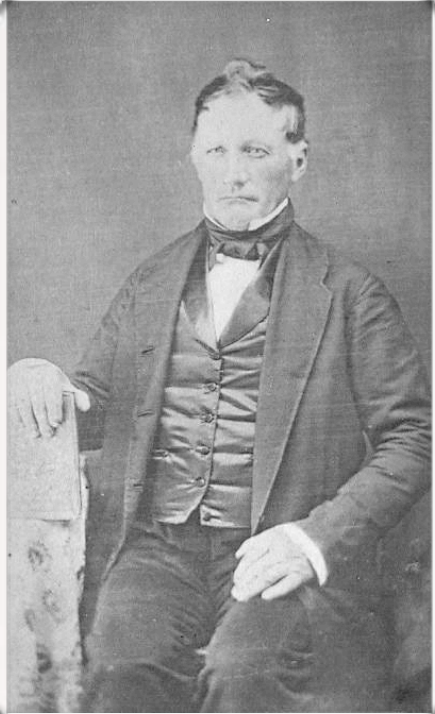




Esther Thomas
1806 - 1891



Merrick Thomas
1803 - 1856

An Influential Oakville Family

**THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER**

SEPTEMBER 2014 Volume 48 Number 3

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday
Oct 15 **Ms. Kealy Wilkinson** will speak about the Canadian Broadcast Museum Foundation which collects, preserves and celebrates the National Broadcast Collection including programs, artifacts, oral histories and etc. from private and public broadcasters.

Wednesday
Nov 15 **Ms Bev Dietrich**, Curator of Guelph Museums. Her talk is entitled, "In Flanders Fields: John McCrae's Story."

Wednesday
Feb 18 **Mr. Bill Thompson** from the Halton County Radial Railway will give a historical review of Canada's Street Cars.

**Above presentations are held at St. John's United Church at Randall and Dunn Streets, 7:30 - 9:00 pm
Admission is free and refreshments are served**

Mark your calenders for the weekend of **September 27 and 28**. The Town of Oakville will be participating in a Halton-wide **Doors Open** event which will include many new sites in Halton Hills (Glen Williams), Milton and Burlington. A brochure describing the various sites is available at our office and at Town of Oakville public spaces. We welcome volunteers who are interested in assisting as hosts at our various sites. Please let me know if you are interested. Our offices at **110 King St** as well as the **Thomas House** will be open. We also offer tours of the **Town Of Oakville/St. Mary's Cemetery**, Lyons Lane. *Andrea Stewart*

Send all mail to:
110 King Street
Oakville On L6J 1B1
Office address is our mail address



Archives Open:
Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 4:30
Third Sun. of the month 12:30 to 4:00

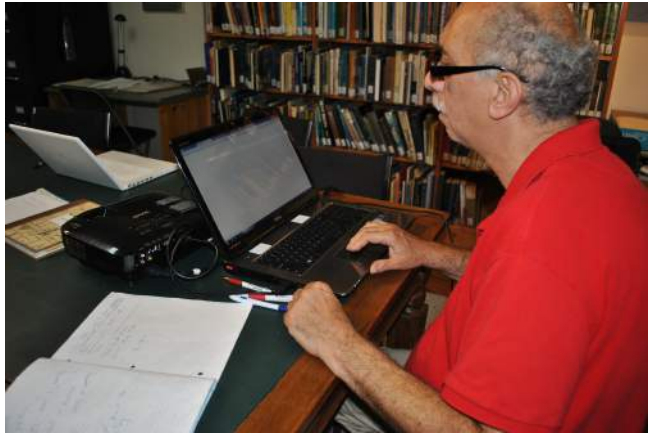


Proudly putting quality images on paper!
2070 Speers Road #1 Oakville, On 905-465-3220
<http://atexdigitalprint.com/>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At last! Our new website has gone live. On behalf of the board and the society, I would like to thank **Stan Smurlick** for all his work in recreating the website. It is the main way that we communicate with the general public and, although Norm Sadler did an amazing job with the previous version, a re-work was past due. Please have a look at it and make suggestions. It remains a work in progress. www.oakvillehistory.org

We've been making some changes at the office this summer. The storage or archives room (depends who you talk to) in the southeast corner of the building has been emptied, cleaned and painted. All the oversize archives boxes and our collection of the Steve Nease cartoons have been moved to our space at the Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre. The space reclaimed at the office will become our technologies room. As part of our long-term plan to scan items in the collection and automate our records, we are applying for a Trillium grant to furnish this room with appropriate equipment including a copy stand, large-format scanning equipment and computers. Thank you **Donna Moran** for deciphering the grant requirements.



Mr. Stanley Smurlick, tireless OHS
website designer

There was an informal discussion last week about how busy the office is becoming. Granted, some days are fairly quiet but on most days there can be anywhere up to 15 people hard at work on one project or another. A recent visitor was a former tenant who was amazed at the changes we've made over the years. **Phil Brimacombe** and **Stewart Sherriff** continue to open the office on the third Sunday afternoon of each month and the number of visitors continues to grow. Many are out for a walk and just drop in but more and more are making a special trip.

By November 11th, a new exhibit should be in place. Stay tuned for an official announcement. *George Chisholm, President*

MERRICK THOMAS

Long before it made its journey to its current home in Lakeside Park, the Thomas House stood on the North side of Lakeshore Road West, west of Margaret Road West, as a reminder of one of the first families to settle in Oakville, Ontario. In fact, the travels of the house from its original locale to Lakeside Park, a transition made



Thomas House at Lakeshore Drive, 1955

possible by the Oakville Historical Society in 1955, parallels the travels of the Thomas family, moving from Massachusetts upwards into Ontario, before settling in Oakville. Although the house in question belonged to Merrick Thomas, the story of the family begins with his father, Seneca Thomas and his misadventures on both sides of the War of 1812.

Seneca Thomas was the son of Dr. Amos Williams and was born in West Brookfield, Massachusetts. He married Aseneth Gibbs of Greenwich, Massachusetts and the couple moved to North Vermont afterwards, having four children together. At the outbreak of the War of 1812 Seneca was working on the fortifications on Queenston Heights for the British forces. Despite his employment with the Colonials, he swiftly defected from their side, enlisting in the American forces in New York State. During his service with these forces, he was wounded and taken prisoner on October 12th 1812, at Queenston Heights. Soon after this event however, he was hit with another tragedy in the death of his wife. With his four children left without a mother, he was permitted to attend the funeral under guard. At the funeral, Seneca staged an escape and it was said he “managed to escape, either by the connivance of his captors or by his own shrewdness, ever after giving Canada a wide berth.” With his escape from Canada, his children were separated, with only the two oldest boys, Merrick and Charles Augustus remaining together, until Charles moved to Eastern Massachusetts at the age of fifteen.

While in his residence in America, Seneca recovered from the loss of his first wife, marrying Hannah Gibbs, sister of Aseneth and they settled in Worcester, Massachusetts. After the honeymoon, it is said that Seneca inquired as to the location of money she had boasted of, with Hannah replying “Oh, that was courting talk. Where are all the houses and canal-boats that you were possessed of?” with Seneca revealing “well Hannah, that was courting talk too”. Seneca would outlive Hannah, and she died without children in Worcester, Massachusetts. Seneca spent much of his latter life spending time with one of his sons in Boston. He did receive a pension from the United States, which honored his services in the War of 1812, and even went on to marry again, although his third wife outlived him. He died in Worcester, Massachusetts on April 2nd, 1860 at the age of eighty-six with his lineage entirely represented through his first marriage. It was said of Seneca Thomas that he was “a man of great independence of character, caring little for others’ opinions of his doings, and was inclined to be sarcastic in his own opinion,” an image reinforced by the way in which he led his life.

Merrick Thomas, Seneca’s eldest son, led a less complicated history, and was the Thomas who was the first of the family to settle in Oakville, Ontario. He was born in St. Alban’s, Vermont on May 26th, 1803 and was said to be the first white child delivered in that town. At the time of his mother’s death and his father’s dramatic escape from British imprisonment, Merrick was no more than 10 years old. It is said that one of his first memories was of driving an army cart with the British forces on their way to Burlington Heights. At this time, he was employed by a Mr. William Kent, living at the head of Lake Ontario, in a settlement called Saltfleet, a township which is now part of Stoney Creek. Mr. Kent owned a substantial number of enterprises in the area, including a store, salt-works and a saw-mill, as well as multiple ships. Merrick Thomas worked his way through many positions as a result, serving “as a sawyer, sailor and clerk,” up to the position of general manager.

After leaving Mr. Kent’s employ, Merrick served as a general manager under William Chisholm, who was running a mercantile and lumber business in Nelson, Ontario, transporting lumber down the St. Lawrence to Quebec with ships also following this route. William Chisholm eventually elected to place Merrick Thomas in charge of the new settlement in Oakville, Ontario, with Merrick helping to clear forests, establish buildings, improve harbours, create piers, as well as construct vessels, with claims being made that Oakville was the first settlement to build a steam boat on Lake Ontario.

Merrick Thomas also served as “a Justice of the Peace for the united counties of Wentworth, and Halton, District of Gore ... held a commission as captain of artillery, and was a Government Commissioner of Light-houses and Harbours ... had his tastes led him into politics, would have been successful as a political leader.” He married Esther Silverthorn of Lundy’s Lane in 1827 and had seven children with her, although three would die in infancy. In Oakville they lived first in a house on Thomas Street, which was built in 1833 but was destroyed by fire in 1839 while occupied by William Chisholm. However, their surviving house was built on what Trafalgar Township records show as a two-hundred-acre farm, leased from King’s College, to Merrick Thomas in 1829.

The house itself is believed to have been built in 1829 on the site of what is now St. Thomas Aquinas High School and St. Jude’s Cemetery. Merrick Thomas purchased the house in 1839, expanding it in 1860 and closing in the veranda. It is built in a “Loyalist Style,” a simple building with two rooms and a loft which was accessible via an outside stairway. The bulk of the present structure is original. A

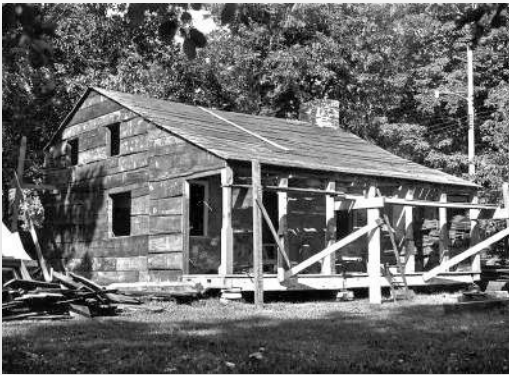


On the move to Front Street

A shadow was cast in 1840 when Merrick Thomas along with Chisholm and other merchants were involved in the incorporation of the Oakville Hydraulic Company. However, as the Sixteen Mile Creek was too shallow to erect the proposed dam, in 1841 the banks foreclosed and suits were brought against Chisholm, Thomas and John Moore, a carpenter and Mariner. This put Chisholm into debt and he died two days after selling his lands to settle his debts. It is believed this is the reason the deed to the farm property was placed in the names of Thomas’ sons George and Charles in 1840 (who at ages 6 and 10 made very youthful property owners!) which may have been foresight relating to the foreclosure of the Oakville Hydraulic Company

Merrick died afterwards in 1856 leaving behind his children and his wife, who lived until at least 1890 on their original homestead. His youngest son Robert, who was deaf and non-verbal from the age of three or four lived in Oakville until 1931. All the other children returned to the U.S., mostly to the Boston area. *Alex Gallacher*

Alex Gallacher is a fourth year B.Ed./B.A. Honours History student at Brock University. She has a particular interest in British History and was the 2014 recipient of the John M. and Barbara McEwen Book Prize in British History from Brock University. She plans on one day helping to foster a love of history in others by becoming a high school history teacher.



Settling in at present location, Lakeside Park on Front St.

Saturday September 27th at 7:30 pm

Join us for **Astronomy Night** with the Mississauga Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada at Lakeside Park. View the skies through large provided telescopes, weather permitting. Thomas House will be open for coffee and cookies.

Oakville Memories: Old and New

A dedicated team has been assembling a book of 200 stories about living in our fine town and it will soon be published. We thank volunteers **June Hitchcox, Hugh Ramsay, Bob Potvin, Helen Debenham, Margaret Godefroy, Renee Lehnen, Mary Davidson** and many others for their hard work. Stay tuned. Meanwhile, you may get a flavour here - <http://images.halnet.on.ca/117/Exhibit/1>

AROUND THE SOCIETY

Our May speaker was **Ms. Ann Birch** (below), author of *Settlement*, a story of romance and adventure set in Upper Canada in 1836-37. Her story was based on the memoir of Mrs. Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*. Mrs. Jameson had been well-connected in society and in literary circles in England but was persuaded to come to Canada at the dubious invitation of her estranged husband Robert, Attorney General of Upper Canada. Robert's ambitions required that he be seen to be a married man, but the marriage was not happy. Disillusioned with Toronto and its Society, Anna adventured in the summer to Detroit, Mackinaw Island, Sault-St-Marie, Manitoulin Island and Penetanguishine. She returned and wrote her memoir. Ms. Birch weaves her story around Mrs. Jameson's adventures and a suggested relationship with Sam Jarvis, a complicated and colourful man who was appointed to Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1837. Both the memoir and the novel describe the domestic, social and political life of the upper classes of the mid-19th century as well as life in the wild among the native people of the time.



Ms. Ann Birch signing copies of *Settlement*

Ms. Birch's details of artifacts and houses is informed not only by her studies, but by her volunteer work at Toronto's old houses: The Grange, built in 1818 and The Campbell House, 1822.

There is some information about both books, as well as biographies and an interview with Ms. Birch on line. *Andrea Stewart*

AROUND THE SOCIETY

Philip Brimacombe was recently honoured with **The Town Of Oakville Heritage and History Award** for his dedication and commitment to the Oakville community. Phil, a retired teacher, continues to write, tutor and volunteer.



Enjoying **Phil's** good humour are (standing from left) June Hitchcox, Jim Young, Andrea Stewart & Mary Davidson. Seated is Margaret Buxton. Each year the awards are designed by a local artist, the 2014 awards being created by artist **Soyeon Kim**.



Phil is shown above (with Oakville founder William Chisholm) enlightening The Kensington residents of Oakville's history.

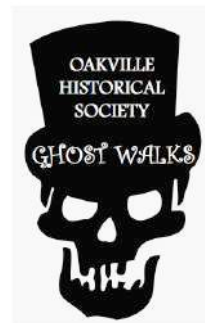
Our very popular **GHOST WALKS** are scheduled for
October 16th to 29th.

The tour begins and ends at our office at 110 King St. after which
refreshments are served.

All ages, groups and individuals are welcome.

Take a look at our fresh new website for further information.

<http://www.oakvillehistory.org/>



AROUND THE



Andy He (above) spent part of his summer before Gr. 12 with us, transcribing the indices of *Oakville and the Sixteen*. We have many opportunities for students wanting to learn of Oakville's history while completing required school credits.



Stewart Sherriff (above) collaborated with **Andrea Stewart** (text), **Vince Segreto** (photography) and **Donna Moran** (design) to produce a self-guided tour of the Erchless Estate. Pick up your copy at our office.



The OHS and The Town of Oakville's Erchless Museum regularly co-operate with each other, opening their respective historical properties to groups of school children. Here is volunteer **Hilary Speed** (in the guise of Mrs. Esther Thomas) asking young children, "What do you suppose this piece of china under the bed is used for?"

AROUND OAKVILLE



Doris (Leany) Mitchell (left holding baby) was born in Winnipeg, worked in Toronto and lived in Oakville. She posed for this poster which was circulated during WWII. **Evelyn Bullied**, who donated this image, reports she and a friend walked Lakeshore from Third Line to Winston Churchill, and not one farmer refused to buy a Victory Bond.



Mona Brajak (at right) regularly places our Oakville Historical Society information frame on Lakeshore Road near her salon **Mona's Coiffure**, 94 George St. and takes it in at the end of her day. We applaud citizens who are involved with their community.

The **Oakville Historical Society** has a massive collection of letters, photographs, diaries, ledgers, flyers and brochures which are catalogued and stored in our archives. They have been donated to us by citizens who realized the need to share these records of our past. Please remember us when you no longer want to keep such treasures. Contact us, we will look after them and everyone will have access to the history they reveal.

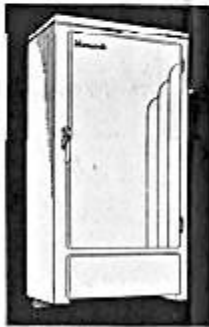
THE WAY WE WERE

HIGHER FOOD PRICES MAKE **ICE** AND AN **Air-Conditioned ICE REFRIGERATOR** AN IMMEDIATE NECESSITY !!

This refrigerator
provides

ICE - - - economy
FOOD - - - economy
NO - upkeep costs !

CAN YOU AFFORD TO SPEND \$350.00 MORE FOR OTHER TYPES OF
REFRIGERATORS WHICH *Do Not* PROPERLY PROVIDE ? ?



MONARCH 4 1/2 cu. ft. capacity
Med. Family Size



\$46.00 up



BARNET 5 1/2 cu. ft. capacity
Deluxe Model

Choose one now for Spring Delivery from our Recent Shipment.
PARIS, MONARCH & ACE, BARNET & POLARZONE
NOW IN STOCK - - THE SUPPLY WILL BE LIMITED
AGAIN THIS YEAR !!!

1. What is the name of the advertiser?
2. Did this advertiser tell the truth?
3. Did this advertiser succeed in stopping the sale of electric refrigerators?



Greg Munz is designing a new display which will be in place by November 2014. The topic is WWI.



Mr. Buist with his new house plaque. (with S Wells, left)



Lyon's Log Cabin newly refurbished and moved, at Shipyard Park, Oakville Harbour. Was built in the 1820s and once stood on Trafalgar Road adjacent to the former village of Vernerville.

PICNIC IN THE PARK



Jim Young (l) with Mayor Rob Burton at the Mayor's Historical Picnic in the Park



P. Brimicombe and L. Naismith at the picnic.

PICNIC IN THE PARK





TURNER CHAPEL ANTIQUES

JED GARDNER

www.turnerchapelantiques.com

37 Lakeshore Rd. W
Oakville, ON, L6K 1C8

905.338.3252
turnerchapelantiques@bellnet.ca



COMMUNITY FUNERAL HOME

ILONA KOPRIVA

President

64 Lakeshore Rd., W
Oakville, Ontario
L6K 1E1

T (905) 844-2600
F (905) 842-2966
ilona.kopriva@eol.ca
www.koprivataylor.com



**CRAIGHOR
CONSTRUCTION**

www.craigmhor.ca

Marc Fraser
Principal|Field Operations

Tel: 905.844.5885
Mobile: 647.409.2896
marc@craigmhor.ca

Brick • Block • Stone
Masonry Restoration and Repair

Suite#1407 1011 Upper Middle Rd E.
Oakville, ON L6H 5Z9

ALDON FINANCIAL SERVICES LIMITED

Tel: 905-844-9223
Fax: 905-339-2528

Email: pdm@cogeco.ca

Peter D. Marlatt

2180 Marine Drive, Suite 608
Oakville, ON
L6L 5V2

please
**SUPPORT YOUR
SPONSORS**



MacLachlan College

Leah Clarke

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS



337 Trafalgar Road, Oakville, ON
L6J 3H3 Canada
T (905) 844-0372 x235 F (905) 844-9369
lclarke@maclachlan.ca
www.maclachlan.ca