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

MARCH 2010

Volume 44: Number 1

SPECIAL EVENTS

March 17th **The Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper at Knox Church (in the basement) – 6:30pm (NOTE DATE CHANGE)**

June 13th **Annual Picnic in the Park – Lakeside Park. Noon to 4:00PM
Bring your own picnic and enjoy the bands. Admission:FREE!**

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

May 19th **Mr Ken Weber: “Surely Not in Canada”. Be prepared to laugh.**

October 20th **The “Mississauga Disaster”. Slides and Discussion.**

November 17th **“Come down to the Sea in Ships”. A voyage in history with Phillip Brimacombe**

Note: **Evening programs are at Knox Church at 7:30pm for 2010, unless otherwise noted. Please visit www.oakvillehistory.org for updates and new events.**

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

NEW MEMBERS WELCOMED

**Mr. R. Burns
Ms. J. Kay
K & J. Crane**

**Mr. J. Sinnott
Mrs. A. McArthur
Mr. H. Leingingen**

**Mr. & Mrs. F.W. Long
Mr. & Mrs. G. Kerr
Mr. M. Seaman**

Our new members are from the local Oakville area, as well as from Sparta, Ontario and, Hudson, Ohio, U.S.A. We hope you enjoy exploring Oakville’s history.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Over the past couple of months, several members of the Society have been involved in a new initiative instigated by **June Hitchcox**. “*Oakville and the Sixteen*” is a fine reference book on the history of Oakville and “*Oakville A Small Town*” also contains much information on the history of our town but in a more anecdotal format. Unfortunately, neither one contains anything on our more recent history.

In conjunction with the Oakville Public Library, the Trafalgar Township Historical Society, the Oakville Museum and Appleby College, we have started collecting reminiscences of Oakville from the 1930's on. Our short term goal is to publish these electronically. A longer term goal is to publish selected stories in print.

Consider this an invitation to record your stories of Oakville from the 1930's to the present day. We're not looking for major works – 300 words or so would be appropriate and please consider submitting more than one story. Encourage others you know to do likewise. Some excellent examples are on Bob Hughes' website <http://www.oakville-memories.info/>. Typed submissions may be submitted at the office. Electronic versions may be submitted to info@oakvillehistory.org for now. Eventually our website will be changed to have a separate page or section. Photos are welcome. All submissions are subject to editing.

On behalf of the Board I would like to add my congratulations to **Harry Barrett** for his well-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award from the province. This does NOT mean that he can retire.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of **Greg Munz**, our relatively new Treasurer. Greg has recently completed a much-needed revision of our budget process.

I hope to see many of you at the **Annual General Meeting** coming up. For some reason attendance has improved since we turned it into a potluck dinner event.

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

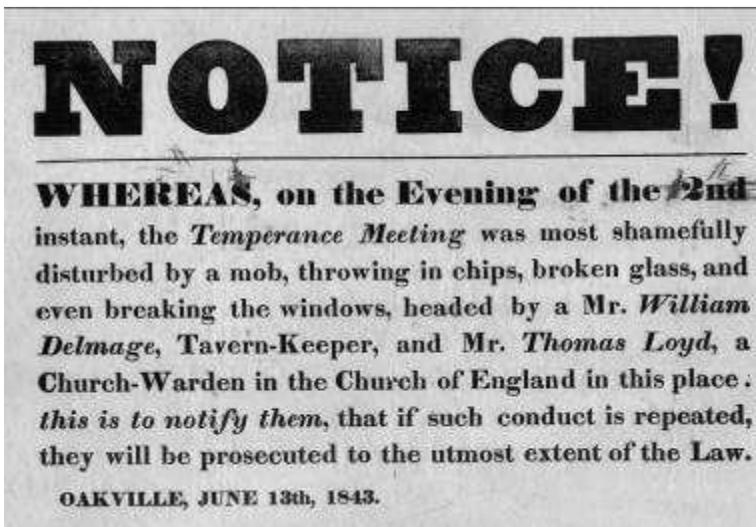
COVER PICTURE: Captain Robert Wilson as a young man.

Advertising insert artwork and compilation done by Carolyn Naismith

Irish in Early Oakville

“Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish”, the title of the first chapter of **Donald Harman Akenson’s** book, *The Irish in Ontario* forms the premise of this research into the early nineteenth century Irish settlers in Oakville.

According to Akenson, it is estimated that Irish immigrants to Ontario in the nineteenth century outnumbered those of the Scots and English combined. The pre-famine immigrants came mostly from the northern part of Ireland and especially from those areas in which there was a domestic textile industry, the linen industry suffering, as it was in the early 1800s from decline and dislocation. In addition, Belfast had experienced a population boom. These pre-famine immigrants, according to Mr. Akenson, though in reduced circumstances, were well above the poverty line and had emigrated for economic advancement rather than fear of starvation or oppression. Further, he observes, there doesn’t seem to have followed the fierce nationalism and ghettoization that characterised the Irish experience in the U.S, especially in cities such as Boston and New York. So the racist depiction of the Irish as “feckless, pre-modern, culturally handicapped, passive exiles” did not pertain to Ontario’s Irish immigrant experience.



**"Sober-minded as they may seem to have been,
there did exist some minor mischief!"**

The early Irish settlers in Oakville seem to have been anything but feckless or ill-prepared to meet the challenges of building a new town. Over twenty-eight percent of those listed in the 1841 Oakville-Trafalgar census were listed as having come directly from Ireland and that does not include the many more that had arrived via the U.S. and England. The majority of the Irish seemed to have come from the north of the country, particularly Ulster. They brought with them the skills

necessary to build ships and homes for the new town; they were carpenters and ships' carpenters, as well as labourers and mariners. An enterprising group, they seemed to have blended in well with their Scottish and English counterparts, and to have thrived and distinguished themselves.

Mrs. Chisholm-Matthews relates a humorous anecdote which illustrates this. When William Chisholm and Irishman Robert Baldwin Sullivan, Commissioner of Crown Lands, were inspecting a settlement in Owen Sound in 1841, the latter remarked how, following the inspection of one remarkably well-ordered and prosperous homestead, the latter praised the evident Scottish prudence, courage and energy, Mr. Chisholm replied, "Well, it may be all just as Scotch as you like to make it, but after all the man is an Irishman."

The early Irish in Oakville seemed to have evidenced none of the nationalist and sectarian sentiment prevalent in the U.S. Indeed there are stories of tolerance and harmony. Mrs. Hazel Chisholm-Matthews in her book, "Oakville on the Sixteen", states that the large percentage of Irish who settled in Oakville had come from Northern Ireland and many of these were Orangemen. It is noteworthy that the local Catholics took the Orangemen's celebrations good-naturedly, enjoying the music and dancing with the Orangemen. There seemed to exist in early Oakville a mood of ecumenical good will; the Presbyterians supporting the building of St. Andrew's Catholic Church, and in return, it is thought, the Catholics naming their church St. Andrew's in honour of St. Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. The land for the church was given by William Chisholm. Mrs. Chisholm-Matthews recognizes the families responsible for building the church as Thomas and John Sweeney, Patrick Rigney, Patrick O'Shaughnessy, John Caven, Captain Nicholas Boylan, the O'Boyles and the McDermotts.

One reminder of the early Irish is the story of Vinegar Hill. This name was given by the early Irish to a little hill running to the north of John Street which apparently bore a striking resemblance to the site of a battle. Remembered with much bitterness, it had been waged in Wexford, Ireland, in 1789 where many Irish rebels had been slaughtered by the forces of King George III.

Surprisingly, nothing is written of the Oakville experience during the famine migration era which began in 1845, and neither does the 1851 census show any significant increase in the number of Irish immigrants during this period. There is no record, either, of the typhus epidemic, brought by the Irish famine victims, which plagued the Eastern part of Upper Canada. The one cholera outbreak that was mentioned and capably handled by John Urquhart (1802-67) and a team of dedicated medical people,

had actually occurred much earlier, in 1832, and this earlier outbreak was recorded to have involved immigrants from Britain in general. It is recorded that during the summer of 1847 when the quarantine station at Grosse Isle in the St. Lawrence was overflowing with the Irish immigrants who had fled the famine and were dying from typhus in the thousands, that a Board of Health was established in Oakville to deal with those who might arrive in Oakville, but no further details are given.

It might be wondered if any residual nationalist sentiment could have been elicited in the Oakville Irish community by the attempts of William Lyon Mackenzie and his reformers to stir up popular sentiment for his 1836 rebellion. However, his efforts seemed to have met with little success in Oakville, the majority of the new Irish population having loyalty to the British institutions and to the Empire. Not much is known about the existence of any rebel sympathisers in Oakville; there were no arrests of Oakville persons, but The Oakville Company of the Militia played a part in quelling the rebellion.

Similarly, the Fenian raids in 1886 and 1887, propagated by Irish Republicans in the U.S., and meant to attack the British governors of Canada, were warded off by the militia. There is reported to have been some sympathy in Oakville in favour of the Fenians and though an uprising in the town was expected, it too was avoided. Some of our early settlers went on to become prominent citizens, others to prosper quietly but, all in all, they had a lasting influence on the history of the Town. Many of the Irish settlers named in the 1841 census were mentioned in Mrs. Chisholm-Matthew's book, allowing us to follow the progress of many of the pre-1841 settlers. Captain Nicholas Boylan arrived in 1821 and became master of the Trafalgar and owner of the Britannia after twelve years in the Chisholm employment. His was one of the families involved in the building of St. Andrew's. Michael Butler, arrived in 1831, was a Ship's Carpenter who worked as a shipwright for William Chisholm. William Creighton, arrived 1837, owned a general store at Dunn and George. Lawrence Culloden, 1833, was a cabinetmaker who produced coffins and whose son became owner of the newspaper, "The Sentinel" with John Diamond. John Diamond, 1831, was a highly respected man, an Innkeeper whose son John Segur Junior became a surgeon in the Canadian Artillery. Captain Maurice Fitzgerald, 1840, labourer, later



Captain Robert Wilson

became a Ship's Captain. John Forman, 1821, farmer, became Innkeeper of the Temperance House. Thomas Lloyd, 1835, whose occupation was listed on the census as "Gentleman" went on to keep a hotel which featured bears and raccoons! John Moore, 1820, educated for the Presbyterian ministry in County Armagh changed his career plans during his crossing to Canada when the captain of the vessel taught him navigation. In 1837 Moore was believed to have been involved in the torching of the steamer, The Caroline, and sending her over the Niagara Falls, in retaliation for the Mackenzie rebellion attempt. Robert Murray, who arrived 1835, was a Presbyterian Minister, the third son of a merchant from Banbridge, Ulster. He became Pastor of the Scotch Kirk and later became influential in the educational affairs in the Province. William O'Reilly, 1832, was a Tavern Keeper. David Patterson, from Ballymena, who had apprenticed as a Carpenter and Shipwright in Belfast, became a Shipwright employed by William Chisholm and later, as Pathmaster. Charles Reynolds, 1827, was one of the first merchants to stock millinery. Pat Smithwick, 1833, was a Tavern Keeper. James Streele, 1833, a Saddler and Harnessmaker was on a committee to prevent the spread of cholera. John Sweeney, 1831, a Ship's Carpenter, was involved in the building of St. Andrews; Thomas Sweeny, 1835, was a Ships Carpenter. Thomas Thomas, 1835, was a Ship's Carpenter, John White, 1823, Farmer, became Liberal member for Halton.



Captain George Wilson

noted for his kindness in bringing homeless sailors to live

with him during the winter. But it was his involvement in the Underground Railroad which was most notable,

Three brothers merit special mention: George, William and Robert Wilson. Their mother, the widow of a Linen Merchant from Ulster, emigrated from Ireland in 1817 with ten children in tow, settling in Perth. Three of the brothers arrived in Oakville three years later and were listed in the census as Mariners. George and William became Ship's Captains and married sisters from Port Nelson and Mrs. George (Mary) became a bakery owner. Captain Robert became the first master of the schooner, The Lady Colborne, and was



Captain William Wilson

smuggling stowaway slaves in the hold of his ships on their return across the lake from the U.S.

In conclusion, rather than the dispirited and dispossessed Irish immigrants one might have expected to discover, the early Irish of Oakville made a significant contribution to the building of the town and, in some cases, became influential in the politics, educational and religious affairs of the Province.

Editor's note: The foregoing article was based on our very early records and does not cover the entire history of this topic. We would welcome any further anecdotes or facts our readers may have concerning this very early period, or of the history of succeeding generations of the early settlers.



Our Society in the Winter – bench in honour of Art Bullied, a long time and dedicated member of the Society

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were” – December 2009

It is a present day view of the “**Romain Block**”, at the corner of Navy Street and Lakeshore Road. It originally was marked “Masonic Hall” and was emblazoned with the Masonic symbol. Masonic Lodge #400 met there.

Lance Naismith

Doors Open

The third annual Doors Open will be held again the last weekend of September. The first two have been a great success. New sites will be added to the growing list. Again, this year we will need **volunteers**. There will be more information in the next Newsletter. People who have volunteered in the past years have all enjoyed being part of the activities. So mark your calendar for **September 25th and 26th, 2010**.

Barbara Savage

Visit the OHS website at www.oakvillehistory.org for the enlarged and colour version of this newsletter and, explore the many informative areas of the website for event and tour dates.

White Elephant Sale

Jim Young is organizing a White Elephant Sale for **Saturday, May 15th, 2010** at the Society (9 am to 2pm) as a fund raiser for the Society. Please bring jewelry, books, dishes, gadgets, small furniture, etc, but **no clothing** to the Society.

WE need volunteers to help sort, price and sell. The funds will go to the painting of our Society building and you can have a little fun as well.

Barbara Savage

Presentation - The Scotch Block

Our February Speakers' Meeting featured **Jim Dills** and **Gloria Brown** of the Milton Historical Society. They spoke about a Scottish settlement in the 1820's. They gave us an interesting account of these hardy early settlers' land clearance, agricultural and industrial developments and showed photographs of the still existing Boston Presbyterian Church established in 1820 and, the many beautiful houses still remaining - including the Harrop House and the Kaneff house which was featured in the recognizable Trisha Romance painting.

The book, "**Halton's Scotch Block, The People and their Stories**", is available from the Milton Historical Society.



**L/R Gloria Brown, Andrea Stewart,
Jim Dills**

Andrea Stewart

*If you haven't submitted your 2010 dues, please do
so and show your support.*

Volunteers are Everything

Our Society exists because of the generosity of our patrons, our members, advertisers and especially our volunteers, who put in a lot of hard work ensuring everyone gets to enjoy the rich history of Oakville. For those who attend our presentations, we have Barb Savage to thank for organizing these events. As well, we should also thank those who put together the refreshments on those nights.

I recently received the following from Joy Sanders and I believe it deserves a special notice in our newsletter. **“Our sincere thank you to Grace and Herb Schroeder, who generously provide the refreshments for the Knox Church meetings.”**

Lance Naismith

Three cheers for Harry Barrett and the Town of Oakville. On February 19th 2010 they both received awards from the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Harry, the Lifetime Achievement Award for promoting Heritage and, the Town for their strong support of Heritage.

2010 Information Brochure

Trying to work out what to do this year? Maybe you are expecting guests to arrive for a short stay? Well, thanks to **Mary Davidson**, the **2010 Information Brochure** is now available at the Society and at various establishments around Oakville. Grab one and make some plans to enjoy the rich heritage of Oakville with some friends and also learn about the Society.

Lance Naismith

*Bored, listless or have some time on your hands?
Get out and show your skills by being a volunteer at the
Society. You never know – you just might find that niche that
gets you out of the rut.*

Trivia: In what year did Oakville become a town? And a city? Ans: Pg. 12

November Presentation

An interesting evening was spent November 18th with **Rick Ruggle**, author and official Historian for the Lorne Scots. During his talk Mr. Ruggle traced the history and development of the regiment particularly their connection with Oakville. (photo L/R * Phillip Brimacombe – Rick Ruggle)

Their history is recorded in a book by Mr. Ruggle which is available at the Society for \$10.00.

Barbara Savage



Heritage Month

Heritage month was celebrated by our Mayor, Councillors and guests at the upper level of **Season's restaurant** on Wednesday February 17th 2010. The building is of great Historical interest as it served as the Town Hall and Jail from 1912 to 1957. Two jail cells are still in the basement, the main floor was the police station and the court room and administration was on the 2nd floor.

Michael Seaman outlined the history of Heritage in Oakville with humorous input by **Harry Barrett**. It was an interesting and very informative session.

Barbara Savage

Annual Wine and Cheese Christmas Party

December 4th was an exciting time at the Society. The Annual Wine and Cheese Christmas Party was held and it allowed members to not only get to know their Society but each other.

Any Society is only as strong as its members and having a get together to discuss various issues only makes our Society that much stronger. Mayor Rob Burton and his wife attended and mixed with the crowd and shared some Christmas spirit with the Society's members.

Lance Naismith

Trivia Answer: Oakville a town in 1857. Still not called a City.



Beads for Africa Presentation

Cathy Benbow Plewes attended the Society and gave a very interesting and moving pictorial presentation of her trip to Africa. Of special note was her story of how the women in an area of **Kenya** would make beads, this being their only source of income to support **Insulin Dependent children and the Diabetic Clinic** there.

Cathy brought these beads home and, with the help of volunteers, had the beads strung into beautiful pieces of jewelry. These were offered to those attending and donations were gratefully accepted to assist the children back in Kenya.

Lance Naismith





L/R Cathy Benbow Plewes and Barbara Savage

Help Save A Heritage Home In Bronte Creek Provincial Park

The Park has an 1860 Georgian house, "**Silver Creek**", built for Ralph Breckon, farmer. It is one of the very rare houses left standing in Ontario to have been built of hand-made brick by the builder, Edwin Brown, from the clay on the property. It took him one year + one day to build the house.

Later it was to have been for Arts and Crafts (1970's), but plans changed. It was carefully boarded up to save for future use. Since



then, open windows, doors, missing shingles and bricks falling from the chimneys, have been an open invitation for animals, birds, rain and snow to enter - causing damage. **"Demolition by Neglect"**. The many buildings in the Park are architectural gems from the 1800's. We urge you to contact **MPP Kevin Flynn** to have this house properly preserved for future use. Perhaps the dream of eventually having this wonderful home well-used by many groups - schools, scouts, girl guides, families - all wanting a farm experience - over-night or longer - may even be fulfilled.

MPP Kevin Flynn - kflynn.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org - 905-827-5141 - 2330 Lakeshore W. (Bronte).

June Hitchcox

Older Views (1970) Note careful boarding which preserved building compared to above recent photo (Nov 2009) showing neglect.



OAKVILLE MEMORIES 1930 TO NOW

If you have ever called Oakville "**HOME**" - now or in the past - this is for you. There are 2 reading/reference books for the history of Oakville from its beginning to 1930, **BUT nothing from then to now**. If you send your stories, there will be.

The 3 Historical Societies, Central Library, Erchless Museum and the Town have combined to publish a book/website to fill this void so that future generations will be able get the "flavour" and facts of Oakville from 1930 to now. Personal, folksy memories - the Great Depression; World War II; the school I go (went) to; why I came to Oakville; our basketball team won yesterday.

Addresses, full names, dates, photos if possible - no limit to the number of stories. The boundaries are Oakville as it stands to-day.

Please tell your friends, neighbours - spread the word.

Articles and their writers will go down in history!

For examples, please see <http://www.oakville-memories.info/>

Oakville Historical Society: info@oakvillehistory.org 905-844-2695, 110 King St., Oakville ON L6J 1B1

Open: Tuesday -Thursday 1:00 to 4:30 pm

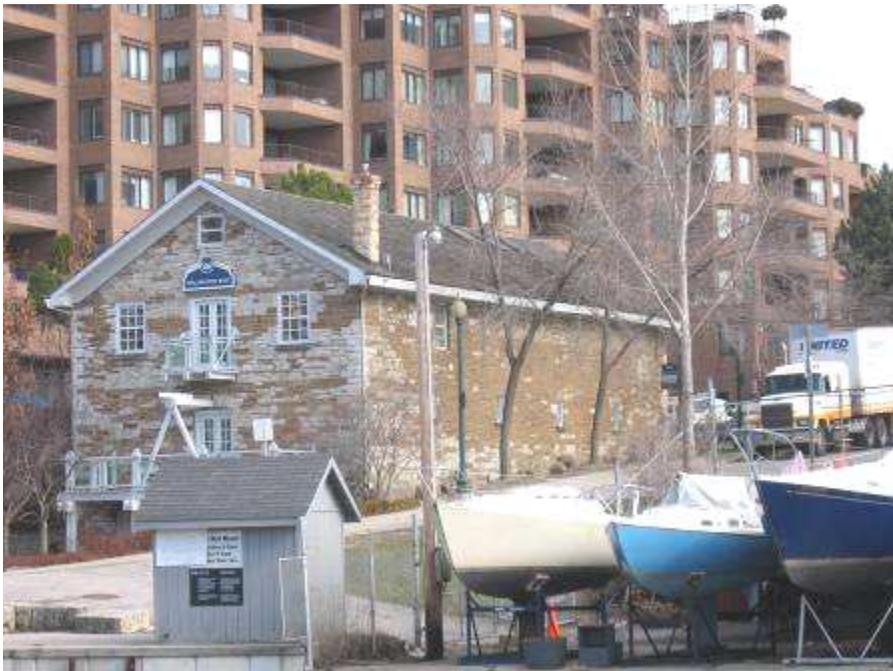
Editorial

Too often we hear from our friends how they were able to go to the U.K., Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East or, wherever and how they enjoyed walking down the old streets and admired the historical buildings so plentiful. How often have we heard people complain that they were castled out or, had seen more than enough old churches? But, they said it with pleasure as they truly enjoyed admiring the historical landscape of the old country.

People move to various places for many reasons, some because they are attracted to the atmosphere generated by our historical facades. Canada is a relatively new country in comparison to Europe, the Middle East or, even the Far East. Our historical landscape is only just developing. But, are we too quick to want the newest, the fanciest and most luxurious buildings we can, without any thought as to what is happening to our history. Long term residents of Oakville have seen many changes. Some for the better and some, well, more consideration should have been given.

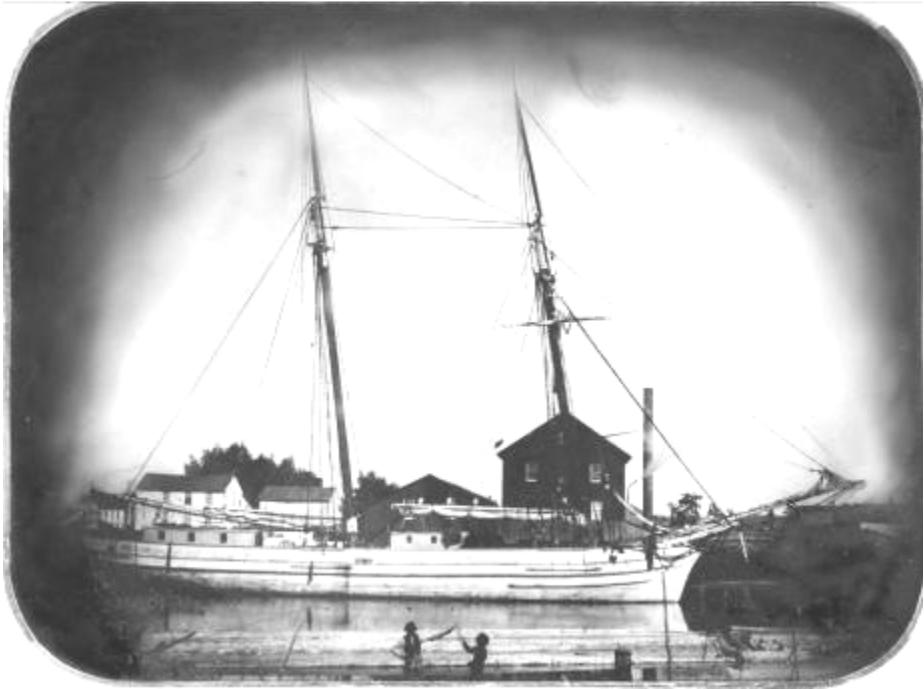
Our present downtown is an attraction to people. Why some people are moving here. Not all want plastic, stainless steel and glass facades that reflect the passage of people. Some like the historical grandeur offered by our older buildings - buildings that reflect history, stability, strength and warmth that cannot be achieved by our cold building materials of today.

Remember, new is not always good and yes, some old buildings need to be removed, but not because some allow them to deteriorate or burn down to ensure destruction or, by those buying up large tracts of land for future profit. Save yourself a trip to the old country and admire our own historical heritage. Maybe, in the future, we'll have Europeans coming here to admire our history - but only if we save it.



Will our history survive our future?

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. Can you identify the schooner?
 2. Can you name a Captain and an owner?
 3. Can you identify what type of photography was used?
- ~~~~~

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

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