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

**DECEMBER 2008**

**Volume 42: Number 4**

## SPECIAL EVENTS



December 5<sup>th</sup>

“Annual Wine and Cheese Party”  
6:00pm to 9:00pm  
110 King Street

March 25<sup>th</sup>

“Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper”  
Knox Church – 7:30pm

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

February 18<sup>th</sup>

*Heritage Matters*: Speaker - Michael Seaman

May 20<sup>th</sup>

*Bring On The Bloomers* - the liberation of women during Victorian Times. Speaker - Ken Weber

October 21st

*The War of 1812*: Speakers - Lieutenant Colonel Robert Nichol and Mrs Nichol (in costume)

November 18<sup>th</sup>

*The History of the Lorne Scots*: Speaker - Rick Ruggle

**Note:** Evening Programs all at Knox Church at 7:30pm for 2009, unless otherwise noted.

If anyone would like to be added to our "HERITAGE EVENT" email list, please email [info@oakvillehistory.org](mailto:info@oakvillehistory.org). We interact with seven other Halton Heritage groups in order to promote all up-coming Heritage Events.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The fall season is winding down and on behalf of the Board I would like to extend a huge thanks to **Barb Savage** for all her work in organizing two major events. “**Doors Open**” was a smashing success. There were over 8000 visits over the two day period. Many of those I spoke to were from out of town and make a habit of attending Doors Open events all over the province. Barb was our representative on the Doors Open committee and put countless hours into the job. **Many of our volunteers assisted by supervising and, working at the venues around town.** Next year we hope to involve more of our volunteers.

No sooner was Doors Open finished when Barb had to gear up for the annual **Ghost Walks**. Barb and her group of volunteer walk leaders and refreshment servers had quite a job. Some of the groups were very large. It's interesting to note that an increasing number of walk bookings are coming through our evolving **website**.

We have recently had two excellent speakers' nights. In October, **Cheryl MacDonald** spoke about “*Gunboats on the Great Lakes*”. We plan to have her return to speak on a different topic. In early November, a large group heard **Mike Filey** speak about, “*Toronto Then and Now*”. He had a great selection of before and after photos. Guess who organizes these events? If you have suggestions for speakers, you can contact her through our website **www.oakvillehistory.org**.

Many aren't aware that our Newsletter editor, **Lance Naismith**, prepares two versions of this newsletter: a **print** version and an amplified and larger version on our **website**.

Our annual members “**Christmas Wine and Cheese**” event is fast approaching. I hope to see many of you there on **5 December**.

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:** Cover art was supplied by Meagan McLellan.

# *Christmas Memories of Oakville*

*Reflecting gratefully on the good things in life  
with Barbara Thornton-Savage*

As the holiday season approaches, I once again reach for my volume of Christmas recipes that have inspired our family's celebrations for decades. These recipes are a kind of time capsule carefully documenting the festive foods enjoyed by our little Oakville community almost a century ago, Sitting down with a cup of tea, I open Dad's recipe book and remember. As I drift back through the years, I once again enter an enchanting world of memories and recapture the sheer joy of this magical holiday season from my childhood.

Suddenly it's Christmas time, 1939 again. I'm just eight years old and standing at the top of the stairs savoring the wood smoke from the oven in the bakeshop behind the kitchen below. I can hear Mom and older sister Joanie laughing and humming our favorite holiday tunes as I make my way down to see Dad.

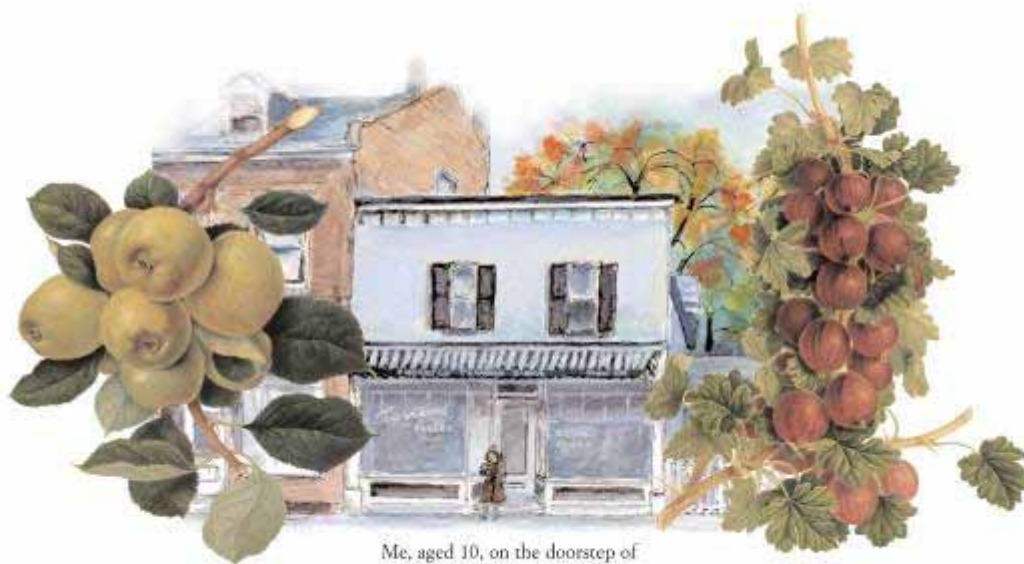
Dad's day began at 4 a.m. everyday except Sunday. All the bread and baked goods had to be prepared before the store opened at 9 o'clock. Dad was so proud of his little shop, Thornton' Bakery, on Colborne Street (now Lakeshore Road) with the cozy flat above that was our home. The large oven in the bake shop was wood-burning, so Dad had to start early to get the oven hot enough to bake the bread, cakes and pastries that would soon fill the shelves and window of one half of the store.

The other half was the children's favorite where the fragrance of cinnamon, orange peel, cloves and peppermint permeated the air. This was the candy side with baskets and jars overflowing with candy canes and humbugs, maple fudge, chocolate, roasted cashews and red skin peanuts. All sumptuous treats for sharing or giving. Best of all was the Mixed Nut Brittle. Dad made and sold tons of it. Unfortunately he never became a rich man because he really didn't count his hard labor when working out the price of the goods.

The sweet smell of peppermint filled the whole of the store and flat above. There were pans and pans of candy canes all made by hand. The whole family took part in the exciting task of making these sparkling festive confections. First, Dad would boil the fragrant toffee mixture until it formed a mound, he would then cut it in half. One half he

would pull over a hook, over and over again until it turned pure white. Pulling the hot toffee on the hook was strenuous work but Dad was strong and never complained. He then added bright red food coloring to the other half that he laid in strips over the white and twisted into a long rope. This was cut into varying small lengths and hastily passed along to my Mom, brother, sister and me so we could bend a hook in one end. We had to work fast as the candy would harden quickly.

I recall just before Christmas standing outside the store looking in at the candy window. I suppose I must have appeared wistful because a very kind lady suddenly went into the shop and bought me a small bag of candy. I can still see her shining eyes as she handed me this gift. I quickly realized she did not know who I was but even though I was a young child I knew not to spoil her act of generosity by saying that my father owned the shop! It's strange but seventy Christmases later, I still vividly remember her kindness.



Me, aged 10, on the doorstep of Thornton's Bakery in 1941.

Once again I call upon my store of Christmas memories as I push open the door and wiggle my way through the crowded shop. It's impossible not to get swept up in the Christmas spirit when its bustling all around you. The waft of warm butter and vanilla mingle with the sugary scent of a hot batch of cookies baking in the oven. But just now I've got a job to do. I interrupt Mom serving customers by giving her a little hug as I



squeeze past into the bake shop in the back.

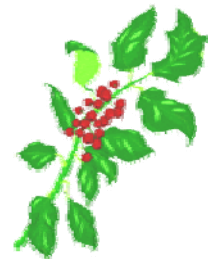
There, wedged between long tables holding all different sizes of dark fruit cake sumptuously topped with an inch of almond paste and a thin sheet of crisp white icing, I can see my Dad and sister Joan. They don't notice me they are too busy writing Merry Christmas and Season's Greetings on the cakes before piping a scroll around the border and adding a Christmas rose or two. Since I was not good at decorating, my job was to follow along and add a small stem of paper holly.

In retrospect, it sounds as if we all participated in child labor, but it was so much fun and such a sense of connection with the whole family. And there was always lots of free time too. As soon as I finished my holly contribution I dashed out to meet with some friends to go ice-skating on the river. It had been so cold that we were able to skate right up to the Old Mill built by William Chisholm.

Now it's dusk and I'm walking home along the river path towards the town. As I reach the high street I am greeted by a warm, golden light radiating from all the windows. A magical moment in twilight with Christmas bells ringing as I enter the shop. The sound gives me a sudden rush of happiness as I anticipate the festive time to come. On Christmas day the church bells chime Christmas carols which echo along Colbourne Street, always quite deserted on that most special of days.

It's closing time as I enter the shop. Mom just smiles at me as I scoop up one lonely gingerbread man left on the tray and whispers that there is a plate of sugar frosted mincemeat pies to enjoy after supper. Tomorrow Dad would be baking some Christmas cookies specially for us to offer Santa on Christmas Eve.

In retelling the story of my childhood I appreciate there are few things that stir warmer memories than the food we remember from that time. I would like to share with you one of my particular favorites - Dad's recipe for Mixed Nut Brittle - which I very much hope you will one day press into your own book of Christmas memories.



## *Ingredients for Mixed Nut Brittle*

2 cups fine white sugar  
1 teaspoon salt,  
2/3 cup of water

1/3 cup of corn syrup  
1/3 cup of butter

1/4 teaspoon lemon juice  
4 cups mixed nuts (Brazil, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, and cashews)

## *Preparation*

Butter a cookie tray with an lip at least 1 inch high, and place in the freezer.

## *To mix*

In a heavy pot, over a gentle heat, combine sugar, salt and water. Stir continuously until all sugar crystals are dissolved. Put in the candy thermometer, clipping it to the side of the pan, and turn up the heat.

Bring the mixture to a boil and then add corn syrup. Do not leave the boiling sugar unattended as it rises quickly in the pan and may boil over. Heat the mixture up to 280 degrees F. Add butter and continue to cook, stirring frequently. The temperature is very high and splashed boiling sugar syrup is extremely dangerous - as dangerous as boiling oil on the skin - so be very careful.

When the temperature reaches 285 degrees F, remove from heat and stir in the lemon juice. Immediately add the nuts and mix thoroughly. Pour onto the cold, buttered tray, and separate into clusters by pulling the mixture apart with the tines of two buttered forks. Work quickly, as the toffee will harden very fast.



*Editor's Note: As Christmas approaches, we all start to prepare for the festivities and make plans for our family activities. Christmas is also a time of reflection, a time to rejoice in our good fortune and hopefully, time spent with family and friends will take the edge off those hardships we have had over the year. This issue brings us an article written by Harry Buxton, from the pages of our December 1998 edition and some short notes from our December 1994 edition. I hope you enjoy this issue and your fortunes continue to prosper in the New Year.*

## **"THE TRADITIONS OF CHRISTMAS"**

There is no evidence that **Jesus** was born on December 25th. What evidence there is suggests that his birth occurred several years before zero A.D., most probably in the year 6 B.C. It was the second century that first used the date as the feast of the Nativity. In the year 350, December 25th was officially declared by Pope Julius I, as Christmas, the birth day of Jesus. The date coincides roughly with the winter solstice, the day on which the sun appears to move from its southernmost position, towards the north.

The day itself had to be rescheduled when the Gregorian calendar replaced the errors of the Julian calendar and eleven days were "lost".

There is a tradition in Britain that **Joseph of Arimathea** visited and at Glastonbury, planted his thorn staff which grew and bloomed each Christmas Eve, and so did its cuttings and seedlings. After the calendar change, a crowd of people assembled in Buckinghamshire, England, on December 25th (old calendar) to see their descendent thorn bloom. It did



**Commin's Music Hall \*\***



not. Back again on January 6th (old calendar), December 25th (new calendar), and the thorn bloomed. The tree knew best!

Christmas lights perhaps developed from an Irish tradition of placing candles in their cottage windows, to help the Holy Family should it pass by. Decoration of homes with greenery seems to have been developed from very early times - holly, evergreen boughs, and of course the mistletoe. The power of mistletoe derives from Nordic legend, when **Balder the Beautiful's** mother, **Frigga**, got all things - rocks and trees – to promise not to harm her son. Since Frigga neglected the mistletoe as harmless already, jealous Loki fashioned an arrow from it, and had Balder's blind brother Holder shoot it at the protected one, killing him. **Loki** was punished, but Frigga blessed the innocent mistletoe and it became a symbol of love.



**Oakville Harbour in Winter**

Incorporated into a Christmas garland and hung up, it became the "kissing bough", and any lady who "accidentally" wandered beneath it paid the penalty; she must allow herself to be kissed.

The Christmas tree is attributed by legend to **Martin Luther**, who, walking at night, viewed the starry sky through trees, and hurried home to place candles on a tree he brought in.

As to the benevolent gentleman we know as Santa Claus, he had his beginnings in an early Christian bishop, **Nicholas, Bishop of Myra**, in Turkey. After his death in 343 A.D. he became the patron saint of children, students, Russians, and also of bankers, sailors - even of vagabonds and thieves. In New Amsterdam, New York, Saint Nicholas became mispronounced as Sinta Claes - hence to us now Santa Claus.

The feast of the twelve days of Christmas, early was celebrated with generously loaded tables of good food. Seventeenth century diarist, Samuel Pepys, was well reputed to enjoy a good and hearty meal. He has been kind enough to leave us a recipe for mince pies.

## "To Make Mince-pyes:

Take a pounce of tongue after tis par boyled, two pound of suet, chop them very small, three pipins chopped small, and one lemon pill shred small, two pound courance a few raisons shred, one ounce of spice, the juice of one lemon, halfpinte of sack, some dates shred, a quarter of a pound of candeed cittron, lemon and oring pill, and sugar to your likeing, mingle well together for use."

Our own Oakville diarist, **George Sumner**, does not describe a very elaborate Christmas. Christmas Eve was a working day, as was the day after Christmas.

Christmas Day itself was usually the occasion for a few visitors, coming for Dinner and Tea. Less frequently George and **Mary Sumner** went to visit family. His monthly accounts for December show modest purchases to celebrate the season. A turkey (1873 - 98 cents; 1875 - \$1.35; 1878 - 60 cents!) was presumably the Christmas mid-day dinner centerpiece, though George never commented on its palatability. A Christmas cake was the feature of the tea, with mid-December purchases of fruit.

Useful articles such as boots and overshoes may have been gifts or winter essentials, but the luxury of slippers (for Mary and daughter Tilla) did appear, as well as a new dress for Mary.

But the thing that counted most for George Sumner in winter and, particularly at Christmas, was sleighing.

Typically, in spring and fall, the roads were a sea of mud. In summer, they were rutted and dusty. Not till the frosts and snow of winter did the roads firm up, and out came the horse-drawn sleighs. No sleighing was an unhappy comment; good sleighing or fine sleighing cheered up George Sumner, even if on Christmas Day he had to clear snow from sidewalks.



It was on the passable winter roads that **Mrs. Anna Jameson** was able to reach Oakville from York in 1837 (January). Travelling in a sleigh, "like a barouche," drawn by two grey horses, she reached the "**Oakville House Hotel**" kept warm on the ride "burned in furs; a blanket....." and "buffalo and bear skins heaped all over". During her couple of hours at the Oakville House, the stage coach arrived. "It was a heavy wooden edifice, about the size and form of an old-fashioned lord mayor's coach placed on runners, and raised about a foot from the ground; .....painted bright red, and long icicles hung from the roof."

The "monstrous machine" discharged eight men equally heavily protected against the cold. They proved "when undisguised", to be gentlemen en route to their duties in the House of Assembly.

It must be the lighter vehicle, rather than the stage on runners, which aroused in George Sumner's breast the sights and sounds of Christmas.

Perhaps we all keep in our memories and recall some aspects, some traditions of Christmas past. We hope they come back to you as happy thoughts at this season of goodwill, when "abundance rejoices and want is keenly felt."

**Merry Christmas!**

Harry Buxton

\*\* Sketch of the Commin's Music Hall by Karen Stephenson. Built in 1894 by Mr. Commin it was located on the N.E. Corner of Trafalgar and Lakeshore Roads in Oakville, until it burned to the ground in 1898. Pauline Johnson, known for her aboriginal poetry, did a recitation at the Hall.

### Winter Notes

From our archives, verses from a couple of Christmas Cards: This verse appears on a card sent by a member of the Lightbourne family.

*"Hearty Christmas Greetings"*

*"To you and yours. Glad sunny hours  
I wish you most sincerely  
Through all the year May fortune cheer  
And not at Christmas merely."*



And, not everything was sunny at Christmas. Another poem, this from an archival clipping, has a more plaintive story -

*"The wind blows high,  
O prithee note,  
Soon we shall need an overcoat.  
And if we wear  
The one we had  
Last Winter, Thousands will be sad.  
But if a new one  
We should buy,  
How can we pay the tailor guy?"*

And:

Remarkable snowfalls have been experienced at Oakville, a couple of times within living memory. One blanketed the Town in 1936. The Toronto Daily Star of February 14th, 1936, reported how snow and wind, piling up drifts eight feet deep, tied up traffic on the Lakeshore Highway near Oakville. "Dozens of automobiles, many trucks and buses, were abandoned along the roadside and their occupants took shelter in friendly farm houses." There was another very heavy fall in 1944. Snowbanks on Lakeshore Road were recorded in photographs.

But sometimes the snowfall just added to the beauty of **Oakville**.

And sometimes, the cold is to be enjoyed, by skating on the **Sixteen**.

**Are you looking for a Christmas gift for that hard to buy somebody in your family? Well, look no further and visit our website ([www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)) and click on PUBLICATIONS. And remember, as a member, you get a great discount on the books. It is worth the visit.**

# ***AROUND THE SOCIETY***



## **Solution to “The Way Things Were” – September 2008**

The photo was of the “*Anitra*”, showcased during the 2008 “**Open Doors**” event in Oakville. Sailing her off Dumfounder Island, is her Captain, Jamie Macrae and passenger Jane Hawkrigg.

Lance Naismith

Addendum: In our September solution, please add the following: “...! James Kelley, who is shown in this 1897 photograph’ should read, ' His son John, who is shown in this 1897 photograph, continued the business in 1893.

## **Outreach –Thomas House**

Pat Mack opened the Thomas House for 128 visitors (3 busloads) from Toronto. The visiting ladies were Chinese and spoke no English, so, translators accompanied them. Since Pat had lived in Taiwan for four years, she was able to speak a little Mandarin. Needless to say, the visitors were thrilled.



Barbara Savage



## October Presentation

Our October presentation, held at Knox Presbyterian church, was “**Gun Boats on the Great Lakes**”. With period pictures, **Cheryl MacDonald** gave us a very informative lecture on how the gunboats provided a sense of security to Canada after the **Fenian Raids**. Tied in with naval history from the U.S. Civil War and War of 1812, she gave an excellent overview that not only gave the politics of the period but, also the living conditions our sailors lived under.

Lance Naismith



L/R: Cheryl MacDonald; George Chisholm, President; Andrea Stewart, Membership Director



## The “Ghost Walks”

The Ghost Walks were a great success thanks to the many volunteers who helped, especially the three leaders **Wendy Belcher, Carol Gall and Francine Landry Smith**. It was Francine’s idea to develop the Ghost walks as a fund raiser for the Society. Next year **Julie Mathers** is joining the leaders.

Barbara Savage

## Membership Renewal Time

Just a reminder that **memberships are due** for renewal December 31<sup>st</sup>. If you have renewed any time between September 1<sup>st</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup>, please disregard this notice. If not, would you be kind enough to use the enclosed form to renew your **membership for 2009**.

Thank you for your continued support.

Andrea Stewart

## Acquisition to the Library

We have acquired a copy of “Mr. Jim - Personal Recollections of James W. Snow. Jim Snow worked as a farmer before entering political life, and was the president of Snow Construction Ltd., Snow Properties Ltd. and Oakville Investments Ltd..

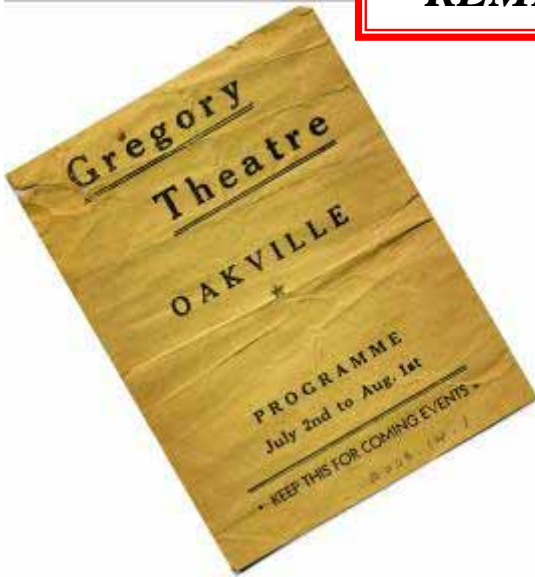
For more on his life, go to: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James W. Snow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_W._Snow).

Lance Naismith

## Can you Help?

We are in possession of a small copy of the “**Order of Service at the Marriage of Dorothy Hawthorn Cox to Max Miller Wyndham**”. If you are related to either of these people or, know how to contact someone, please contact Ev Bullied at the Society and let her know. It would be nice for a family member to acquire the booklet.

## DO YOU REMEMBER?



### Historical Walks

For those who have taken our Historical and Ghost Walks, I think you can say that they are a very enjoyable way to learn about Oakville's history. Our guides are volunteers who want to share the rich history of Oakville with those who want to know about how Oakville developed. Here is one such testimonial from one of our guests.

*Dear OHS*

*With nine other members of our Gourmet Group, we enjoyed a lovely tour of historical Trafalgar Road last Saturday. I hadn't realized that Trafalgar Road had so much history!*

*We should thank George Chisholm, our guide, for making it so interesting and informative. George's extra little asides added a lovely flavour to the written script and we all enjoyed it immensely.*

*Thank you all for your work in making the historical society such an asset to the town.*

*Heather Strucken*

## *Blast from the Past*

# McGregor's Hardware Store

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Shelf and Heavy Hardware  
Builder's Hardware  
Tin and Plumbing shop in connection  
All work guaranteed.  
Vacuum Cleaners to let, hand and electric.  
Paints, Oils and Glass.  
Screen Doors and Windows.  
Refrigerators.  
Spades, Hoes, Rakes, and Shovels.

**ALL AT ROCK BOTTOM  
PRICES.**

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**Jas. N. McGregor**  
Oakville                      ✪                      Ontario

Munn's United Church article from 1973

## *Oakville church 150 years old Sunday*

OAKVILLE — A church founded by itinerant "saddlebag preachers" on a homestead here will celebrate its 150th anniversary Sunday.

Munn's United Church on Dundas Highway E., believed to be the oldest active congregation in the Oakville area, will celebrate its founding at both 11.15 a.m. and 7 p.m. services.

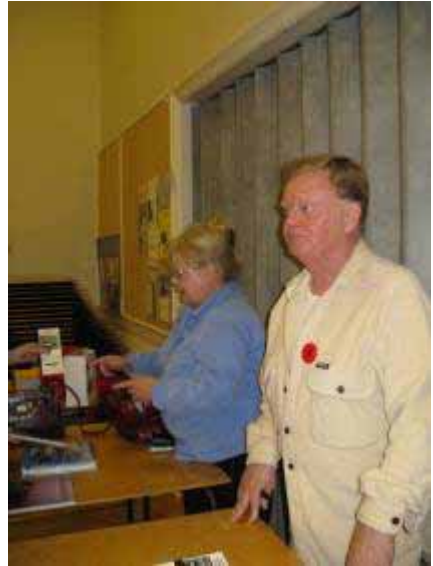
The efforts of the saddlebag preachers, who travelled west from Toronto on Dundas St., met with success among the early settlers in North Oakville and by 1823 a group was meeting at the Munn family homestead. The group flourished and grew along with the small community known as Munn's Corner and by 1826 regular services were being held in the school house.

In October 1844 a frame church was built on the northeast corner of Sixth Line and Dundas St. It was replaced just before the turn of the century with the brick church now being used.

The denomination changed with Church Union in 1926 but the congregation continued under the Unit Church of Canada and later joined with another pioneer congregation in North Oakville, Wesley Unit Church, to form the present group.

## [An Evening with Mike Filey](#)

On Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, our regular Knox presentations treated us to “**An Evening with Mike Filey**”, author, columnist and contributor to AM 740 radio. His passionate interest in Toronto history led to years of research and involvement in the Toronto Historical scene and his presentation style and humour held our interest. His presentation interspersed photographs and drawings of Toronto, then and now. The old photos evoked nostalgia, even for those of us too young to remember, and the glossy colourful photos of Toronto now, despite the loss of many of the old buildings, are quite beautiful.



Author Mike Filey

It was heartening to learn of the loving and thoughtful preservation of many of the old, handsome buildings: The Royal York; Old City Hall; Old, Old, City Hall (now St. Lawrence Market); and, St. Lawrence Hall, to name a few. Mike’s passion reminds us of the importance of the work of preserving our heritage, while allowing for intelligent development. Mike’s handsome book, “**TORONTO, The Way we Were**”, is now available in bookstores, just in time for Christmas.

Andrea Stewart





# *THE WAY THINGS WERE*



1. Can you guess the date?
2. What is the street?
3. What is the building?

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**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](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)**

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