

Oakville Historical  
Society  
since 1953

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# Historical Society News

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[www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)



## Childhood In A Different Age

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# Speakers' Nights

Our Speakers' nights have taken on a new look the past year. We have been enjoying them from the comfort of our own living room (or den or kitchen) via Zoom available through computer, tablet, or phone. This platform has also enabled us to enjoy presentations from other historical groups who may engage a speaker of interest to us in Oakville. Make a note of these events and you as a Society member will receive a Zoom invitation via email closer to the date.

## Beaverdams Church Restoration

16th June 2021 7:20 - 9:00 pm

David Cowan, President, Friends of Beaverdams Church

Opened in 1832, among many interesting finds discovered when a large upper area of the church was opened after being sealed off for 140 years were cast iron nails and an Ontario-built pump organ.

## Forts in the Niagara Area

28th July 2021 7:20 - 9:00 pm

Jim Hill, Senior Manager, Heritage Niagara Parks

Jim's responsibilities include the supervision of historic sites like the Laura Secord Homestead, the Mackenzie Printery, Old Fort Erie House and over 100 plaques, markers and monuments along the Niagara River.

# Tea at Two

Many members may remember and/or likely miss our tea time in the office. We have a solution for isolation. Starting Tuesday, June 1, join us for **Tea Tuesday at Two** via Zoom. Discuss events of the present day, of yesterday for a few minutes or up to 60 minutes. You will receive a reminder of how to join closer to the date. Get your china tea cups out!

## Think you know your Town?

Town of Oakville Heritage Planning asked for our assistance in scanning several hundred slides of houses in Oakville as they don't have an appropriate slide scanner. Added to that the Town has shared with us about 1,000 photos of houses and 1,000 negatives of house photos that we are scanning. Volunteer Karen Jaszewski who has a great interest in genealogy is now scanning from home. She, as well as Janet Godber and Grace Park are now trying to find the location of the unidentified residences. This project has been of benefit to both us and the Town as we each will now have copies of the files. It's a fairly volunteer-labour-intensive process which is ongoing. If you have a computer and would like to help us find addresses, please contact us and we can guide you through the process.

# A Note from the Society President

by George Chisholm

Thank you to those who were able to attend our 2020 Annual General Meeting held online. As part of the meeting Phil Brimacombe, Janet Godber, Stewart Sherriff and Mark Verlinden all agreed to serve as directors for another term. The appointment of Steve Bysouth to the Board was also confirmed. At the April Board meeting, the following were confirmed as Officers for the year: Marie Descent as Secretary; Mark Verlinden as Treasurer; Susan Wells as Vice President and George Chisholm as President. The other Directors are Mary Davidson, Janet Godber, Averil Jany, Greg Munz and Stan Smurlick. Your Society is very fortunate to have such a dedicated, cohesive and enthusiastic group of Directors. It's in good hands.

We would like to thank the late Evelyn Bullied for remembering us in her will. Ev was a long-time member of the Society and served on the board for many years. She also volunteered as an interpreter at the Thomas House and was noted for bringing her own mistletoe to the annual Christmas Party. Ev passed away in 2019 at the age of 102. She also left us a copy of the Tremaine map of Halton County dated 1858 and a child's highchair. Ev was born and raised in the Village of Sheridan. To get to and from Maple Grove School she walked through the farm of escaped slave James Wesley Hill. Hill's son, Frank, gave her the chair which was made on the farm. Her bequest will be added to the Society Trust Fund, managed by the Oakville Community Foundation.

There are lots of plans in the works as we move into summer and, we hope, the re-opening in some way of the office and the Thomas House.

Watch for the release of a virtual Mayor's picnic featuring photos from past picnics going back to

the 1980s. Many of the photos are courtesy of Marianne Hawthorne. Steve Bysouth and his group will be preparing more video vignettes. We have a brand-new exhibit at the office on the history of education in Oakville prepared by student Julie Suh. Because we can't yet open, a group is working on a video tour of it.

Mary Davidson now has five crews of two volunteers each that will be working on the gardens. The area to the east of the office is blocked off by construction fence as the renovations to the Coach House continue, which should be completed by August.

As always, if you have comments or suggestions, please speak up.



Alyssa Nascimento (above) is our first 2021 summer student. In her 3rd year at Queen's University studying Concurrent Education and Arts and Science, she went to high school at Garth Webb Secondary School. Alyssa is working on digitizing our collection from home. We are very hopeful that funding will be approved from Young Canada Works to hire an additional student and possibly an intern. We are also hopeful that later in the summer we can have our students working in the office, with appropriate distancing.

# Patricia Wilson: Childhood In A Different Age

by Ruth Verlinden

“Away you go, Patsy”, said Doug Wilson to his 5 year-old daughter, as he reached over to push down the clutch of the tractor with his hand because she was too short to do it herself.

Patricia (Patsy) slowly drove the full-sized tractor down the rows of the orchard. As she rolled past the men and women picking, they would hoist their bushels of apples into the trailer behind her tractor. A cherubic little girl, she would drive the tractor a few hours a day during apple picking season. She didn't mind. She loved being her daddy's right-hand girl. Sometimes her three-year-old sister, Carrol, would ride in the trailer. Two tiny girls bouncing along on a tractor and a trailer while the grown-ups were busy picking apples! Once Carrol stuck her leg out and got a bad brush burn from the tire.



CS Parker's Wilton Farm  
425 Fourth Line, c1950

read 'Wilton Farm'. The enormous farm house was built around 1859 by James W. McCraney and his wife Augusta. In 1944, the farm was owned by Calvin S. Parker. He was the owner of several companies and held the patent for the original ditch-digging steam engine. Patricia remembers him commuting to Toronto in a big white car, always smoking a cigar. He hired Patricia's father to be the farm manager.

Doug Wilson used to work in Toronto. He tried to enlist for the war, but wasn't accepted. He met Patricia's mother, Dorothy Bellerby, on 'Firecracker Day' (Victoria Day), May 24th 1940. At the time, she was a cook at Appleby College and they married the next year, on August 16th 1941. Then the army called again. However, Doug refused to enlist now, since he had a wife to support. Because he was a farmer's son, the army required that he work on a farm in lieu of becoming a soldier. He and Dorothy worked on several farms together and eventually they came to work for CS Parker, where Doug was the



Young Patsy's tractor

There is a stretch of road on Fourth Line, north of Rebecca, that still has houses widely-spaced apart. At 425 Fourth Line, there was a sign that

manager. His many responsibilities included supervising other staff and maintaining the generator, which was in a cabin on the edge of the ravine. The Parkers lived in the big house on the front of the property. The Wilsons lived farther up the road in a smaller house.

There were apple trees, cherry trees and pear trees and there were raspberries in the ravine behind the house. Patricia's mother would run out and pick cherries to make pies. Then the cherries had to be pitted and the dough made. It took a whole morning to make pies for supper.

Other employees on the farm included a gardener and three farm labourers. The farm labourers were new immigrants known as DPs, Displaced Persons. They lived as boarders in a wing at the back of the Wilsons' house. Patricia remembers a man from England, and a Dutch man who had wooden shoes.

For a while, a Polish man also boarded with them, and his language was fascinatingly colourful. One afternoon, while her father was chatting with Mr. Parker, little Patsy began throwing stones onto the flagstones at the back of the house. Mr. Parker took his cigar out of his mouth and told her to stop. She yelled 'Taka hui!', threw one hand up in the air, and slapped her elbow with the other hand, just like she had seen the Polish farmhand do. She had no idea what it meant, but she suspected it was rude, and ran away. When Mr. Parker asked what she had said, her father feigned ignorance.

When it was time to go to kindergarten, Patricia and the boy living across the street, with the unlikely name of Freddy Snowball, would walk by themselves on the side of Fourth Line, a dirt road, to Rebecca St. and catch the Greyhound bus. The school bus didn't run at noon for the half-day kindergarten class, so the youngest students of the school took the inter-city bus!



Doug Wilson, left, and farm worker prune apple trees.



Dorothy Wilson, holding basket, with farm workers.



Patricia's roots go deep in Oakville. Her great-grandparents came to Canada in 1884. When her great-grandmother Martha died, great-grandfather John sailed on a ship back to England to fetch another wife, Evelyn Ward. They lived on Gilbrea farm, in the area that eventually became Bronte. The first church services of this area were held in his house, and often one of the men in the family acted as pastor. John Wilson donated land and helped to build the small white church that was the original Church of the Epiphany, which is still on Bronte Road. Little curly-haired Patsy cut the ribbon for the church hall. The cross made of two beams from his barn is still in the church today.

Patricia's grandfather, Alexander Wilson, was born in Bronte in 1888. He served in the First World War and when he came home he married Ethel Young in 1920. They farmed one hundred acres at the corner of Rebecca and Third Line and called their farm Bellehome.

When she was not driving the tractor or sitting next to her father on the bulldozer, Patsy and her sister played on the deer statues adorning the front lawn beside the 'Lady Guinevere' statue, a bare-chested Amazonian with a spear, being attacked by a dragon. Every now and again an artist came to spray the statues with fresh paint: bright colours for Lady Guinevere and the dragon, natural colours for the deer. One year he spray-painted a large wall painting for them to hang in the house.

Once a week, Patsy and Carrol would walk through the orchard and go to the Big House for lunch in the kitchen with Clara Baker, the young woman who was the Parker's cook and housekeeper. The little girls always wore pretty dresses for this special event. There were red and white cushions on the chairs, an enormous fridge with two doors set into the wall, a step down into a sunroom at the side of the house, a big chandelier with fancy fringes over the dining



The Wilson family house September 1945 to July 1951, north of 425 Fourth Line



Jim Barns and Clara Baker.  
Mr. Barns lived in a back wing  
of the Wilson's house.

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**The distance between Third Line and Fourth  
Line is 2.1 kilometers or 417.56 rods**

room table. Clara had her quarters, a bed sitting room, off the kitchen. Sometimes someone important would unexpectedly arrive before she had tidied away lunch! Clara would quickly load the dishes into a big pan and hide them under her bed. Sometimes the girls would go upstairs to visit Ethel, CS Parker's wife, who was very ill.

Clara had met CS Parker in Newfoundland when he was there on business, and he offered her the housekeeping job. She worked for him for decades, even after his wife Ethel died in 1952 and he married a second time, to a woman named Jeannie. When Patricia visited the farm in 1969, Clara was still there, but she later moved back to Newfoundland.

Patricia's family lived at the Parker's until July 1951. She eventually went to college intending to become a Home Economics teacher, but she married a dairy farmer and came back to farming. She and her husband now live north of Cornwall Ontario, getting up daily at 5:30 a.m. to feed 55 cows, while her son and daughter-in-law do the milking. The dairy farm has been her home since 1967.



Statue of Lady Guinevere at Wilton Farm

After CS Parker's death in 1969, the statues on the front lawn were auctioned off. The orchard was cut down and became a neighbourhood of modern houses. However, you can still see the Parker farmhouse standing in its original immense glory at 425 Fourth Line.

Cover photo: Patricia Wilson aged 2, atop the wall at Wilton Farm entrance. All photos provided by P. Wilson

## Exhibits

*Get Schooled*, designed and presented by Julie Suh is now on display at our offices. This fine work informs us of the history of education in Oakville. Although it cannot be seen by the public until (we hope) the near future, we plan on assembling a digital presentation to broaden the reach of this excellent work.

Photo of display at right by Susan Wells



# 1918 Influenza Epidemic

By Andrea Stewart

Named The Spanish Flu, for reasons that seem unclear, this was the most devastating epidemic in recorded history. Arriving as it did at the end of World War I when there was so much people movement, making conditions ripe for disease, it spread rapidly, claiming at least fifty million people world wide; more people than the war. No country seems to have been immune. Canada lost at least fifty thousand lives.

The first signs of the influenza in Halton were found in October 1918, the epidemic lasted until March or April of 1919, and took a roller-coaster progression, with the most severe outbreaks occurring around Christmas and January 1919. Curiously, this `flu seemed to hit not the young or frail elderly, but healthy 25-45 year-olds. By the time the epidemic ended, some 150 Halton residents were dead and several hundred had been severely affected, out of a total population of 23,000.

The first recorded report was in Georgetown on October 10, 1918. There were some 300 cases in Burlington. Many doctors died and nurses had to be trained to deal with the sick. The funeral director died and the demand for coffins couldn't be met. There are reports of self-contained funeral streetcars. The local newspapers contained numerous advertisements offering medicines, salves, and ointments.

In order to contain the spread, the medical authorities sought to ban assemblages and close public places such as schools and theatres. This ran counter to those who sought to organize public rallies and to raise funds for the last few months of the war effort. The clergy were upset about the closure of churches and

theatre owners petitioned the Boards of Health in municipalities to reopen the theatres. Images of throngs of people at train stations welcoming home soldiers illustrated how difficult it would have been to prevent gatherings. In December of 1918 "Business as Usual" was declared but it was not to be; the 'flu was more severe when it came back at Christmas and January. The Guelph Winter Fair went ahead and many farmers became infected. Despite the grimness, the illness and loss of life, there seems to have been no evidence of hysteria and, on the contrary, much kindness among the public. People demonstrated a great ability to cope, not only with the war, but also with this final insult.

As there was no central health authority such as Health Canada, each Halton municipality had its own Board of Health to deal with the crisis. In 1919 Federal Health Care came into being, together with a new awareness program.

One theory about the epicentre of the outbreak was that it was a "chicken flu" originating in China. As to why it was named Spanish flu it is conjectured the reason was that it was because Spain had remained neutral during the war and they were the only country able to publicize the epidemic.



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# Volunteer Opportunities

By Stan Smurlick

Our volunteers are the backbone of our Society. There are many enjoyable ways you can express your passion and interests. Following are a few ways you can help.

**Archives** Cataloguing and care. You could help at the office or with a scanner at home.

**Artifact Acquisition** Finding documents or artifacts. Maybe you know someone downsizing who may wish to donate their collections.

**Computers** You could teach others to use computers or maintain Society computers.

**Exhibits** Try envisioning a future display!

**Facilities** Building maintenance. Help if you have skills in this area

**Finance and Accounting** Banking and financial control.

**Garden Care** Join a rotating team who love to beautify our grounds.

**Historical Research** A perfect project for people with a computer and internet access.

**Interviewing** Write life stories. Record life stories of Oakville people.

**Membership** Development.

**Newsletter** Write articles, suggest topics.

**Publicity & Promotion.** Post to community calendars. Design promotional pieces.

**Ghost Walks** Be a roaming Ghost. This involves dressing in period costume and assuming a persona. Is always enjoyable around Halloween!

**Social Events** Host by Zoom for now, but post-COVID social fun!

**Social Media** (eg. Instagram, Facebook) Post information

**Thomas House** Become an interpreter Get ready for when we re-open!

**Video Production** Script ideas, props, acting, filming, crewing, editing

**Walking Tour Guide** Lead a group.

**Writing** Anything interesting that could be related to the history of Oakville.

**Website** Write a line or two on website pages to encourage membership. Edit. Create downloadable documents from material on the website. Maintain a Google calendar on our website.

We look forward to hearing from you! Email us at [o.historical.s.membership@gmail.com](mailto:o.historical.s.membership@gmail.com) or phone the office at 905 844-2695. Website volunteers please email Stan Smurlick [ssmurlic@hotmail.com](mailto:ssmurlic@hotmail.com)



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# Spring Garden Work



The blackbirds were waiting for them to go away and not politely but Marie Descent, Mark Verlinden (above) and George Chisholm replaced the cracked concrete fountain base today and got the fountain set up. The new base which weighs about 220 pounds was worth the drive to Acton Precast. Harry Barrett our late and much-missed volunteer would have appreciated us using his piece of pine to lift it into place. In the fall we shall sandblast and repaint the cast aluminum fountain.



For the last decade the majority of the gardening has been beautifully done by Averil and Joe Jany who write—

*“It was in spring of 2012, a few months after we moved to Oakville. Wandered by on a walk, saw the neglected garden, knocked on the door. Andrea answered and invited us in for tea. We chatted and then offered to join the garden committee, which was received with suspicious enthusiasm! We were it, and it worked well for eight years, with sporadic binges of extra help with jobs too big for us alone. It was a huge wrench to realize that it had become too difficult for us by 2020. We absolutely loved doing it and still hope to contribute small amounts of help when we can.”*

Now it is time for new gardeners and Mary Davidson has arranged five teams—Donna and Walter Moran, Andrea Stewart and Susan Bowen, Mary Davidson and Caryl Hamilton, Cathy and Jim McNulty, Jim Bond and Nalin Gamage. Special thanks to Donna Moran who has made up a schedule.

Claudette Shaw is taking care of the Thomas House gardens, keeping it true to times past with plantings of vegetables and herbs. She is planning to have these identified for visitors and interpreters alike.

Work has begun at our next door neighbour, the Erchless Coach House seen at left, where archaeologists are collecting material for study. Inside was found more evidence of the blacksmith shop at this site previous to the current structure, built in 1899. Work including new pathways, fences and gates should be completed by August.

# Membership

Marie Descent, Susan Bowen, Andrea Stewart

We currently have 198 paid up members with thirty-four still to renew. Surprisingly, given the fact that we've been closed, we are pleased to have welcomed 42 new members in the past year.

Since the last newsletter in March, the following new members have joined:

Mr. John Bielski, Mr. Keith Bonnyman, Mrs. Anne Cramer, Ms. Caryl Hamilton, Ms. Michelle Kelly, Mr. and Mrs. John and Donna Koumoundouros, Miss Amara Maraj, Mr. and Mrs. Dave and Sandra Mundy, Mr. Rick New, Mr. and Mrs. Marc Rondeau, Ms. Mary St. James, Mr. Andrew Tyrrell, Canadian Caribbean Association Halton.

We continue to deliver the gift book, Oakville Streets and Landmarks to all new and renewing members and we have had word that it has been well received. Let us know if you did not receive your gift.

Owing to the increasing cost of postage we are asking those of you with active email addresses to let us know if you would like to receive the newsletter electronically.

# Finding Sybil



OHS member Rory McAlpine generously donated to our collection photos of his mother and her classmates from mid-1940s Oakville Trafalgar High School. We recognised Sybil (Calverley) Rampen (at left and below) and contacted her at Joshua Creek Heritage Art

Centre to see if she could identify classmates. She added a few names and if you would recognise faces from mid-1940s OTHS, contact us and we can provide you with photos of the young students.



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# The *way* things were...



## Do you know?

Where this building is located?

What it is used for?

Why it is significant?

*Look for the answers in our next issue!*



## From March 2021 *The way things were...*

This milk door, usually located by the back door of a house opened to a small cupboard and was accessible from inside and outside. The milkman would retrieve tokens or coins in exchange for dairy products which he placed inside. Unofficially it was used by a child to gain access when house keys were misplaced.

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