



THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

December 2014 Volume 48 Number 4

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday
Feb 18 2015 **Mr. Bill Thompson** from the Halton County Radial Railway will give a historical review of Canada's Street Cars.

Wednesday
April 22 2015 Author **Ron Brown** will profile his travels *From Queenston to Kingston: The Hidden Heritage of Lake Ontario's Shoreline*.

Wednesday
May 20 2015 **Larry Sherk**, holds one of the largest privately owned collections of breweriana in Canada, if not the world. He will tell us about caps, bottles, labels.....

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

Friday
Dec 05 2014 Your Oakville Historical Society's **Annual Christmas Wine and Cheese Party**. Put on a smile and meet your fellow members. 6 to 9 pm at OHS offices, 110 King St.

Wednesday
March 18
2015 Oakville Historical Society **Annual General Meeting**. Potluck. Meet your fellow members, enjoy a delicious meal and give your input to YOUR society. St. John's United Church, 6:00 to 9:00 pm

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I would like to start off by thanking **Wendy Belcher, Mary Davidson** and all those who helped out with this year's **Ghost Walks**. It was another spectacular season but we're just about maxed out on available space and time. The **Ghost Walks** bring many people in who have never been in the old part of town before and have never visited our office. Many express a real interest in the history of Oakville and the work of the Society. Some may come back for the other things we do. This year we used the **Oakville Arts Council Volunteer Hub** to bring in some students to help, as local citizens in period costume. All the comments received have been very positive.

Mary Davidson is a director of the Society who deserves special thanks. Not only does Mary look after most of the scheduling and organizing for the **Ghost Walks**, she also organizes our **Speakers' Nights**, looks after most new volunteers, is one of the prime organizers at the **Thomas House**, is very involved with the **Memories Book** project and is rarely too busy to help in any way she can. We would be lost without her.

I'd also like to thank **Donna Moran**. Through her efforts, the Society will be receiving a **Heritage Organization Development Grant** of \$1545. This is a provincial grant. Donna has also been involved in submitting a **Trillium Grant** application to assist us in the purchase of equipment to be used in digitizing the archival collection and records.

Our new **First World War Exhibit** is ready for visitors, thanks to the leadership of **Greg Munz** and others. Make sure you pay a visit to see it and send your friends. Shown at right are **Krista MacLaren** with her father **John Schwab** viewing the First World War uniform of John's father, **Clarence Schwab**.

I hope to see most of our members at our annual **Christmas Wine and Cheese** on December 5th, 6 to 9 pm.

George Chisholm President



The Forgotten Pride of Oakville: Steamships of the Oakville Port

By: Mark van Huuksloot

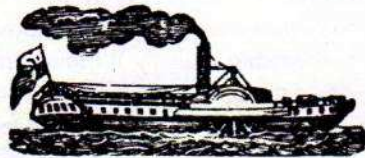
The storefronts of the historical downtown Oakville, filled with coffee shops and restaurants, no longer represent the port town that once made its home here. A passing tourist would not be able to see the opportunities that this town provided the people in the nineteenth century. Unless they travel off the main streets and find the small historical plaques that are tucked away from the busy modern life, there are very few reminders of the past. Even William Chisholm's home bears little more than a plaque to commemorate the founder of Oakville. There are no longer the dry docks, slipways, beams or hooks that had allowed the Oakville shipbuilders to build great steamships that would be Oakville's pride on the Great Lakes. That doesn't mean that they have to be forgotten, or that they didn't help build the foundations for the Oakville today; it is perhaps because of them Oakville survived on Lake Ontario.

Lake Ontario has always been important to the settlements that were founded along its shores. Used for shipping and travel, even warfare, the lake was always bustling with numerous ships passing every day through the Great Lakes network. It is not surprising that, with this number of ships plying the lake, there were a large number of incidents that occurred over the years. Sitting below the surface, like a carpet across the floor, are hundreds of ships and thousands of souls, lost to shoreline and storm, leaving behind nothing but their stories. These ships and sailors, though seemingly insignificant today, were the lifeblood of their age, and provided a great service to the settlements all around the great lakes. Oakville can lay claim to only a couple of the hundreds of ships that passed through the lake, and each has a story, even if we have forgotten many of them. Most of the ships that were produced from Oakville's docks, serviced Lake Ontario well, most notable are the steamships which were more reliable than their predecessors which included schooners, among other ships. Eventually though, when the hulls grew tired or the engines started to whine, they were broken down for parts. Three ships from Oakville shared this fate of repurposing, leaving the waters of the lake to give life to new ships.

The Steamship *Constitution*, built in 1832, was the first steamship from Oakville, and ran the shores for sixteen years, and though not without incident, with still enough life and running parts to be dismantled to be used again. It gave its engine to a new steamship, the *Ploughboy*, and the Oakville legacy continued for nineteen more years, before The *Ploughboy* burned to the waterline while being repaired in Detroit.

The *Oakville*, later named The *Hamilton*, built in 1834, two years after the *Constitution*, was the second steamship to leave the bay of Sixteen Mile Creek, she was rebuilt into a barge after ferrying passengers throughout Lake Ontario for six years. The *Union*, built almost beside the *Oakville* in 1834, was the third ship to set sail from Oakville. After capsizing, three short years after being built, she followed her sister ship and was rebuilt and repurposed into a three masted sailing vessel known as a barque. These ships stood the test of time and have been remembered, even if it is by a few. However what about the steamships built in Oakville that have been lost to the lake?

NEW ARRANGEMENT.
The Splendid Low Pressure Steamboat,



CONSTITUTION,
EDWARD ZEALAND, Master.

WILL during the present season, touch at and leave the following ports, as follows, viz :

Will leave Port Hamilton every Sunday



There are many stories hiding below the waves, lost to most as time passes and places change and old gives way to new. There are two stories of steamships built in Oakville, lost to the cold lake depths that should be remembered.

They begin their tragic tales on the shores of Sixteen Mile creek.

Off the shores of Toronto, the *Burlington* was seen burning in the year of 1841. And although the scorched remains no longer lie in what would have been their permanent resting place; plenty of boats pass over her would be gravesite, unaware of the tragic story that occurred. As the last recorded ship built by William Chisholm, a prominent Upper Canada Politician and businessman of the nineteenth century whose efforts brought about the founding of Oakville, the fire of the *Burlington* was a poor end to this shipbuilder and businessman's legacy.

Servicing the waters between the greater Toronto areas for the short span of four years, the *Burlington* caught fire at a dock, as many steamers did in that age, and was lost before the fire brigade could save her. With the rumoured cargo of gunpowder aboard, the *Burlington* burned too fast to be recovered in one piece, though through the will and talent of shipbuilders, the hull was salvaged and used to build the schooner *Scotland* six years later. Fires were common on ships, as they were made of flammable materials and often carried dangerous cargo but loss at a dock was a rare event for steamships, though wasn't unheard of, and this was not the last. The last steamer from Oakville was not lost at a dock; however another fire did claim this steamship on the shores of Lake Huron, far from its builders' yard.

The *General Wolsely*, built in Oakville at the end of the steamship era in 1884, found its permanent resting place in Cape Croker in the Georgian Bay, only two years after commissioning, making it one of the shortest lived steamships to be built in Oakville. After running aground in the bay, as many ships had before, this ship was abandoned with such haste, that only a portion of the cargo was recovered.

Generally, people of today know little of how essential these steamships were in the lives of the people living along the shores of The Great Lakes. They brought communities together that were otherwise quite isolated and without the industry of building them and the trade that they brought, Oakville would have been a very different place today.

Mark van Huuksloot is a History Major at Carleton University

Information gathered thanks to

The Great Lakes Maritime Database, Regents of the University of Michigan; 2014,
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/t/tbnms1ic?page=index>

H.C. Mathews, Oakville and the Sixteen: The History of an Ontario Port. University of Toronto press; 1953

And special thanks to Phil Brimacombe of the Oakville Historical Society.

AROUND THE SOCIETY

What do you do at the Oakville Historical Society? We asked a few volunteers.

Phil Brimacombe tells us -

I delivered a presentation on the History of Oakville to the residents of Kensington Seniors Residence.

I delivered a presentation to the grade 7/8 students of Clanmore Montessori School as part of a walking tour of Old Oakville conducted by Andrea Stewart.

I assisted in taking care of the Thomas House.

I opened up the office on King St with Stewart Sherriff every third Sunday of the month from 12:30 to 5:00 pm, as we have for the past few years, .

I am continuing to compile research albums on the marine history of Oakville and Bronte Harbours. Albums on stonehooking, fishing, and the coal industry are nearing completion.



Doors Open Halton OHS opened its doors to visitors, and long-serving volunteers made them feel welcome.

Standing left to right - Marianne Hawthorne, Donna Starkey, Sarah Leaver, Renee Lehnen, Andrea Stewart, Susan Wells, Carol Castle. Seated Claudette Shaw

We get questions! My great-grandparents lived on Reynolds Street. Is the house still there? I would like to know when and where the first Woolworth's store was put up. I am seeking information on a Black American, former slave, James Wesley Hill, a resident of Oakville following his escape from Maryland. I am needing information on some of the men lost in WWI who were members at St. John's United Church.

In years past, the **Oakville Historical Society** conducted scheduled **Guided Historical Walks** during the warmer weather. We put out a sign on Lakeshore and when interested people appeared, we headed out. We noticed a waning interest in this type of gathering so our guides now lead them when we have a group request. We continue to get calls from singles wanting a guide so we will schedule a few walks next year and see how it goes. Watch for an announcement.

AROUND TOWN

Oakville in year 2000: You might not recognize it

The Oakville of the year 2000 will be greatly different from the Oakville of today. In fact an Oakville resident who leaves this year and comes back in 20 years might not even be able to recognize the community, predicts town long range planner, John Walker.

The changes won't be the Buck Rogers stuff of the 1930s - buttons, flashing lights and a gadget for everything - but they will be radical, nonetheless, he says.

Walker says there won't be many more high-rises because those buildings are not energy-efficient. Instead there will be an increased number of low-rise development and more moderate types of housing. In Oakville of the future, neighborhoods will be geared more to pedestrians and less to roads and other physical services. Walker believes the town will retain its community charm and avoid the urban blight that sprawls across areas to the east and west. "Oakville is the only community that stops Toronto and Hamilton from becoming another Los Angeles," he says. It is a waste of time, energy and human resources to have much of Oakville's population commuting daily to Toronto when their jobs could be done as easily in Oakville. As the energy crisis intensifies, individual homes will have to become more self-sufficient drawing power from their own plants perhaps using solar energy. Sewer systems which form a major part of residents' tax bills will be reduced as homes process their own sewage using special toilets.

by Michael Shapcott

A Salute to Oakville March 30, 1977

Sean Livingston (below), Naval Reserve Officer (CIC) launched his book *Oakville's Flower The History Of HMCS Oakville*, next door at Erchless Museum. HMCS Oakville was a Canadian World War II corvette that fought in the Battle of the Atlantic, and was one of the few corvettes to sink a U-boat. Book is available at local bookstores and on-line.



Just a reminder that 2015 Membership Renewals are due in December. A renewal form is enclosed for your completion and return, together with your cheque.

This year we will not be issuing membership cards since there seems to be no need for them. Instead we will confirm your renewal either by Canada Post mail or by email. However, if you feel the need to have a card please indicate so on your renewal form.

Thank you for your support and we hope you will continue to enjoy the benefits of membership.

Andrea Stewart, Memberships Secretary.

AROUND THE SOCIETY

Our October speaker was **Ms. Kealy Wilkinson**, (left in picture), Executive Director of **The Canadian Broadcast Museum Foundation**. With a long history in Canadian Broadcasting and especially with the CBC, Ms. Wilkinson treated us to an exciting chronology of the technology, people and events in Canadian broadcasting.

In 1920 Canada put the world on air with the first real radio broadcast ever. We heard of the importance of radio broadcasting in keeping us informed of the events of World War II, the bad news delivered by “The Voice of War” or, popularly, “The Voice of Doom” Lorne Greene, and war correspondents such as Matthew Halton, Peter Stursberg and Rene Levesque. For much needed light relief during the war there was big band music and The Happy Gang. CBC’s radio drama was the best in the world and the BBC came recruiting our stars.



The advent of TV gave us a chance to see other parts of our country and its people, developing a shared citizenship as well as educating and welcoming newcomers to Canada. We had the longest transmitter network in the world and it grew steadily, outpacing that of the US. We were the best informed country in the world with access to everybody else’s information.

Sadly, though, the preservation of Canada’s important broadcast history is in peril. Owing to a lack of resources, a great many of these records have been destroyed and we have lost a large part of this treasure. There is hope that this destruction can be slowed, thanks in large part to Ms. Kealy’s Foundation. However, there is an urgent need to collect vast quantities of memorabilia and funds are exhausted. See how you can help by looking up the website, www.aireum.ca.

Plans are to create the most technologically advanced museum in the world, a virtual museum that will not only preserve the stories of the early broadcast pioneers who shaped our thoughts and dreams, but will continue to capture our stories in the future. It would be most fitting to see our pioneering legacy preserved. *Andrea Stewart*

AROUND THE SOCIETY

If you're looking for a gift for that history-minded person, consider the books and prints stocked by your Society. There is a member price for most items and we don't charge HST. More information is available on our website at www.oakvillehistory.org. We are the sole source for some of the items including the beautiful Rindlisbacher print of the schooner **White Oak** leaving the harbour. We hope to have prints of some of our old maps available soon.

Oakville - A Small Town 1900 - 1930 by Frances Robin Ahern Members: \$10 Non-members \$12

Oakville and The Sixteen by Hazel Chisholm Mathews \$35 & \$50

The Story Of Oakville Harbour by Philip Brimacombe \$10 & \$12

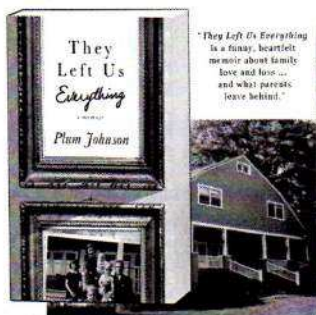
Ghosts of Oakville by Joyce Burnell \$10 **Boo Too** by Joyce Burnell \$10

Oakville Street Names & Landmarks by David Ashe & Joyce Burnell \$35 & \$42

Prints of Oakville \$16 & \$20 **The Walker's Guide to Old Oakville** \$2

Old Oakville by Suzanne and David Peacock \$25 **A History of the Lorne Scots** \$10 & \$12

Lake Ontario Graveyard of the Great Lakes \$20



Plum Johnson lived with her parents and brothers in a large house at the foot of Oakville's Trafalgar Road. The book, *They Left Us Everything* (at left) is a fine-tuned account of family life from WWII to the present. Follow the author around Town and identify the landmarks. See where to buy at <http://plumjohnson.com/>

If you, like Plum Johnson, need to have a clear-out, think about donating to our **Garage Sale**, held at the offices on **2nd May 2015**. Books, china, small furniture, bric-a-brac & etc. are all valuable to treasure hunters. If you need us to pick it up, give us a call. 905 844-2695

William Whitaker and Sons, right, west side of Dundas St. (now named Trafalgar Road) between Colborne St. (now Lakeshore Rd.) and Church St. There is some confusion about the spelling of Whitaker. As often happens, some family member will leave out a T, or a D as in Davi(d)son and that makes it difficult for future genealogists to find ancestors. At OHS we have records with reference to *this* Whitaker with one T.



AROUND THE SOCIETY



September's newsletter featured an image of a **MONARCH** ice box in a **Hillmer** advertisement. Member **Sandy Bray** called us to say, "I have one of those!" and she sent us a photo, shown at left. Sandy tells us the ice box was owned by her great-grandfather Alfred Bray and it is still used by Sandy at the same cottage. Mr. Hillmer could not slow the sale of electric refrigerators and there are few ice boxes still in use.



Since the spring, **Joe and Averil Jany**, above, have spent hours and hours in our garden weeding, transplanting, pruning, trimming and raking. If they have other commitments their daughter Susan comes over. Thanks Jany family! Our garden has never looked better.



Rosemary Seeton at left, diligently searches for photographs and documents in our archival room. If you are looking for a photograph, a map, a document, chances are Rosemary can find it.



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