

## Sunset At The Sixteen: Schooner White Oak, 1893

In July 1st 1867 almost 7000 people gathered along the banks of Sixteen Mile Creek to witness the side launch of George Chisholm's new schooner. It was anticipated that the vessel would be called New Dominion to honour Canada's first Dominion Day but George's 10 year old daughter Kate christened her White Oak as a tribute to Oakville's founder William Chisholm.

The ship yard at the west end of William Street was owned by George's older brother Duncan Chisholm. Operations on the site had expanded to the point that arrangements had to be made with the Town of Oakville to use a portion of Market Square for various materials and supplies. White Oak was probably the most expensive ship on a cost per tonnage basis ever built at this yard. The two masts topped with gilded acorns were \$100.00 each and the final figures worked out at \$112.00 a ton; approximately 10% more than comparable schooners of her day. At 213 tons with a carrying capacity of 14,000 bushels of wheat, she was a high point in the history of Oakville ship building. Her maiden voyage from the port later that summer involved a cargo of \$165,000.00 worth of lumber.

White Oak as with most vessels of her type had a number of owners and masters while in the grain, lumber, coal, and general cargo trade. However, these changes in ownership never resulted in a change of name. She saw service on all the Great Lakes but had a long association with Oakville as a home port. On the night of April 2-3, 1896, spring flood waters burst the dam above the railway bridge. The resulting rush of water broke the stone hooker Lillian loose from her winter berth and she sideswiped White Oak as she was carried downstream and out into the lake. Back in service later that summer the schooner began spending more and more of her time in the lumber trade on the Upper Lakes. Finally her masts were removed and the hull was used as a barge to be towed by steam tugs.

She ended her days tied up at the wharf at a lumber mill in Collins Inlet. Collins Inlet is west of the mouth of the French River.

The mill burned and they left the barge there. A few of the sturdy oak timbers are visible to this day. We have some pieces of her in our collection.

The print was commissioned by former Oakville Historical Society President Dick George.

Although Erchless and The Custom House still overlook the Oakville Harbour, numerous other changes have taken place. Commercial shipping is gone and in its place a multitude of pleasure craft now crowd the waterway. The lighthouse built in 1889 by Henry George, a contractor from Port Elgin at a cost of \$960.00 now stands at a yacht club on the west bank of the creek. Two of the upstream buildings survive as the Granary and a portion of The Oakville Club. The crib constructed pier was lost over the winter of 1946-47. The new concrete and steel structure was built considerably to the east. In spite of the changes, the Harbour remains an important focal point of the community. Marine artist Peter Rindlisbacher's work is now represented in the collections of nine museums and historical societies in Canada and the United States. Growing up in the small community of St. Clair Beach just north of Windsor gave him countless opportunities to observe the subtleties of light on waves, water and sails. He combines a fine sense of colour and composition with exacting historical detail, making his work important to both artists and historians. Along with an interest in sailing and his artistic talents he has found time to complete a doctoral programme in clinical psychology at Queen's University.

The print says Whiteoak, but the vessel was actually the White Oak. This should be corrected in the future printings.