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

**DECEMBER 2012**



**Volume 46: Number 4**

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**CHRISTMAS PARTY: 6:00PM – 9:00PM (110 King Street West) ALL MEMBERS are invited to the Society for the “Annual Christmas Party”. Enjoy a scrumptuous spread provided by the Friends.**

Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Christmas at the Thomas House: 2pm to 5pm. Bring the whole family - sing carols around the fireplace. Donations are welcome. The Erchless Museum is having Tea and a tour the same day.**

Wednesday, March 20th, 2013

**OHS Annual General Meeting and Pot Luck Supper, starting at 6:30pm at St. John’s United Church.**

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

### 2013

Wednesday, February 20th  
Wednesday, May 15th

**Speaker: TBA**

**Speaker: Maureen Jennings, Author - Murdoch Mysteries! and more. (There will be a \$5 charge for this meeting.)**

Wednesday, October 16th

**Speaker: Mr. John Kenty, author of Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story-Bikes in Summer, Skates in Winter!**

Wednesday, November 20th

**Speaker: TBA**

**All programs will be held at St. John’s United Church (Lusk Hall – Randall & Dunn) and begin at 7:30pm, except the March 20th program (6:30pm for Pot Luck, 7:30 for AGM).**

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**COVER PICTURE:** Celebrating an Olde Tyme Christmas 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.



Atex Printing & Graphics -Proudly putting quality images on paper! - 2070 Speers Road #1, Oakville, 905-465-3220 <http://atexdigitalprint.com/>

## President's Message

Christmas is almost upon us and, to help the season along, plan to attend our annual Members' Wine and Cheese set for Friday, 7 December. This is a very popular and busy event.

Our Ghost Walks continued to be popular this year. Even the storm on the Monday before Hallowe'en didn't stop us. A large group of about 30 male and female Cubs and Leaders from Ecole Ste Marie made up most of the early walk and had a great time despite the wind. Our thanks to Wendy Belcher and Mary Davidson and their dedicated group for all their work on this great event. It also is a major source of income for the Society.

Speaking of income, we continue to be in real need of a new Treasurer. If you know of someone who might be willing to take this on, please contact me.

Thanks are due as well to Andrea Stewart and her group of volunteers for all their work on Doors Open 2012. Although it ran for only one day this year, it was a very busy day. 378 visitors toured the Thomas House – a record for one day.

The redesign of our website is continuing and the new version should go live in the early spring.

Our May Speaker's Night features Maureen Jennings. Ms Jennings is the writer behind the very popular Murdoch Mysteries.

We have started the move into our new storage area at Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre (QEPCCC) - the storage/archives room are in the S/E corner of the office building. We will be able to set up some more research space and a digitization facility there.

If you haven't seen the changes to the Cenotaph in George's Square, go have a look. An entrance walkway has been added, the granite deck around the original monument has been replaced and a new wall has been added behind. The new wall has the names of those who died during active service carved on it. Three names are on it: two from the War of 1812 and that of Colonel Geoff Parker, killed in Afghanistan two years ago. I sincerely hope no more names will be added. Metal plaques list the names of those who have served on UN peacekeeping or NATO operations. To be eligible, the person must have lived in Oakville when they joined up.

If I don't see you at the Christmas Party, I hope you and your family have a great holiday season.

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)

## The Sound of the Hickory Stick

As a retired Oakville Elementary School teacher I have always had a nostalgia for the old one-room schoolhouses that dotted the landscape of our province in days gone by. Fortunately a significant number of these wonderful structures live on, many of them surviving as residences lovingly restored by their owners. In this article I am going to concentrate on our community's first schoolhouse, the Oakville Common School.

Let us flashback in time to 1836. In that year, nine years after William Chisholm began construction on the townsite of Oakville at the mouth of the Sixteen Mile Creek, the Common School was established. It was situated in the Meeting House that stood at the present site of the Centennial Library on Navy Street. To the north was "Frenchtown" where a number of workers employed in the shipyard at the top of Navy Street on the "Navy Flats" lived. To the south was Baker's Livery Stable. Hazel Mathews in her book, "Oakville and the Sixteen", describes the structure as follows: "the neat frame building of the meetinghouse, which was used as a schoolhouse, was an advantage over the structures of rough logs usual for schools at the period. Under the low windows of the three sides of the room there were desks of slanted boards suspended on hinges which could be let down when religious services were held (during the week the pulpit was relegated to a corner of the room). Only those who were being taught penmanship used the desks. For other lessons children sat on long benches facing the master's desk, each pupil's equipment consisting of a slate, pencil, and the odd book".

At this time in Upper Canada, communities like Oakville would get together to provide a suitable school building and, provide funds for the teacher's salary and supplies. Since it was confirmed in 1836 that there would be a minimum of 20 pupils, the Oakville Common School was eligible for a government grant. The local voters elected 3 trustees who were entrusted to examine the teacher's qualifications, engage or dismiss him, lay out the course of study, select textbooks, and set up student discipline guidelines. We are indeed grateful to Justus Williams, a prominent local merchant, for spearheading the establishment of Oakville's first school.

The first schoolmaster at the Oakville Common School was William Tassie. He was born in Dublin, Ireland and educated there. Upon immigrating to Upper Canada he began his teaching career in Nelson Township west of Oakville. It is said that he,

"believed in the rod as did all Old Country teachers". Mr. Tassie eventually became a renowned educator throughout what was then known as Upper Canada.

What was a typical day like in the life of William Tassie and the pupils at the Oakville Common School? Similar to today, the school commenced classes at 9 o'clock. With the schoolbell ringing across the valley of the Sixteen Mile Creek, the children would enter the schoolhouse in a straight line, take their seats and, begin with the Lord's Prayer. A firm clip on the ear was not an unusual punishment for any student who was slow in following the schoolmaster's instructions! Then, facing the Union Jack and a picture of Queen Victoria, the class sang, "God Save the Queen", while Mr. Tassie played the piano that had been generously donated by a benefactor in the village. An arithmetic lesson started the day, presumably designed on the hopeful assumption that the pupils were as wide awake and mentally alert as they would be at any time throughout the remainder of the school day. The arithmetic lesson was followed at 10:30 by a 15 minute recess. Lessons in reading and literature followed.



William Tassie

As the Oakville Common School was situated at the centre of Oakville, the pupils went home for lunch between noon and 2 o'clock. Another arithmetic lesson followed lunch with a reading lesson after the afternoon recess at 3 o'clock. If the teacher was so inclined he would provide opportunities for the students to enrich their educational experiences by engaging in music and art activities. Once or twice, a week history and geography was taught. However, the major emphasis was on "The 3 R's" as there was a concern at this time that it was vital that the younger generation learn their sums and work to become functionally literate. Many of their parents had not had the opportunity to attend school whether it was in Canada or in the Old Country. As a result illiteracy was very common among the adult population. The pupils were dismissed at 5 o'clock. It was a long day for Mr. Tassie and the children!

Rote-learning was regarded as a "mental muscle builder" and children memorized verses and multiplication tables, capital cities, the dates of battles and the words in the speller. In writing class for example, pupils spent hours making pot hooks and slanted lines before tackling the art of making letters. They practised on small, wooden-framed slates, with slate pencils that squeaked in unison throughout the Common School

classroom. In the one-room schools the schoolmaster was responsible for teaching pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 8. There was relatively little time for teacher-guided explanations. The older students were frequently called upon to assist the younger ones. Also, the schoolmaster's time was occupied in preparing quill pens, ruling loose sheets of paper, and setting copies.

In cooler weather the students assisted in bringing in the wood. It was supplied by the fathers who were employed in local establishments like Joseph Milbourne's Distillery at the mouth of the Sixteen, Melancthon Simpson's Shipyard just north of the Common School, the Chisholm Sawmill and Gristmill at the head of navigation on the Sixteen or, in one of the increasing number of hotels and shops lining both sides of Colborne Street (now Lakeshore Road) between Navy Street and Trafalgar Road. Other fathers were schooner captains and sailors on one of the many wooden cargo schooners and steam passenger vessels that journeyed from Oakville to other ports on the lake. The mothers at this time worked out of the home.



Oakville Public (Common) School  
1850 - 1960

Just like today, the students at the Oakville Common School often got into mischief! One common trick played on the schoolmaster involved the older boys bringing gunpowder to the school. They would secretly place it in the hollow at the top of the pot-bellied stove at the back of the classroom. When the heater became red hot the gunpowder went off with a muffled "WOOF", leaving a startled teacher and many amused students! Another favourite pastime with children who attended the Oakville Common School according to "Oakville and the Sixteen" was

excavating the foundation of the schoolhouse on the west side where it was perched atop the steep bank of the Sixteen. Frequently, Aboriginal bones and artifacts were found. Another activity was digging under the foundations of the school in the hope that the structure would eventually topple into the marsh below with a little push to get it started! It is said that the marsh itself was the home of many long, black water snakes as well as

mud turtles which the boys would frequently let loose in the schoolhouse. The girls reportedly went crazy! Then a boy would "selflessly" volunteer to catch the poor creature and return it to the marsh thereby affording him an extra recess of 15 to 20 minutes.

The older children often lost school time in the warmer months as they would work on the farms in surrounding Trafalgar Township to provide needed extra income for their families in Oakville. In one case, an 8 year old boy missed a significant amount of school as he was engaged as the cook on board the cargo schooner "Albacore". Such stories were not uncommon. There were epidemics of the usual childhood maladies like whooping cough, measles and scarlett fever that would clear a schoolroom for days on end due to the relative lack of quick and effective medical attention at the time. Poor water quality and the fact that the town dump was situated in the marsh right below the schoolhouse did not help matters. The bigger boys, frequently restless and bored, were often absent, being otherwise occupied on hunting or fishing expeditions up the valley of the Sixteen. Some thoroughly enjoyed stirring the pot. One boy who was reported as having been strapped, apparently said "thank you" when the ordeal was over. When asked why, the young man replied with bravado that his parents had told him to say thank you for everything he got! On occasion a newly-recruited male teacher, often only 3 or 4 years older than his new charges, found himself in the position of having to fight one of the older boys in the school to establish their authority as the schoolmaster.

The days of the Oakville Common School ended in early 1850 when the newly-constructed Central School was opened immediately north of the old schoolhouse. The Common School became a garage for Oakville's first fire engine. The red brick Central School was expanded several times over its 109 year history and for many years incorporated both the elementary and grammar school students. The venerable old building holding so many memories for generations of Oakville residents, many of whom are still living in Oakville today, was demolished by Lakeview Demolition Company in 1960 for only \$425. Hopefully a similar fate does not await the old Oakville-Trafalgar High School structure on Reynolds Street. Replacing the old Central School was New Central School that opened in 1959. The bell from the tower of the old Central School was transferred to the new school where it still rests today.

Perhaps in future newsletters Society members will be interested in writing articles expanding on what I have written about the old Common School. It would be fascinating to read about the histories and anecdotes associated with Oakville's other old schools like St. Mary's on King Street (demolished in the 1980's), Brantwood (formerly the Allan Street School), Westwood, Linbrook, Maple Grove and of course Oakville-

Trafalgar High School. I know that articles on St. Mildred's Lightbourn School and Appleby College would also prove to be valuable additions to our newsletter archives.

Phillip Brimacombe

### Christmas Presents

Looking 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

### Books For Sale

Available for gift giving, for the history buff in the family or, just yourself!

**Oakville & the Sixteen**

*Members - \$35.00*  
*Non-Members - \$50.00*

**Oakville: A Small Town**

*Members - \$10.00*  
*Non-Members - \$12.00*

**Oakville Harbour & Bronte Harbour**

*Members - \$10.00*  
*Non-Members - \$12.00*

**Oakville: Street Names and Landscapes**

*Members - \$35.00*  
*Non-Members - \$42.00*

**Halton's Heritage: Wm. Halton  
& Halton County (New this year)**

*Hard Cover - \$55.00*  
*Soft Cover - \$42.00*

**Ever Faithful**

*\$25.00*

**A History of the Lorne Scots**

*Members - \$10.00*  
*Non-Members - \$12.00*

**Old Oakville**

*\$25.00*

*All prices quoted include taxes. Cash or cheque only. NO CREDIT CARDS please.*



# *AROUND THE SOCIETY*



## Solution to “The Way Things Were” – September 2012

**I**t was all about “Percy the Penguin”. In 1974, then Oakville Mayor Harry Barrett had a problem. Fritz the Cat and the Three Musketeers had taken “Percy the Penguin” and demanded a ransom – Mayor Barrett had to ride a bike through the downtown mall at high noon, against a town bylaw. Bending to the demands he rode a tricycle along the mall and Percy the garbage bin was eventually restored to his job – collecting refuse.

Lance Naismith

## Erratum

In the last issue, the following members had their names spelt wrong - Steve Zazulyk and Yvonne Verlinden. We offer our apologies.

Do you have the writing bug and maybe a historical story or two in you? We are always looking for material. Maximum - 2 or 3 pages single space typed. If you have pictures, we can always use them – we’ll scan originals.

## Presentation – War of 1812, Incorporated Militia

Your Historical Society was thrilled 17th October 2012 to introduce to a full St. John's Church hall, a very talented and enthusiastic speaker, Richard Feltoe, author and archivist.

Mr. Feltoe, Curator and Corporate Archivist for the Redpath Sugar Museum, is also a living history re-enactor who, with passion and humour, told of strategies and battles of the “Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada” during the War of 1812-1815.

Mr. Feltoe brought with him arms, cooking implements, toiletry kits and uniforms that his family constructs for the battle fields. And speaking of family; if you are part of his, whether a wife, child or grandchild, you become part of war re-enactments.

Thank you Mr. Feltoe for a talk illustrated with anecdotes and detail.



Greg Munz with Richard Feltoe (R)

Susan Wells

## Membership Renewal

Just a reminder that your membership renewal for 2013 becomes due on 31st of December. We are enclosing a membership form for your completion and return.

Your prompt renewal helps the Society in so many ways. The Newsletter you are reading is supported in part by your dues, along with the presentations and events and, the Walks (Ghost and Historical). Although we depend greatly on volunteer help, there are costs that must be met and your membership dues go a long way in keeping the Society a viable entity in the development of Oakville and keeper of the past.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Andrea Stewart

## Thomas House stars in Sheridan College video

Students from Sheridan College did a Christmas oriented video on Santa Claus called “Deck the Malls”. The narrator used the Thomas House to read a poem and the inside of the Thomas House was used as a backdrop – fireplace in action.

Go to the following link to view the Youtube.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_2gX0\\_jwDg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_2gX0_jwDg)

And, here is a behind the scenes look at the production.





Katie Breen, James Garcia, Brian Oliver,  
Stefano Vito

### Society Member Honoured

With military precision, Mayor Rob Burton led the charge in a secret mission – to honour Harry Barrett at his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday party at Seasons Restaurant. He announced Oakville Council’s decision to name the town’s network of waterfront parks as the “Harry Barrett Waterfront Park System”. Before, during and after his 13 year tenure as mayor, Harry developed the Town’s waterfront holdings through the Planning Act, something future generations will fully enjoy. Thanks Harry for a job well done!



Lance Naismith

### Doors Open – Results

We are pleased to report a successful and fun day for the fifth annual Doors Open event, thanks to the support of our volunteers and sponsors. Overall attendance for Oakville was calculated to be around 3,600 visitors. The Thomas House saw some 378 visitors, our offices 116, Erchless 325 and the Old Post Office some 421.

Fifty-two people accompanied Phillip Brimacombe on his tour of historic Oakville and Jamie Macrae welcomed 292 aboard The Anitra.

Local restaurants and stores no doubt welcomed increased business since 24% of our survey respondents did some shopping while in town. The same percentage also reported having visited a restaurant.

Twenty-five or more Society volunteers spent the day welcoming visitors as well as attending the harvest table at the Thomas House.

Anna Laplante from Burlington won the draw for the \$250 gift certificate from our sponsor, Olsen Europe. This draw was taken from those who took the trouble to fill in the survey given to all the attendees at the various sites. Congratulations to Anna.

Andrea Stewart

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

### Scenes Around the Society



Eileen Za, Lindsay Thompson at the Thomas House.

## **THE WAY THINGS WERE**



1. Do you recognize who this is?
2. In front of what store was this taken?
3. What was the relationship between the store and the person?

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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)**

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