms. They would whoop it up every Saturday night at the Oakville House.

During the war years, the farmerettes came and lived in barracks to work the local farms.

All the local boys would date the farmerettes and ignore all the local girls until fall.

Barnyard Bess would come to town in her wagon and yell greetings to some of the Town’s most prominent citizens (much to their embarrassment)

Every Saturday, we would all go to the matinee at the **Gregory Theatre**. It cost 11 cents, 10 cents to get in and 1 cent for candy. While there, we would watch Tonto and the Lone Ranger lasso some more bandits or watch Flash Gordon fly his space ship.

On Monday nights we would all hurry and do our homework so that we could sit by the radio and listen to **Lux Theatre**.

Every September we would all rush to Guild’s Book Store, or Busby’s or, Grinham’s to purchase new pencils, rulers and books for school – another year had begun.

Every week our Latin teacher had different coloured hair. Sometimes it changed twice a week.

Through good and bad times, some things were very predictable in Oakville.

P.S. Members and friends, you probably have other memories of Oakville. If you do, please send them to us and they will be put in a future newsletter.

Harry Barrett, Beth Milligan, Bill Russell and Barbara Savage.

Heart of Oak

*“Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer,
To add something more to this wonderful year;
To honour we call you, as freemen not slaves,
For who are as free as the sons of the waves?”*

Originally penned as an opera, the official march of the Royal Navy (and Canadian navy) is an oddity in that it has lyrics, something most marches do not have. It is a stirring march whose title refers to the oak hearts of the old wooden fighting ships of the Royal Navy. And Oakville had a part in the building of these ships, which ruled the waves.

When one discusses the history of Oakville, you must refer to the Oak tree, which has given its name to our fair town. Oak!!!! It certainly doesn't inspire one as the tall stature of the Redwood; the massiveness of the General Sherman Sequoia; the oldest like the Bristlecone pine; fastest growing such as the Albizia of Malaysia; or, the strongest such as Ebony and teak. No, this tree has gained fame because it never overspecialized, a tree that has made its mark in the temperate world. Its growth reflects mankind's spread and, it became the most useful of trees in human history. It taught humans forestry, its composition was easy to split and shape and, the making of planks and beams was only limited by its size. Oak was easily shaped by stone axes and subsequently with bronze and iron tools as it grew alongside mankind. It became a chief strategic material.

Oak has left a very impressive record through time - the old timbered houses show its strength and longevity; Leonardo da Vinci's drawings were executed in oak gall ink; Viking age oaken ships are still found; bronze age coffins are unearthed; ancient

barrels, casks vats and tubs still exist; and fossil leaves from 30 million years ago are found. The wood had its architectural and shipping uses while the lowly acorn was a source of food. While First Nation people flavoured acorns with maple syrup, the Kurds and Iranians used distillations of oak sap as a drink. The Apaches made flour from the acorn.

Oak has also been a strong symbol throughout mankind's history. In heraldry, it signifies strength, good character and stability and we know that the strong and faithful have "hearts of oak". The oak was the tree of the Greeks (Zeus), Romans (Jove), Norse (Thor), and the Celts (Dagda). Oak woods were a place of renewal and many a person was buried in their "suit of Oak". Because they were expected to last, surveyors used them to mark boundaries.

Until the middle of the 19th Century, the collier was a central act of human culture. Without the making of oak charcoal, there would be no plowshare, no pots, no making of beer, coins, cannons, hinges, swords, and glass for windows nor, the founding of wine bottles. The high heat content and steady burn of oak made this progress possible. The art of barrel making and tanning required oak as well.

And now we come to Oakville, a small port founded by Col. William Chisholm at the western extremity of Lake Ontario in 1830. The early traffic of this port centred around the wood industry, since much of the gristmill's produce was used for the settlers and farmers themselves in the early years.



Two hull support pieces from the "White Oak" schooner, built in Oakville.

Recovered from Tobermory.

Made from Oak.

The white and red pine were cleared from emerging farmland and sent to Britain to be used from everything from matches and Venetian blinds to ship masts (some on Royal Navy ships). Although white oak was also rafted as timber (dense wood supported by crossbars of pine), a large industry was built around barrel staves. These 3.5 to 5.5 foot lengths were cut in the winter and floated down "the Sixteen" in the spring runoff.

Oakville made a greater recovery after the economic and social turmoil of the late 1830's than other ports due to this established lumber trade and growing wheat economy. Although wheat and flour replaced lumber in the 1850's, the strong early lumber trade

established Oakville’s place in the Ontario economy. So much so, that shipbuilding was established in the port to transship the wheat and staves. Due to Chisholm’s stake in the lumber trade as well as his “reputation for truth and honesty of character and genuine soundness of heart, the local Indians gave him the name of ‘White Oak’”. He is quoted as stating that “at times the water was so thick with staves that a man could walk on them from the harbour to the dam, a distance of about a mile”.

Oakville’s name is grounded on a strong heritage that reflects the Oak’s honoured place in mankind’s history. Although oak is no longer an industry within its borders, it is nice to see the “Heritage Tree” on Bronte Road continues to grow along with a strong, prosperous and heritage rich Oakville. (Main source: William Bryant Logan’s book, “Oak, the Frame of Civilization – article suggested by Walter Jennings)

Lance Naismith

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In May, Harry Barrett and I represented the Society at the Annual Inspection of **1188 Lorne Scots Oakville Cadet Corps**. The Society is the official sponsor of this cadet corps and Harry, my wife and I, as ex-cadets, were very pleased to see the return of one of our cadets as Reviewing Officer.

LCol Geoff Parker, CD, was a cadet in the 1980s. He is in the process of moving from the position of Chief of Staff for 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group at CFB Petawawa to CFB Gaquetown, New Brunswick, to take over as Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment.



George Chisholm
OHS President

*Capt Shane Crawford, CD,
Commanding Officer of 1188 Lorne Scots
Oakville Cadet Corps, presents a plaque to
Reviewing Officer LCol Geoff Parker, CD at
the 83rd annual inspection of the cadet corps*

There are still Historical Walks available for September and October. Please take advantage of the fall weather by exploring **YOUR** Oakville. And, don't forget to get everyone ready for the educational and scary Ghost Walks. What better way to teach your children and grandchildren some exciting and thrilling history about old Oakville, while bringing back some memories for yourself.

Historical Walking Tours (2007)

| MONTH | MAIN ST. | HERITAGE HOUSE | TRAFALGAR RD. |
|-------|---|---|----------------------------|
| SEP | Sun 9 th & 30 th , 2 pm | Sun 2 nd & 16 th , 2 pm | Mon 3 rd , 2 pm |
| OCT | - - - - | Sun 14 th , 2 pm | Mon 8 th , 2 pm |

- NOTE:** Main Street and Heritage House walks start at 110 King Street, while the Trafalgar Road walks start from St. John's United Church, 262 Randall Street. **Tours take 2 hours.** All walks cost **\$12.00/ person** and light refreshments are served for the Main St. and Heritage House walks. **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED** – please call (905) 844-2695 to book tour. Special groups may arrange other scheduled times.

The OHS Annual Ghost Walks (2007)

| SEPTEMBER | THURSDAYS | SATURDAYS |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| 7:00 P.M. & 8:30 P.M. | . | 22 nd and 29th |
| OCTOBER | | |
| 7:00 P.M. & 8:30 P.M. | 4 th , 11 th , 18 th , and 25 th | |
| | | |
| 6:00 P.M., 7:00 P.M. & 8:30 P.M. | | 13 th , 20 th , and 27th |
| | | |
| COST | \$12.00 PER ADULT | \$6.00 PER CHILD |

- Please note:** Begins and Ends at the Society, 110 King Street. Following the Walks, refreshments will be served. **Length of Walk:** 1 Hour. Wear good walking shoes. **Register** early as there is limited enrollment. **(905) 844-2695**
- CASH ONLY – NO CREDIT CARDS.**

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were” – March 2007

The building is located at the southeast corner of Thomas and Randall Streets and was built circa 1904. It was the **Oakville station of the Hamilton Radial Railway** which ran an hourly service between Hamilton and Oakville until 1924. It made stops along the way and functioned as a commuter train. The tracks ran along Rebecca Street and when the bridge across the Sixteen Mile Creek was completed in 1906, it ran along Randall Street to the Station. The cars were run by electricity and the station contained a generator to supply the electric power.

May Isaac

Concert in the Park

With a beautiful sunny day, the Concert in the Park was well received by all who attended. Entertained by the **St. Paul’s Dixie Land Band** and, the **Oakville Wind Orchestra**, the attendees - some of whom dressed in period costume for the event, relaxed in the warmth of the sun and music.

Marianne Hawthorne arrived in style, driven by George Farrow in his Model T.





Piped in by James Sawyer, (L/R) Mayor Bob Burton, Marianne Hawthorne, Barbara Savage and OHS President George Chisholm began the festivities with a well received march through the crowd.

It was a relaxing afternoon for all who attended and citizens of Oakville, casually visiting the park, were given an opportunity to enjoy our lovely waterfront, entertained with a backdrop of inspiring music. Our interpreter at the Thomas House

was kept busy with a steady flow of those that wished to learn more about our heritage. The Erchless House was also open to showcase Oakville's history.

Volunteers manned the information booths, offering memberships, information and advice concerning the Society. Their efforts were much appreciated.

Getting into the spirit of the event, some dressed in period costumes, livening up the celebrations. The mayor's wife, Wendy Burton (Back Row/Right), made the presentation for the winners with the assistance of Marianne Hawthorne (Back Row/Left). The costume contest was won by: Joyce Stephenson – 1st place (Back Row/Middle), Gwyneth Lorimer – 2nd place (Front) and Pamela Rowley – 3rd place (not pictured).



Outreach

Wendy Belcher, one of our Ghost Leaders, is doing a special presentation for patients at North Ridge Long Term Care Facility. September 28th, 2007 between 2 and 4:00PM

Barbara Savage

Memorial Fountain Dedication



(L/R) Harry Barrett, Mayor Bob Burton, Harry Buxton, Mary Noad

On Sunday, June 25th, 2007, the **Memorial Fountain for Volunteers** was dedicated. Mayor Bob Burton attended, along with Councilors Roger Lapworth and, Mary Chapin. After the dedication speech by President George Chisholm, Harry Barrett read off the names of those volunteers who have passed on. It was a fitting tribute to those who had helped the Society in the past, in the presence of those who continue to build on their work.

Lance Naismith

Contemporary History for Another Generation

Last fall, we were confronted with the little known history of Canada's part in the training of spies during World War II. Armed with images of the secret camp, guest speaker Lynn Philip Hodgson shared the results of his research into Camp X. Copies of his book Inside Camp X were available for further study and reflection.

As many members will agree, our generation is also faced with encouraging the younger generation to explore these little known facts of Canadian history. Aware of the amount of research that accompanies the development of historical fiction, I would like to recommend two books for the 8 to 12 year olds by Eric Walters. Both books are written as tales of adventure of the two brothers, Jack and George Braun, back in 1943.

In Camp X the boys are living in Whitby and become involved with the training grounds for allied spies under the leadership of Sir William Stephenson.

In the second book, Camp 30, the boys have been relocated to Bowmanville where their mother has been offered a job as a clerk in a prisoner of war camp holding the highest-ranking German officers. Curiosity and circumstance lead to the brothers' involvement with an attempted escape of the German prisoners from the camp. Both

novels are sure to encourage young readers to find out more about our contemporary history.

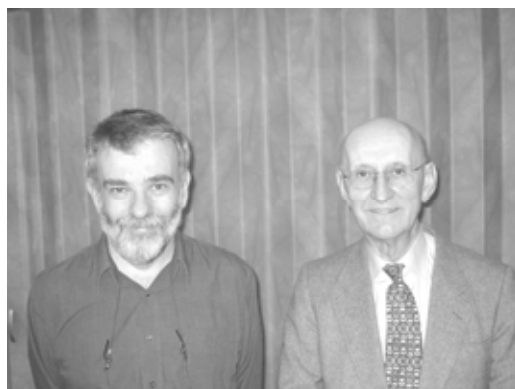
Look for Camp X (Penguin Group Canada 2002 ISBN 0-14-131325-5) and Camp 30 (Penguin Group Canada 2004 ISBN 0-14-301678-4)

Fred H. Hayward

May Presentation

On May 16th, Professor Neville Thompson, a retired Professor of History at the University of Western Ontario, gave a very interesting and in-depth presentation on “the effects of British History on the settlement of Oakville”. Not just focusing on Oakville, his presentation gave the audience a very broad look at British History and some of the factors that had an effect on our town. Well received and enjoyed by all.

Lance Naismith



OHS President George Chisholm & Professor Neville Thompson (R)



Ev Bullied (left), on behalf of the Oakville Historical Society, accepts a copy of Joyce Stevenson's newest publication, "Ever Faithful", a comprehensive history of St. John's United Church (1832-2007). The copy was donated in appreciation of the assistance Joyce received from the Society.

“Doors Open”

In 2002 The Ontario Heritage Trust launched Doors Open, Ontario. Over 2 million visitors have participated in Doors Open Ontario. Some of Oakville’s intriguing and charming sites will be open to the public. Admission will be free.

France was the first country to launch its Doors Open programme in 1984, followed by Glasgow, Scotland in 1990. The idea soon spread to neighbouring countries, including the Netherlands, Sweden, the Republic of Ireland and Belgium. In addition, Australia and some states have joined this highly successful phenomenon.

Planned for Oakville on Saturday and Sunday, September 27th and 28th, **2008** is the “Doors Open” programme. There is already a committee working on it headed by Claire Loughheed, Manager of Culture and Heritage Services, Recreation and Culture.

So mark your **2008 calendars** for this future exciting event.

Barbara Savage

MEMBER BENEFITS

Free Access to:

Historical reference library

Marine reference library

Archival library

Quarterly newsletter & lectures

Discount on purchase of the book

“Oakville & The Sixteen”

*No G.S.T. on “Oakville a Small
Town” & “The Story of Oakville
Harbour”*

Openings and Special Events

Annual Christmas Event

Fellowship & Socializing with

Access to experts on our local history

*Rental space available at reasonable
rates*

*Free regular admission to The Oakville
Museum*

*Discount on Walking Tours sponsored
by the Oakville Historical Society*

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. Can you identify this young girl?
 2. When was the photo taken and where?
 3. What is the uniform she is wearing?
- ~~~~~

The Oakville Historical Society: 110 King Street, Oakville

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

Tel: (905) 844-2695 Fax: (905) 844-7380

Postal Address: P.O. Box 69501, 109 Thomas Street, Oakville, Ontario L6J 7R4