



HISTORY OF THE COTTAGES

These cottages on the north side of the Erchless grounds were designed by sisters Hazel Chisholm Mathews and Dr Juliet Chisholm, great-granddaughters of Oakville founder, William Chisholm. Juliet was an artist and paediatrician; Hazel an author and historian. In 1953 the two women moved into the newly built cottages leaving the main house occupied by Hazel's son, Monty Hart, and his family.

The two buildings were originally separate. The west cottage was built first for Juliet in the Norman style, reflecting Juliet's time working in France. Hazel's cottage followed and is of a more contemporary style. Each cottage had a kitchen, bedroom, den or guestroom, bathroom and a large living area.

Both were built in 1952 by builder Fred Shaw using building materials from McNamara's Salvage Yard on Ninth Line. G.W. Barrett and Son put in the plumbing, hot water and heating system. James Sullivan installed the wiring. The living rooms had open beam ceilings. Juliet's main room has a Credit Valley Limestone floor, French style windows to the ground, a large fireplace, a skylight and forced air heat. Hazel's building was simpler with hot water heat.

Following Juliet's death in 1964, Hazel moved to Shelburne, Nova Scotia where her great great grandfather had moved after leaving the United States in 1784 before moving to the Niagara Peninsula. In 1977 the Town of Oakville purchased the complete estate. The Customs House opened to the public in 1983. The family home did not open until 1991. The Town continued to rent out the cottages.

In 1992 the Oakville Historical Society reached an agreement with the Town of Oakville whereby the Society was granted possession of Hazel's cottage. Renovations started immediately. The heating system was replaced; air conditioning was installed, wiring updated, walls, roof, ceilings repaired and the windows replaced. A couple of years later after the death of the tenant in Juliet's cottage, Commodore Robbie Robertson, the Society took over that cottage and work started on it. To start, a door was opened between the two cottages. A wall was removed, the front door relocated, heating system replaced, kitchen removed and both buildings were painted inside and out. Each job took over 8 months of volunteer labour under the direction of former mayor Harry Barrett.

Outside, the surroundings were freshly landscaped and two new patios were constructed. The cottages, now one building, were formally opened to the public and serve as the offices and archival centre of the Oakville Historical Society. Today, volunteers maintain and operate the facility. Renovations continue as required.