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



DECEMBER 2011

Volume 45: Number 4

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011

**CHRISTMAS PARTY: 6:00PM – 9:00PM (110 King Street West). ALL MEMBERS are invited to the Society for the Annual Christmas Party. Come and mingle with fellow Oakville history enthusiasts and enjoy a scrumptious spread provided by the Friends.**

Wednesday, March 21st, 2012

**OHS Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Supper Starting at 6:00pm**

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

2012

Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup> 2012

**The Avro Arrow – a video and talk by Steven Shaw**

Wednesday, May 9th, 2012

**The War of 1812: Speaker Mr. Ken Weber**

Wednesday, October 17th, 2012

**Women and the War of 1812: Speaker Cheryl MacDonald**

Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

**The Home Children with focus on those who came over from the Dr. Barnardo Institute. Speaker Elaine Guther**

**All programs will be held at St. John's United Church and begin at 7:30pm, except the March 21st program (6:00pm).**

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**COVER PICTURE:** Celebrating an Olde Tyme Christmas with a toast in the Thomas House.

Photo credit: **Yacoub Husseini** – [treasurethemoment.ca](http://treasurethemoment.ca)

Make-up Artist: Alex C

Advertising insert artwork and compilation - Carolyn Naismith.

*Full Story  
on Page 26*



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This issue of the newsletter should reach you before the annual members' Christmas Party. If you haven't attended in the past or recently, consider dropping by to meet some of our new members and chat with older ones. You'll be sure to notice some changes in the two main rooms. Greg Munz and I have been hard at work painting and installing picture rails so that displays and exhibitions can be set up more easily. By early December it will probably still be a work in progress. Greg plans to install a permanent timeline showing events which have affected Oakville. The rooms look brighter already.

Our Ghost walks experienced major growth this year and our income was about double that of last year – but at a cost. Our five volunteer walk leaders, supervised by Wendy Belcher, conducted 36 walking tours, four bus tours and two PowerPoint presentations. They had assistance from several Society volunteers and, new this year, students from Oakville Trafalgar High School. These walks have become a major source of income for the Society and, in short, they were swamped. Please consider giving them a hand next year. Wendy would love to hear from you.

We were very pleased and honoured to receive a significant donation in memory of Norm Sadler from his two daughters. Norm was responsible for developing our website and passed away very suddenly. While developing and working on the website, the Society and Oakville's history became a major part of Norm's life.

I hope you and your family have a very merry Christmas.

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

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

*Society offices are open every third Sunday  
of the month – 1:30pm to 4:00pm*

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

If you wish to submit photos for the Print newsletter, please ensure they are **high resolution** – not email quality. Otherwise they will not reproduce well. Editor

## *Oakville's Secret Santa (Land)*

In the spring of 1958, my parents announced we would soon be leaving our apartment in Toronto to move to a brand new house in Oakville. I did not want to go. They said Oakville was a great place and there would be lots of new friends to make and places to explore.

When I finished grade one, we moved to Seabourne Drive just east of the Third Line, which was a few streets from the end of town. After that, there was nothing but fields, old farmhouses, empty barns, forests, ponds and creeks. The houses on Seabourne ended at Tansley Drive, but the street continued south to Rebecca all the way down to Lou's BA. That's right, there was no Hopedale Mall or even its predecessor, Hopedale Plaza – just fields, a woodlot, a great tobogganing hill, and a place for our parents to buy gas and for us to buy hockey cards and inflate bicycle tires.

The day after moving in, there was a knock on the door. Dad answered and a young six-year old boy, said, "Hi, my name is Don. I saw a boy move in here. Would he like to play?" The answer, of course, was yes. Don Buckland and I became great boyhood friends and were like brothers until his passing in 2008.



**Santa Land – Village area**



**Oakville's Dolores Buckland (centre) with relatives visiting from Nova Scotia**

On a hot day in the summer of 1958, Don and I were sitting on the Buckland's front porch with nothing much to do. Then Don piped up, saying, "Hey, Roy, do you want to go to Santa Land?" I asked what Santa Land was and he enthusiastically explained it was a place with a building shaped like old Mother Hubbard's shoe, miniature houses for the three little pigs, an igloo you can get into, a big corn on the cob to eat lunch in, a big apple, and lots of other things. Then, he added, "Oh yeah, there is also a castle and a huge swimming pool with a raft in it." I looked at him and thought to myself, my new friend is nuts. He insisted we should go and I agreed.

We walked to the top of Seabourne and then turned left onto Bridge Road, which took us over to the Third Line. We then walked north until the houses ended just before Al's Esso on the southwest corner of Third Line and Speers Rd. There were a couple of factories north of Speers and south of the QEW. After that, there was nothing but farms all the way to Milton, which itself, was mostly farms.

South of the highway, there was a bridge over the 14-Mile Creek. The Third Line had only one lane in each direction and today, I don't think motorists even realize they are on that bridge. Nonetheless, the real fun began there because that is where we left the road and scrambled down the embankment to the creek below.

We then headed west for about the length of a football field or a bit more. Then, the creek swung sharply north toward the highway. I had no clue where we were, but Don knew the terrain. I could hear the highway traffic getting louder and I was now starting to believe a little bit more in Santa Land. Then, Don said, "We need to go under the

highway now”. Walking up the creek in the huge culvert under the QEW highway was a memorable experience and a very cool part of going to Santa Land.

When we surfaced on the other side, Don told me we were very close. After about five more minutes of following the creek, walking along a path at the west end of a farm that still exists today, there was a small hill. At the top, there it was – Santa Land.

I think there were about ten buildings, but that was 53 years ago, and I never did count them. Some were in rough shape, but others were still good, including Old Mother Hubbard’s shoe. However, weather and kids had taken their toll.

We then crossed the creek on the west side of the village and started the steep climb out of the valley. When we reached the top, it was flat again and, to my amazement, there they were – the castle and the pool. The apple and corn on the cob buildings (food stands) were there, too, but nobody was using them to sell hotdogs and drinks anymore. I couldn’t believe my eyes.

Don and I went to Santa Land many times and in all seasons, including the dead of winter. It was always like a Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn adventure and I will never forget that feeling. We were lucky to grow up in west Oakville at that time.

*The following historical account of Santa Land is based on information provided by ten or twelve people who lived in the area at the time or who were directly involved in the Santa Land project. I thank each and every one of them.*

Bill Adams was the creator and promoter of Santa Land. Adams was an entrepreneur and promoter from Hamilton, who later lived in Burlington for many years



**Mid-fifties clothing styles**

until his passing five or six years ago. His plan was to build an amusement park, based on Santa's Village in Bracebridge.

In the early to mid 1950s, the QEW was not the major highway it is today. In fact, local farmers also used it to move tractors and implements from one farm or field to another. This was common practice for many years, and may have still been the case when Santa Land was built. There were fewer highway lanes then and no service roads, which made it possible for visitors to use the main entrance, which was directly off the north side of the highway, a short distance west of the Third Line.



### **Visitors to Santa Land**

Research indicates that Santa Land most likely opened in the summer of 1956 and closed in 1957. It was not intended to be open in the winter months and, as one person stated, "It wasn't built to last."

In 1956, John Patterson was a young sign painter in his late teens or early 20s. Adams asked him if he could paint QEW road signs for Santa Land, which he did. The signs were 8 feet by 4 feet and hard to miss. But Patterson remembers when the provincial government informed Adams that he could no longer use his entrance off the QEW. The highway signs had to come down and Patterson was asked to quickly paint new ones that would direct highway traffic up the Third Line to Upper Middle Road, where cars could turn left (west) to a new entrance at the north end of the valley. The road signs were made, as were a number of other ones to guide people along the trails

from the new entrance on Upper Middle Road to the village, pool and castle at the south end. The loss of the main entrance on the QEW spelled the beginning of the end for Santa Land.



**Did these Nova Scotia boys find Rudolph in Oakville?**

The pool was about 80 feet long and was built in the shape of a snowman. The head was 20 feet long and 10 to 12 feet deep with a diving board. At the far end, near the castle, there were two wading pools, which were the snowman's feet. They were one foot deep. The mid section was the snowman's belly. It was three to four feet deep. The snowman had his buttons painted on the bottom of the pool. The rest was painted snow white with blue trim.

In those days, much of swimming pool construction was manual. Machines were used, but not like today. It took a crew of 42 men 13 days to build the Santa Land snowman pool and adjacent change room. The pool was built by Oakville Custom Swim Pools Ltd., now called Canada Pools. It is the same company that built the pool in the Oakville Club.

The general consensus today is that Santa Land opened too soon because Adams was under financial pressure to make loan payments. Combined with the loss of the main entrance, he was forced to declare bankruptcy and close the facility.

Today, just north of the old Santa Land site, there is a ballpark and city paths to enjoy walks through the valley. In 1956-57, there was Santa's village, a petting zoo, elves, paper mâché figurines, and even a Santa Land Princess. The first princess was Sandra Stayton, who won a contest to earn the position, which was to be friendly with visitors and introduce them to Santa Claus who was in the castle next to a very large and unusual swimming pool.



### **Bill Adams: creator, promoter and owner of Santa Land**

Unfortunately, when Don and I showed up in 1958, the pool was a green, slimy swamp with turtles, frogs and who knows what else. But, it did have a raft, and we sure used it.

People say, “If you build it, they will come”, but it isn’t always true.

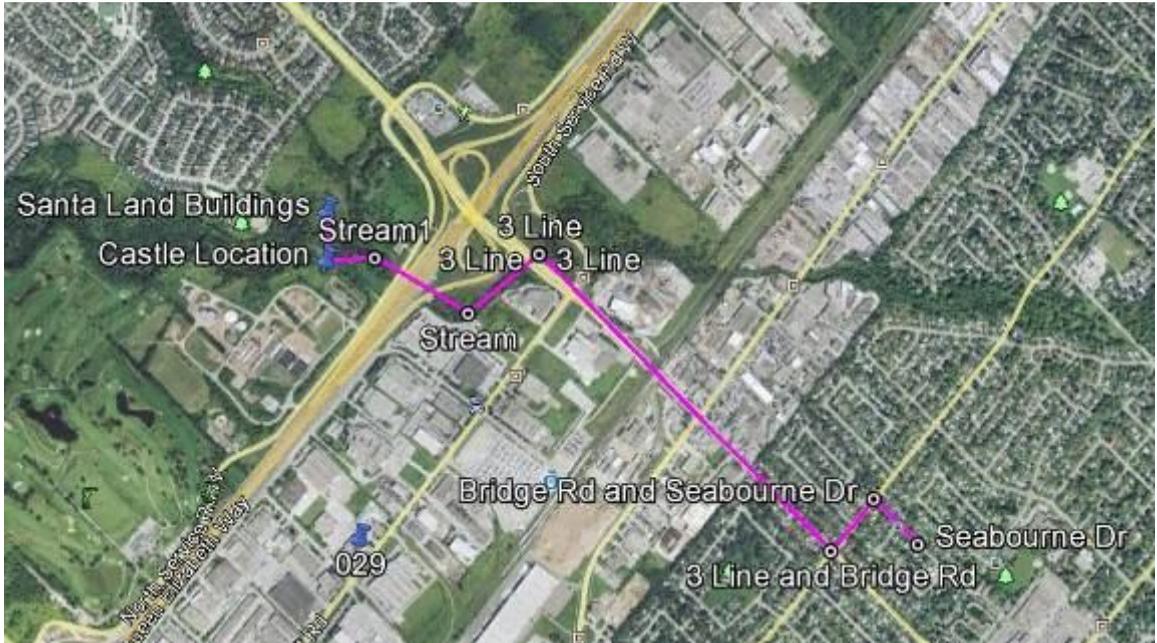
It was a great time to be a young boy growing up in the Third Line area where Oakville stopped, and exploring began. At age seven, nothing was more fun than going to Santa Land.

Thanks Don.

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. For this article, we are lucky to not only have some pictures taken while Santa Land was open but some taken by the author during his re-discovery of this Oakville piece of history. Follow along on this magical tour with the following pictures. Editor

Roy Maxwell

## Re-discovering the Past



### **Roy and Dons' Adventure Path**

*Go west young man and follow the creek north, under the highway, and keep going until you reach Santa Land.*



**Author, standing under the Third Line bridge more than 50 years later. Looking towards Santa Land.**

**The trees you can see are at the south end where we began our trek under the Q.E.W. It was not as long in the 1950's prior to building the Service Roads. The lighter coloured concrete shows where it was extended later. It was always a fun walk and easier in the winter when the creek was frozen.**



**This is the north end and the kids' gateway to Santa Land.**



**Almost there!!!!**

**The old Santa Land site (2011). The creek is on the left behind the trees. This is the place where Santa's village was located – a few strong baseball throws south of where the ball park is today.**





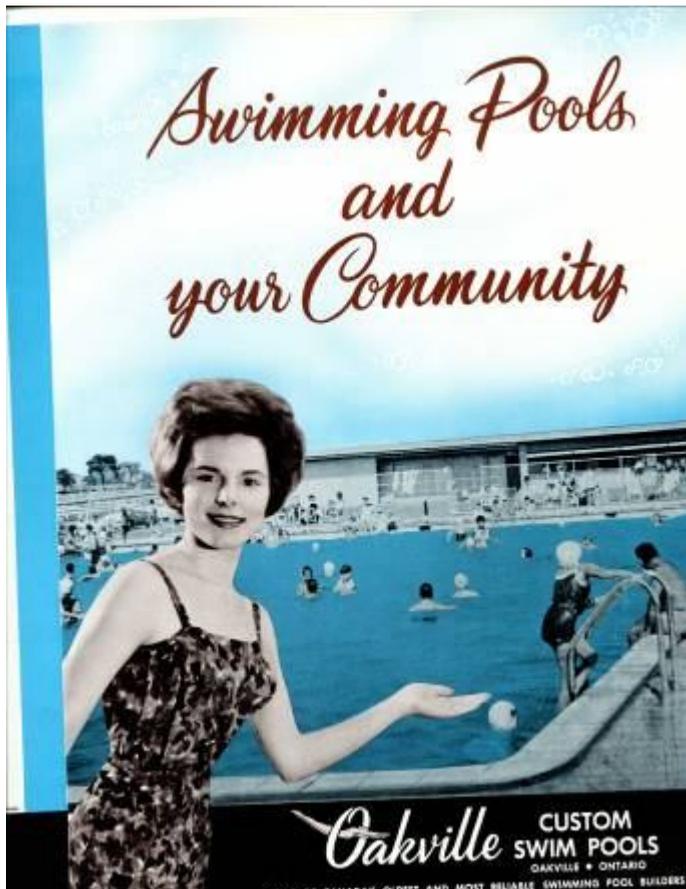
**This is where there used to be a bridge across the creek that linked the village in the valley to the castle and pool above on the west side of the creek. It was a steep walk up railway tie steps to get to the top. My memory tells me that the bridge and steps were where two trees now hang over the creek and the bit of land and grass in the middle. If I am wrong, it won't be by much.**



Although a bit fuzzy, this picture showing the construction of the pool is too valuable to omit. (Like our memories, even the fuzzy ones are interesting – Ed.)

The snowman pool is starting to take “shape”.





**This is a 1950's brochure for Oakville Pools, whose name was changed to Canada Pools because "Oakville" sounded too local. They are still located on Speers Road, east of the Third Line. Their office may be the oldest building on Speers Rd.**

## References and Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people who are all former or present-day Oakville residents. Each provided valuable information to help explore the history of Santa Land.

- Jean Bennett (valuable information and contacts)
- Rob Buchanan (2010-11 photos)
- Dolores and Steve Buckland (1950s Santa Land photos; perhaps the only ones in existence)
- Terry Buckland (for his own Santa Land memories and for finding and sharing the Buckland family's Santa Land photos)
- Canada Pools (for providing extremely valuable Santa Land history and photos of the snowman pool)
- J.D. Patterson (for providing first-hand knowledge about Santa Land, its road signs, and traffic challenges)
- Glenn Powell (valuable contacts)
- John Rogers (historical information about farm ownership on the North Service Road between Bronte Road and Third Line)
- Nance and Rod Waterman (valuable contacts)
- Roy Maxwell

Do you have any Oakville “Memories” you’d like to share? If so, contact June Hitchcox at the Society.

**Your memories are tomorrow’s history lesson.**

# ***AROUND THE SOCIETY***



## **Solution to “The Way Things Were” – September 2011**

The “Sea Gull”, launched in 1864, initiated trade with Port Natal in South Africa. Built by John Simpson at his yard in Oakville, the cargo it carried on this epic voyage were buggies and prefab houses (first in South Africa).

Phillip Brimacombe

### **Thomas House**

Pat Mack, our long-time interpreter at Thomas House kindly volunteered on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 to host a group of 40 visitors from the Halton Multicultural Council, Adult ESL Learner Group.



Their tour also included the Post Office and Erchless Museum. We are always learning from our visitors as we discuss use of everyday implements and how they are so similar across many cultures. Many times we hear, "My grandmother used one of those in (Switzerland), (China), (Finland)."

Susan Wells

## Visitors to Thomas House during 2011 Season

APPROXIMATE TOTAL     **3,400**

VISITORS FROM COUNTRIES OTHER THAN CANADA:

<u>Country</u>	<u># Entries</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u># Entries</u>
Africa	2	Australia	4
Brazil	1	Bulgaria	1
China	2	Corsica	1
Ecuador	1	Finland	1
France	4	Germany	6
Holland	1	Hungary	4
Israel	1	Italy	5
Japan	2	Korea	4
Mexico	6	Pakistan	1
New Zealand	1	Poland	4
Portugal	2	Romania	1
Russia	1	Slovakia	2
Switzerland	2	Taiwan	1
Thailand	1	Trinidad & Tobago	2
Turkey	1	Ukraine	2
UK: England	12	Venezuela	1
Scotland	2		
Ireland	3		
Wales	1		

**35 Countries**

**88 Sets of families/individuals**

Mary Davidson

## Presentation

**S**tonehooking, smuggling and sailing at the Oakville Harbour. These intriguing topics and more were engagingly presented by your OHS member and author, Phillip Brimacombe.

Phil, always ready to spread his ample knowledge of local historical events, filled in at short notice and engaged the audience with stories and facts concerning Oakville's Harbour history, weaving in stories of the lives of captains and builders. Thanks Phil, for your dedication.

Susan Wells

## Christmas Presents?

**L**ooking for Christmas presents? The Oakville Historical Society has small and larger prints of "Olde Oakville" suitable for framing, by artists Don Sutherland and Michael Hitchcox. We invite you to drop in Tuesday or Thursday afternoons - 1:00 am to 4:30 pm - and have a look! Books? We have a fine selection of books related to Oakville's history and, if you have someone who loves maps, we have maps for sale that show all the sunken ships in Lake Ontario. Support your Society and give someone a gift they will love.

June Hitchcox

## Ghouls, Sparks, Beavers and Spirits!

**T**he ghost walks took on a new "life" this year with around 500 souls attending; about a third of them from youth groups, and many of them in Halloween costumes. Children and adults alike were delighted to hear the stories of Oakville's earliest inhabitants, some of whom have never left us!

There were some forty-two walks, ably guided by the ghosts of Esther Thomas (Wendy Belcher), her husband, Merrick (Phillip Brimacombe) and son Murray (Daniel Fassler, aged nine), together with Buccaneer Jacques (Carol



Gall) and one of Oakville's early mayors, Peter MacDougald (Stewart Sherriff).

It was a very busy time and we are grateful to the more than a dozen volunteers who helped host the events, as well as the local high school students who came out to help.

Andrea Stewart

**Esther and Merrick Thomas**





**Merrick Thomas chatting up the visitors.**

### **The Cottages at 108 and 110 King Street**

**T**hese Cottages on the north side of the Erchless grounds were designed by sisters Hazel Matthews and Dr. Juliet Chisholm, great-granddaughters of Oakville's founder William Chisholm. Juliet Chisholm was an artist and pediatrician, Hazel an author and historian.

In 1953 the two women moved into the newly-built cottages, leaving the Customs

House occupied by Hazel's son Monty Hart and his family. Juliet lived at 108, Hazel in 110.

Number 108 was conceived by Juliet as a Normandy cottage with stone floors, inspired by the years she had spent in France. The pinkish tint of the floor tiles is a characteristic of the Credit Valley stone used in their construction. Hazel's residence at Number 110 was in a more contemporary style. The differences in design went as far as the heating systems; 108 (Juliet's) was heated using forced air, whereas 110 (Hazel's) had radiators installed for a hot water heating system. There was a great deal of second-hand material used in the construction of these two homes, possibly due to the shortages brought about by World War II.

By the mid-70s, both the Erchless family home and the Cottages were occupied by tenants. The Town of Oakville purchased the Erchless Estate in 1977 and continued renting the properties for some time. The Customs House was restored and opened to the public in 1983, while the Erchless family home did not open to the public until 1991.

In 1992 the Oakville Historical Society reached an agreement with the Town of Oakville whereby the Society was granted possession of the Cottage at 110 King Street.

Juliet's Cottage at 108 King continued to be occupied by its tenant, Commodore Robertson. Eventually the Society took over the second cottage also and commenced a three-year renovation project to join the two buildings into one. Vintage materials were used to maintain an authentic appearance.

The renovated building now houses the Society's archives, a collection of historical documents pertaining to the history of the Town of Oakville.

### [The Importance of Heritage](#)

**T**oo often I hear that saving our Heritage isn't good business. I guess for those in the salvage business or buy/tear down real estate market that is true.

But, it has been proven that Heritage designations do not reduce value. And, they do not stop you from fixing up your place. The interior is usually yours to do with what you want. The exterior is another matter. Most people buy a home because they not only like the house but like the character of the area. So, why should people come in and tear down what people bought in the area in the first place? Heritage can protect value, character and maintain standards. What's wrong with that?

Lance Naismith

## Painting up a Storm

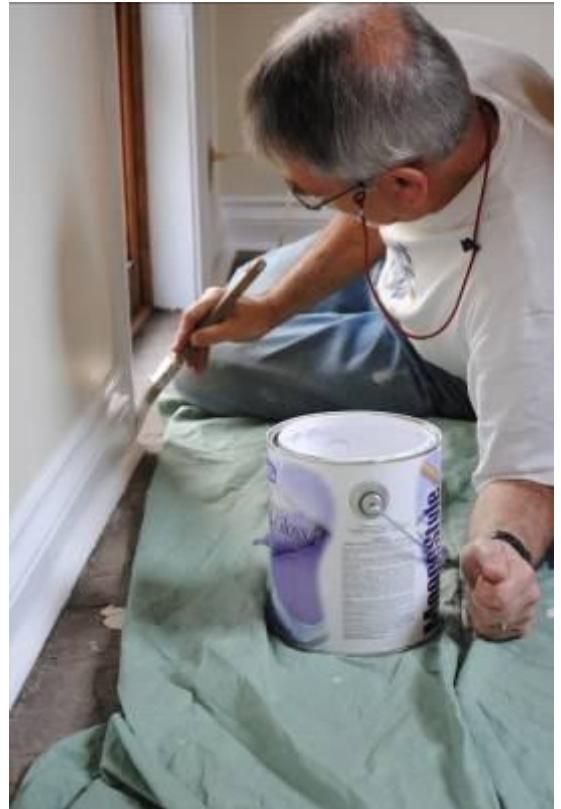
Our Society president, George Chisholm and Treasurer, Greg Munz have been painting up a storm at the Society offices. The great room with the fireplace and the front lobby area were in dire need of some tender care, so they both went at it and have done a fine job. As well, they installed a display system which will enhance our ability to show various educational packages. As well, they have been working on the visitor washroom.

Thanks guys for a great job.

Lance Naismith



**Greg staining up a storm.**



**George having a rest (?) while painting.**

## Doors Open

**D**oors Open this year exceeded all expectations with 7,026 visits to all sites - which is more than a thousand over the previous year. The most frequently visited sites were The Old Post Office: 850 visits, Thomas House with 785 visits, and Erchless with 654 people going through. There were 506 visits to our OHS offices.

Phillip Brimacombe's heritage tour received much appreciation from local visitors and out-of-towners alike: Phillip looked like the Pied Piper as the crowds following seemed to grow with each block! On behalf of the Doors Open Committee I would like to thank all our volunteers for their hard work and willingness to help Oakville host this event.



Andrea Stewart





## The Making of the Cover

Early April – just the time to celebrate Christmas. The front cover of the December 2011 edition of the Society’s newsletter was a project spawned from a “nice to have” type of conversation that took a life of its own and is the result of a lot of creative work by a number of people who enjoyed recreating a moment in history.

On the eve of the photo shoot, casual passersby would have seen the Thomas House lit up inside by flickering candles, with the laughter of children punctuating the still air of Lakeside Park. Curiosity would have stimulated some to investigate this strange apparition and they would have been rewarded by a sudden chorus of Christmas songs accompanied by a fiddler. Suddenly, the Thomas House would have exploded with bright flashes and raising voices – adult and child alike. What would have seemed like ghosts of Christmas past would suddenly be revealed as a photo shoot of costumed volunteers of the Oakville Historical Society representing a typical Christmas celebration by the Thomas family and friends.

The idea of a Christmas Cover for our Newsletter had its roots in a short conversation between myself and Mary Davidson. She quickly took the bull by the horns and elicited help from various people to organize and plan this event. Along with Susan Wells and Agnes McArthur, the inside of the Thomas House was quickly decorated into a Christmas motif – hanging decorations and a small tree. And the family Bible – that was supplied by Jim Young.

We were lucky when award-winning photographer Yacoub Husseini, of Treasure the Moment Photography volunteered his skills to bring about this recreation of history. Aply assisted by makeup artist, Alex C, the thrill of a pioneer Christmas was brought alive and recorded for posterity.

As you can see by the front cover, everyone took care to dress for the occasion. The two young ladies had their dresses made for them especially for this event by their grandmother, Anne Marie Lattemore.

It was fun doing the event and the following pictures are dedicated to those who helped with this project and for those who gave support for the idea.













And, what's a traditional Christmas without the traditional tintype.



## The Cast



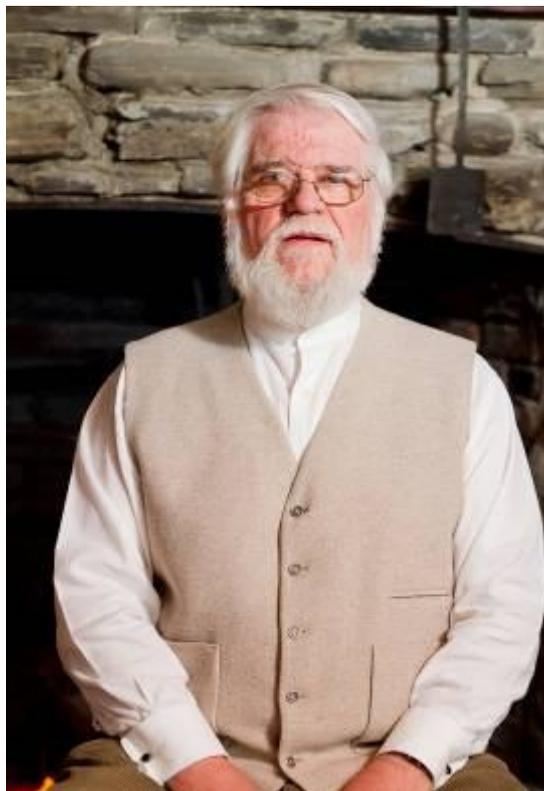
**Mary Davidson**



**Phillip Brimacombe**



**Wendy Belcher**



**Gord Lattemore**



**Anne Marie Lattemore**



**Pauline Hadfield**



**Richard Hadfield  
(Fiddler)**



**Daniel Fassler**



**Kaitlyn Powell**



**Keira Powell**

One thing about doing a photo-shoot like this is being able to record the activities from behind the scenes. Here are a few pics to show how it is done.



**Table set and fire ablaze**



**Cast arriving**



**Makeup!!!!**



**And, more makeup**



**Memorizing their lines????**

**Warming up  
the fiddle**





**Yacoub getting the cast together for the shoot**



**Lights, Camera, ACTION**  
**Well, at least lights and camera**

**Steppin' Out**



**Discussing the props**

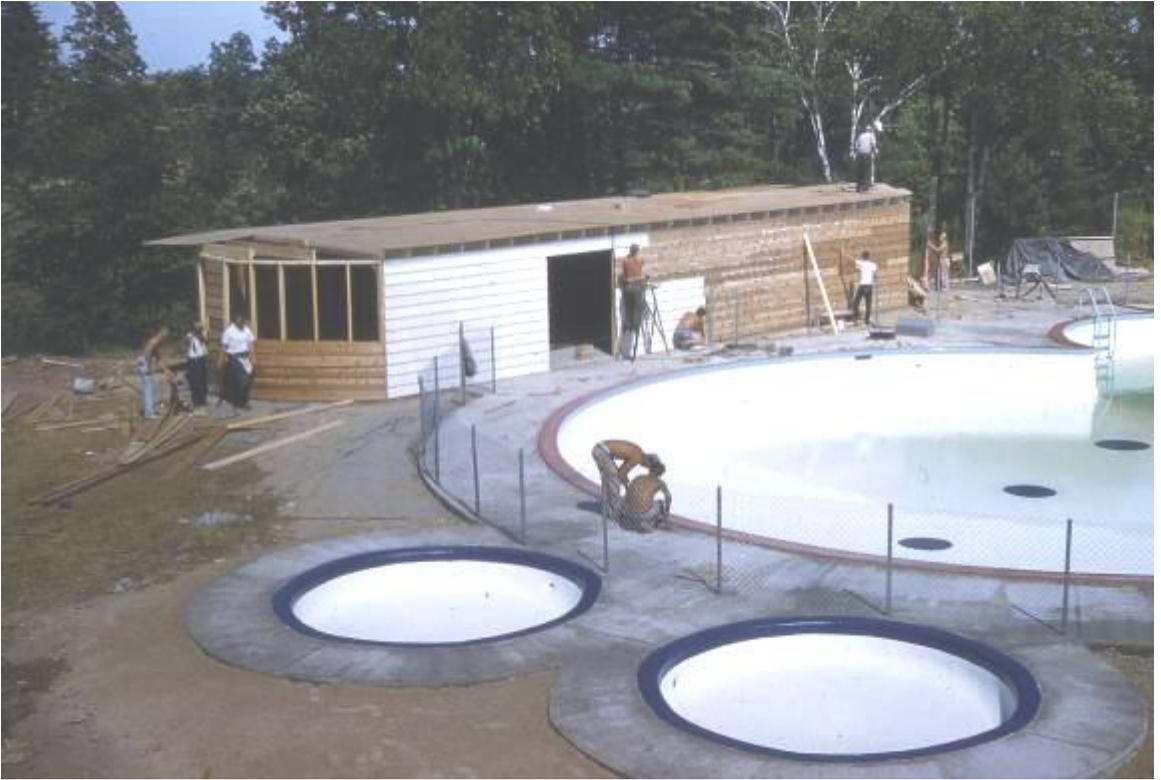


**Setting up the cover shot**



**A successful shoot!!!**

## **THE WAY THINGS WERE**



1. Do you recognize where this is?
  2. What are they building?
  3. Who owned this project?
- ~~~~~

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

**Archive Hours: Tuesday & Thursday \* 1:00 to 4:30PM**

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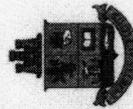
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