

Oakville Historical
Society
since 1953



Historical Society News

www.oakvillehistory.org



Labour of Love:
Reflections on the Oakville Children's Centre

Annual General Meeting

18th March 2020

Oakville Historical Society's AGM is for all members to discuss affairs and socialize over a potluck supper. Please arrive with dinner offerings at 5:00pm to 5:30pm. Dinner at 6:00pm and meeting at 7:00pm

Yard Sale

23rd May 9-2pm 2020

This is our Annual Get-Rid-of-Excess-Stuff Sale and is sure to benefit:

- Donors (clutter removed)
- Buyers (treasures found)
- The Society (funds received)

Sale held at our offices at 110 King St., Oakville. Please bring us your treasures the week before the sale. No clothing, fabric items, large furniture or books please. Call us at 905 844-2695 if you require us to pick up your yard sale donation.

Speakers Nights

15th April 2020

Michael Johnson will speak about "A history of Canadian Peacekeeping" including:

- Peacekeeping before 1956
- The Suez Crisis
- Canadian Peacekeeping Missions 1956-1990
- The Decline of Peacekeeping
- The Costs
- Heroism in Canadian Peacekeeping

20th May 2020

Kim Fullerton will present "Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation Treaties." Fullerton, lawyer for Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation will give a presentation on the Treaties that cover Oakville and surrounding territory.

Speakers Nights are held at St. John's United Church, corner of Dunn and Randall Sts. Enter by Randall St. Doors open at 7:00pm for 7:30pm event. Refreshments served, donations welcome.

TCA

TURNER CHAPEL ANTIQUES

JED GARDNER

www.turnerchapelantiques.com

905.338.3252

37 Lakeshore Rd. W, Oakville, ON, L6K 1C8
turnerchapelantiques@bellnet.ca

Mayors Picnic

14th June Noon to 4:40pm

Bring a lunch and be ready to enjoy music and dancing at Lakeside Park, Navy and Front Sts. Fun for all ages. No rain date.

barkley 
design • print & copy

Putting ideas into print since 1992

✦ We Design

✦ We Print

✦ We Care

905-844-2226

design@barkleyprint.com
barkleyprint.com

480 Morden Rd., Oakville

A note from the OHS President

It was great to see so many of our members at the annual Christmas get-together. My thanks to Marianne Hawthorne and the entertainment committee for all their work in arranging the event.

It has been fairly quiet around the office since Christmas but as summer approaches it will get busier. That means we'll have an increased demand for volunteers. If you'd like to help at the Thomas House or elsewhere, we'd love to hear from you. We're hoping to have a couple of summer students again this year. With their help we've made great progress on the collection over the past few summers.

Preparatory planning and utilities work has started on the Coach House next door and the Society is being kept informed. One change that will affect us directly will be the move of the iron gate further west along King Street. Planned sewer work should fix once and for all the problems we've been having with our sewer line.

I hope to see many of our members at our Annual General Meeting coming up in March. It will start with our usual pot luck dinner and will be held at St John's United Church.

We're always open to suggestions on how we can improve our Society. Please contact us if you have any. George Chisholm



This old iron entrance at the Society's offices, 110 King St. has seen better days. One post has been enveloped by a tree, whose roots are spreading onto the path, making it difficult for visitors to safely enter the narrow opening. The Coach House is to the left.



DIGNITY RESTORED

Gravestone Cleaning
 dignityrestored.ca
 905-483-1638










JIM YOUNG, M.B.A.
SALES REPRESENTATIVE

Direct: 289.259.0955
 Office: 905.842.7000
 jimbobmba2000@gmail.com

RE/MAX ABOUTOWNE
Realty Corp. Brokerage Independently Owned and Operated.
 1235 North Service Rd. W., Suite 100, Oakville ON, L6M 2W2



Labour of Love: Reflections on the Oakville Children's Centre

By Patricia Stephenson

When no performing arts theatre for children existed in their hometown of Oakville, three families, each with young children — Lois and Greg Munz, Jill and Ron Planche and Kathy and Denny Crowe — decided to make it happen.

Lois Munz recalls when friends Jill and Ron Planche proposed a plan to establish a family-focused “theatre presenting company,” an organization that would hire professional performers to entertain young audiences. It was autumn of 1977. The newly built Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts had opened in October of that same year with programming geared to adult audiences. “Ron, as Regional Councillor and a member of the Oakville Centre Board,” she says, was keenly aware that there was nothing in the works for children’s programming. Yet, she adds, “Ron and Jill thought that the 485 seat Oakville Centre was ideal for kids.”

“The Planches had combined business and theatre experience,” says Munz. She adds that Jill worked for the Canadian Opera Company as “executive assistant to the general director,” and “Ron was a marketing professional.” The Planches determined that the purpose of the new company would be to bring the best in children’s professional performance to the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts. Performances would include theatre, dance, music, individual artists and well-known children’s performers. And to encourage family attendance, all tickets would be one price and kept as low as possible. Yet, beyond the plans, says Munz, neither family had the financial resources to contribute to a new business. However, the Planches “felt [that] with most of the work being done by volunteers and with grants and fundraising possibilities,” they could make a go of it. This plan required that the

company founders, whose responsibilities would include the management and running of the organization, would work as volunteers. After much discussion, including an assessment of the risk, the Munz family assured the Planches they would contribute “in any way they could.”

When the Planches put forward their proposal, Lois Munz was on leave from teaching to stay home with her six-month-old baby and three-year-old son, while taking university courses in the evening. She recalls many times working on assignments well into the early morning hours. Teaching qualifications were changing, she says, and it was necessary to upgrade if she wanted to return to work as an elementary school teacher (which she later did). Her husband and the Planches weren’t flush with spare time either — they all had full-time jobs.

The launch:

By early 1978, the newly founded Oakville Children’s Centre (OCC) was registered as a non-profit corporation. While performances would be presented at the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts, the OCC would operate out of the founder’s homes. During OCC’s first few years, friends Kathy Crowe (owner of Blackbird Graphics) and her husband Denny, joined the Planches and the Munz family team.

The performance season for the Oakville Children’s Centre stretched from October to April, with a break at Christmas. Performances were held on Sunday afternoons, and occasionally on a Saturday. A “top-billed show” would perform twice on the same day — in early and late afternoon. Lois Munz says that by “the 1981-82 season . . . approximately 30,000 patrons” attended the performances.

Greg Munz says that “months of work went into bringing so many shows to Oakville for the theatre season. And it was all done by volunteers.” He recalls attending “showcases” with the other OCC founders, “where theatre groups would present excerpts of their best work to an audience of folks who might hire them.”

In the early years, while mail-in ticket orders went to the Planches’ home address (also known as the Oakville Children’s Centre box office), the Munz family home phone number was used for phone-in ticket orders. Greg Munz took the orders. (His wife and Jill, he says, mailed out the orders.) He recalls the overwhelming surge in ticket sales every fall, when the Halton and Peel school boards sent OCC brochures home with the school children each September. He says, “This is when our kitchen phone began to ring right off the wall!”

“For a few seasons,” says Lois Munz, “Jill had arranged for tickets to be sold at The Bay in the children’s department at Oakville Place.” In exchange, The Bay received free advertising of its children’s clothing in the OCC program. That arrangement required a volunteer though and in time was discontinued. “Eventually,” she says, “the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts box-office took over the ticket sales completely. What a relief!”

Lois Munz describes an overview of the responsibilities divvied up between the three founding families. She was “in charge of recruiting volunteers, organizing them and communicating their responsibilities to them.” Her duties also included “conducting tours of the theatre facilities after most performances.” She says that Jill took on the financial end of the business, as well as managing the programming and bookings of productions from all over Canada, (occasionally from the States and once from Poland). Ron contributed his marketing expertise. For the first few years, says Munz, Kathy designed the brochures and tickets, and took care of the printing, then Ron took over the design work.

On theatre performance days, says Munz, her

husband Greg, Ron and Denny, prepared McDonald’s orange drinks, sold cookies, and tended to the cash. They also worked as stage-hands, and on rare occasions, they were asked to fill-in with non-speaking roles on stage. At times, the men took on the role of “dresser,” she says, “to help the actors get into and out of their costumes, sometimes very quickly, to change from one character to another.”

Fundraising and promotion:

Although the Oakville Children’s Centre received grants, Lois Munz says that continual fundraising was necessary to encourage individual and corporate support, and to keep ticket prices low. She says she credits Jill’s outreach efforts to businesses within the community, which resulted in generous financial backing.

When Oakville’s Midnight Madness began in the early 1980s, the Children’s Centre founders jumped at the opportunity to fundraise at the event. They set up a tent, a couple of barbecues and sold sausage on a bun. The fundraising went “quite well for a few years,” says Greg Munz, until a flood of other vendors and main street restaurants caught on to the idea.

The Oakville Children’s Centre founders looked for novel ways to promote the organization. It was during such a discussion between Greg Munz and one of the OCC board members (who worked for a billboard company), that led to the creation of the “Christmas Caterpillar.” Munz, who was instrumental in building the caterpillar, says it was constructed using copper pipes, hula hoops, and other materials. The Christmas Caterpillar made its debut at the Oakville Santa Claus Parade to a packed crowd of thousands. The giant smiling lime-green caterpillar, with saucer-like eyes, wearing a Santa hat, strutted along the parade route. Accompanying the caterpillar, he says, was his wife Lois, “dressed up like a bird handing out brochures . . . [and] interacting with the children watching the parade.”

On stage surprises:

On occasion, there were surprises during performances — it was live theatre after all. Lois Munz recalls when “the broom of one of the witches caught [on] fire. Fortunately, the fire was extinguished immediately but the smell of burnt straw hung heavy in the air.”

Greg Munz tells the story about a role he played on stage that received a surprising response from the audience. He was a fill-in for one of two stretcher bearers — and someone neglected to tell him that only one side of the stretcher could carry the weight of a person (because of a locking mechanism). No sooner had an actor flopped onto the stretcher than it immediately folded in half. The other stretcher bearer realized at once what had happened and managed to lift his end of the stretcher high enough to prevent the actor from hitting the floor. The actor, sandwiched between the two halves of the stretcher was carried safely across the stage. The audience, unaware of the near casualty, roared with laughter.

A good long run:

Lois Munz considers the Oakville Children’s Centre years as “the golden age of children’s theatre in Canada.” For almost two decades, well-known Canadian and international performers hired by the Oakville Children’s Centre, graced the stage at the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts. The line-up included acts such as Sharon, Lois & Bram, Fred Penner, Famous PEOPLE Players, Theatre Beyond Words (creators of the Potato People), Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers, Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and Orkidstra, Peter and the Wolf performed with the Oakville Symphony Orchestra, The Loon and Heron (a theatre group known for using sign language in their performances), and many others. As well, she adds, local talent from Elizabeth Paterson Dance Company performed “*The Nutcracker* ballet for us each year at Christmas.”

Munz reflects fondly on the years when the children of the founding families accompanied their parents to the shows. The children “benefited tremendously” from attending the performances and meeting the performers backstage, she says. “They realized that celebrities were real people that had outstanding talent.”

The decision to close the Oakville Children’s Centre after nearly twenty years in operation, came down to a few factors, says Munz. “Towards the end of the Children’s Centre run, Jill and I would be sitting at the back of the theatre watching the performances.” Their children had long since grown up. She adds, “This scenario, along with the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts offering to take over programming for children and the competition of home video rentals, made the decision to end the Children’s Centre quite tolerable.”

Before closing the Oakville Children’s Centre, “there was a balance on the books of \$22,000,” says Munz. “As the organization was non-profit,” she adds, “the disbursement of that money had to be done correctly.” Thus, an endowment fund named “The Munz & Planche Family Fund for The Performing Arts was set up and invested with the newly formed Oakville Community Foundation (OCF).” Once the fund reached \$25,000, the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts (the sole beneficiary of the fund), would receive a grant. To date, the fund has gifted almost \$24,000 to the Oakville Centre for the Performing Arts — and support continues to this today.

“To sum it up,” says Lois Munz, “the Oakville Children’s Centre was a lot of work— but gave us all many years of fond memories.”

Cover photo: courtesy of Oakville Beaver

Steve Nease, in 2009, donated a collection of his art work to the Oakville Historical Society. Here is a sample that shows there is nothing new in 2020.



Cartoon by Steve Nease
www.neasecartoons.com

1984



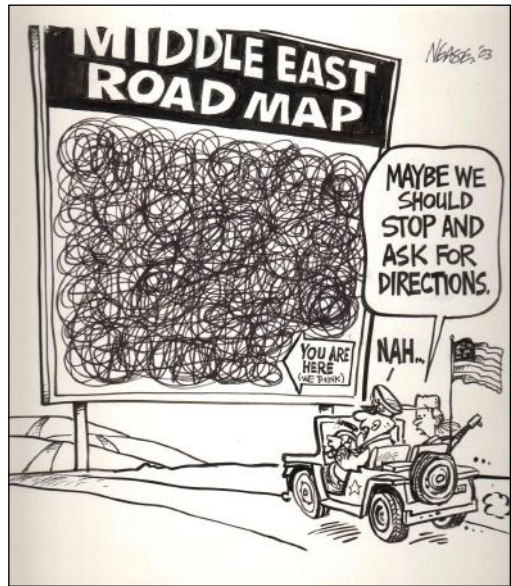
Cartoon by Steve Nease
www.neasecartoons.com

1984



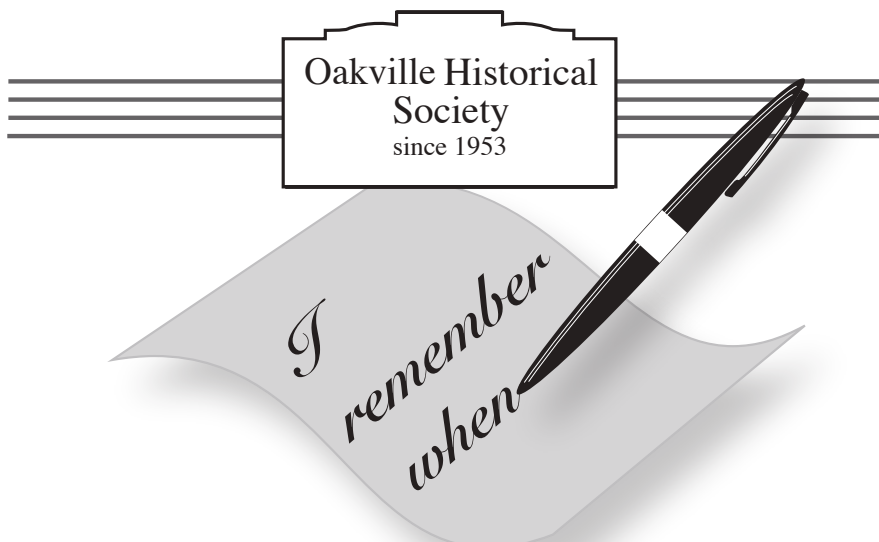
Cartoon by Steve Nease
www.neasecartoons.com

2003



Cartoon by Steve Nease
www.neasecartoons.com

2003



Do You Have a Story to Tell?

If you would like to share your Oakville story, we'd love to hear from you.

The Oakville Historical Society (OHS) is collecting "Oakville Memories." These stories will be posted on the OHS website, and may appear on displays and in OHS publications (such as the newsletter).

Your stories of the past keep our town's history alive for future generations.

Your story may be submitted in writing. Or if you prefer to tell your story orally, an OHS volunteer can interview you. To arrange an interview, please email information@oakvillehistory.org.

Please indicate "Story to Tell" in the subject line.

Interviews may be conducted at the OHS office or if you prefer, we can come to you.

Annie's Story

By Janet Godber

Annie (Van Allen) McKay was born in 1861 in West Flamborough to parents William & Louisa. She grew up in Milton and in May of 1894, married Duncan McKay, a merchant, and they lived on Martin St. in the town of Milton. Duncan McKay was a well known and respected individual in town and a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows.

Between 1896 and 1900, Annie and Duncan welcomed four children into their family - William, Peter, Mary and another baby girl. Sadly, two did not survive beyond infancy. Enduring the loss of two children would have been a great heartache to the family. Although on the decline, the infant death rate was still a concern to families well into the 20th century.

Annie & Duncan had barely begun to enjoy raising their remaining young family when tragedy would strike again. In June of 1901, Duncan developed peritonitis, an infection of the tissue lining the abdomen, and he died shortly thereafter, leaving Annie alone to raise her two children, William aged 6 and Mary, aged 8 months. Milton's newspaper The Canadian Champion, reported that Duncan was honoured as "one of the oldest and most prominent Oddfellows of the county", and he was sent off with a large parade and funeral which was well attended by the most respected people in the county, including Brother Hillmer from Oakville.

Annie, now a widow, would forge on. By 1911, she had made her way to Oakville, where she rented a house at 261 Spruce St. from Charles Doty, a well known lumber dealer who lived next door. By now, her children were aged 16 and 11. It is likely that her late husband's connection with the Oddfellows secured her family a place in Oakville.

By 1916, with the Great War well underway, Annie's only son William signed up at the age of



261 Spruce St., Oakville

20, serving as sergeant with the No. 2 Overseas Training Depot, Canadian Expeditionary Force. One can almost feel the quiet desperation in Annie as she waved goodbye to him at the train station, perhaps reflecting on the family she had already lost and wondering if she would ever see him again. What relief she must have felt at his safe return.

In April of 1920, after several years of living in rented premises, Annie was able to purchase a house two doors down at 269 Spruce St. at the corner of Inglehart St. This was quite an accomplishment for Annie, and a long climb back from the position she had found herself in as a young widow. Her son William was now employed as an auditor and her daughter Mary, a stenographer. They took in a boarder to help pay the bills.

TCA

TURNER CHAPEL ANTIQUES

JED GARDNER

www.turnerchapelantiques.com

905.338.3252

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

turnerchapelantiques@bellnet.ca

The McKay family were settling into life in their new home. However, the grim reaper would bang on the door once more when Annie was stricken with nephritis a few months later. Putting her affairs in order, in July of 1921 she transferred the deed on the house to her son William for “love plus \$1.00” just a month before her death.



269 Spruce St.

William went on to marry Annie Olive Nash the following year and they continued to live in the house until their own deaths in 1971. The McKay family would be united again in the Evergreen Cemetery in Milton.

Annie's name doesn't appear on the plaque at 261 Spruce St., as Charles Doty was the homeowner, but if it did, it would simply read “Annie McKay, widow”. She would also be known as “widow” on official documents. However, she was much more than that. Annie was an extraordinary person. Her story is not one which would be read in history books, but it is one filled with determination, courage and hope, and it is one of many stories told across the nation during that era.

“Hardship often prepares an ordinary person for an extraordinary destiny” C. S. Lewis

Thomas House

This year we are planning a workshop here in the offices on “The Art of Interpretation” with Andrew Cirtwill of Spruce Lane Farm who will be sharing his expertise with us on this most interesting subject. Carol Gall, Susan Bowen and I attended his workshop in December and came away excited by the ideas presented to promote our Thomas House and thought it would be a great way to start the new year.

We plan to have this in April prior to our opening in May, and would love to hear from all past, present and “future” Thomas House interpreters. This is a great opportunity to brush up on our skills and learn some new techniques and presentation ideas.

Let me know if you are interested in such a workshop – would a weekday or weekend, morning or afternoon be preferable? This will also be useful for any student volunteers so please pass this on to those you know who would be interested.

Once we know numbers, I will set up the details.

Mary Davidson
905-842-6935 mary.davidson2@bell.net



TERRY C. COOKE
Managing Director

TEL: (905) 844-2600 FAX: (905) 842-2966
kopriva@eol.ca

64 LAKESHORE ROAD WEST, OAKVILLE, ONTARIO L6K 1E1

Membership

We are pleased to welcome the following new members since last newsletter:

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Boast-Cornish, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Buxton-Forman, Ms. Rue Louise Frischmuth, Mrs. Mary Gundy, Mr. Tim Haig, Mr. Colin Hardman, Mr. Neil Harrison, Ms. Sally McFadyen, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen McWilliam.

Our current membership is 228 with one hundred members still to renew. If you haven't renewed your membership, please use the enclosed membership form or simply renew online.

Thank you all for the support you provide for the work of our volunteers.

The Membership Team: Andrea Stewart, Marie Descent and Susan Bowen

Bronte Historical Society

2020 Schedule of Events

22nd May Wine and Jazz
 23rd May Opening of Sovereign House
 4th July Canada Places Day 10-4pm
 26th September Culture Days
 Trafalgar Day TBA
 Christmas Art Show TBA

Bronte Historical Society
 Open May-Oct 1-4pm Sat, Sun and Wed
 Sovereign House
 7 West River Street
 Oakville Ontario L6L 6N9

MACRAE & ASSOCIATES

RENOVATIONS
 RESTORATIONS

JAMIE MACRAE

65 NAVY ST.
 OAKVILLE, ON
 L6J 2Z1

cell 905 399 6066

WINDOW
 CRAFT
 INDUSTRIES

Allan Sauder
 saudera@windowcraft.com

24 Ronson Drive, Unit 4
 Toronto, ON, M9W 1B4
 Tel: (416) 535-4499

Visit our web site at www.windowcraft.com

Please

visit our
 advertisers



BLACK FOREST PASTRY SHOP

184 Lakeshore Rd. East
 Oakville, ON L6J 1H6
 T 905.337.1671

www.blackforestpastryshop.ca
john@blackforestpastryshop.ca

The *way* things were...



Do you know?

Where this house is located?

Who is in the photo?

Look for the answers in our next issue!



From December 2019 The *way* things were...

Methodist Episcopal Church, built 1869, demolished when Wm. Anderson Bridge erected, c1961. Located at 125 Randall Street, former site of recently relocated Fire Station #3. Central School, south of the church, is seen at left.

Archive Hours:

Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 to 4:30 pm
Third Sunday of the month 12:30 to 4:00 pm

905 844-2695 www.oakvillehistory.org

110 King Street
Oakville, ON.
L6J 1B1