

Oakville Historical  
Society  
since 1953

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# Historical Society News

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



## A Life Well Travelled

**Volume 55 Number 3**

**September 2021**

# Speakers' Nights

by Steve Bysouth

## Nick Howard of Iron Works Printing Museum, Oakville

15th September 2021 7:20-9:00 pm

After many years directly involved in the printing industry, Liana and Nick Howard set about to build a museum of printing history with focus on machinery from the 1830s to 1950s. Hear how it all came about.

## Alanna Bray-Lougheed

17th November 2021 Time to be announced

Alanna Bray-Lougheed grew up in Oakville participating in many sports and it was lessons at the Burloak Canoe Club that led her to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in the Canoe/Kayak-Sprint event. She'll tell us how she paddled that journey.

Make a note of these events and you as a Society member will receive a Zoom invitation via email closer to the date.

# OHS Videos

by Steve Bysouth

A few of the most recent productions include Elda Boese, Get Schooled and Get Schooled—The Trailer. These are in support of the new school exhibit which has yet to be shown to the public.

Two historical plaque story videos have also been produced: David Patterson and Robert Hall.

Lastly, a yard sale trailer was made in support of the August 7th event.

The partnership with Cogeco YourTV has resulted in the showing of some of our shorter videos and on July 26th a special 30-minute showing of an updated version of Mark Verlinden's Navy Street walk.

One of the new OHS video features being used this year is voiceovers where people can record the story/script at home and then the soundtrack gets added to appropriate images to create the final video. This option works well, for example, on plaque videos where acting may not be the best option.

All of the above productions may we viewed on our website: [oakvillehistory.org](http://oakvillehistory.org)

If you would like to become involved in helping with research, acting, voiceovers, story telling, script writing, video production or other aspects of OHS video production team, please reach out to Andrea Stewart.



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# A Note from the Society President

by George Chisholm

It was great to see such a large turnout for our annual yard sale. Thanks to my wife, Brenda Chisholm for organizing it and to all the volunteers who helped out with donations, pricing, moving stuff around and disposing of a lot of the leftovers. The office is now somewhat more useable. We're still in the process of selling some of the larger items online but we've made just over \$2000 so far. I counted close to 20 of our blue Society T-shirts at the sale, many of them on newer members. It was unfortunate that the day ended with a cloudburst and we all got thoroughly soaked cleaning up. There are plans underway for a follow-up sale in the fall featuring many of the Christmas items that didn't sell. Stay tuned for further information.

I am sorry to announce the resignation from the Board of Averil Jany. Averil and her husband Joe looked after the garden and she worked in the archives. We'll miss her voice at the Board table.

We would like to thank Dana Beeton and John Hodgkinson for their work in rebuilding the Thomas House fireplace. Fires over the last 65 years had eroded the beach stone hearth to dust. It's now proper fire brick which will blend in with time. It's set for another 100 years.

You may have missed the announcement about our new online exhibit featuring our plaques. We've been cleaning up our records and have information on over 250 plaques that are or were on houses. Some are missing and we know there are others out there for which we don't have much information. Mark Verlinden has created an online exhibit featuring 100 of our plaques (to start). It can be accessed through our website. Each house has a page with further information and photos related to the history of the property and its early inhabitants. A Google map linked to the exhibit shows where the plaques are located. We're on track to install over 30 plaques this year.

While there's still no official word on when we may be able to reopen the office and the Thomas House, we still repond to phone and email messages.



Brenda Chisholm, at right, displays wares at Yard Sale.

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# The Secret History of a School Bus Driver

by Ruth Verlinden

Starting in September, the school bus pulls up to the stop on McCraney Street where parents wait with their children. Our friend Neil Harrison was a school bus driver for a few years, and he shakes his head at us parents coming to the bus stop when we live just a few blocks or even just a few houses away. He recalls how very different was his own childhood.

He was born in Cheadle Hulme, a small English village. In 1942, when he was seven years old, his family moved to London because of his father's job as a cableroom telegraphist. When the bombs began raining down in the Blitz, the family divided to live with different relatives outside of London, and Neil was sent to live with an aunt in Cheshire. Sure enough soon afterwards a 'Doodlebug' V1 flying bomb hit the street where they had been living, shaking the house so badly, it had to be torn down.

In 1945, they moved back to London. At age 10, Neil sometimes spent the day exploring the city by himself, taking the London Underground (subway) train from stop to stop. He would pop up to street level and look out the doors, but wouldn't go past the gates, then jump on the next train. He would travel the whole day on one ticket!

When he was 15 years old, he went to King Edward VII Nautical College, where he learned seamanship and coastal and celestial navigation. A year later, he became an apprentice with a shipping company. He and his parents signed a four-year contract with the company, which included the promise 'to stay out of alehouses, taverns and houses of ill repute', a clause that has been in apprenticeship contracts since Medieval times. And so, at age 16, he packed a

suitcase for two years on board a ship. No one went with him to the harbour; he just took a train by himself to the port.

What a joy to discover at his first breakfast on board that there was grapefruit, fish, eggs and bacon, toast and marmalade! The merchant navy had no rationing because of the dangerous work they had done in the war, such as sailing in convoys to Russia. After years of war rations and post-war thrift, this was astounding. The coming year looked promising.

'Neil! Watch out!'

He looked up just in time to fling himself out of the way. A piece of iron ore was falling out of a crane bucket as it swung material from the ship to the train car on shore. That was close! His first week on board the ship was nearly a disaster!

'Get over to the other side of the ship while we're unloading!'

'Yes sir!' he said, with a huge sense of relief.

While in port, the apprentices would do the same work as sailors: splicing rope, painting, chipping rust off metal, checking life boats. When at sea, they went on watches with the officers. Here they applied what they had been taught at the Marine College: taking bearings, doing coastal navigation, writing in the logbook. They employed celestial navigation using the sextant in the twilight to measure the angle of the stars and calculate the ship's position. During the day they measured the altitude of the sun. Compasses on metal ships are subject to inaccuracy, so that twice on every four-hour watch, a seaman would

measure the compass error, using the sun, moon or stars, and calculate the ship's position according to the nautical almanac.

The ship travelled from Wales to the United States, and then to Australia. After eight months at sea, Neil was left in Durban, South Africa with another apprentice in order to transfer to another ship. The company put the teens into a decent hotel, and they received a meal allowance. They spent their days on Durban's famous ocean shoreline: swimming in the sea and stretching out on the expansive sandy beach. In the evening, they were on the dance floor, chatting with the jazz band performing at the hotel. The

bandleader was a celebrity drummer, and his very pretty wife taught Neil to waltz and fox-trot. It was a very nice ten-day holiday for two teenage boys on minimal wages.

Neil was finally at home for a two-month holiday after two years. Then he was back to sea again for long stretches of time, going to India, South America, criss-crossing the oceans. A seven-month voyage to Australia was considered a short trip. He finished his apprenticeship, wrote exams and was promoted over the years. Finally, after nearly ten years at sea, he wrote the Master Mariner examination, which made him eligible to be a captain. However, he had seen the life of a captain, away from their families for two years at a time, and he wanted no part of that. He decided never to go back to sea again.

Instead, he chose aviation. He retrained as an air navigator and was hired by British United Airways in 1965. At that time, there were five men in the cockpit: two pilots, two engineers and the navigator. Neil sat behind the pilot at a desk with instrumentation, and gave directions over oceans and large continents where there were no radio aids. He was also responsible for calculating the best altitude and power settings in order to use fuel most economically.

However, his goal was to become a pilot. In England, pilot training was only available as a full-time program. Since Neil by now was married and had two young children, he couldn't afford to give up his job. When he discovered that Canada had pilot training that could be done part-time, they came to live in Oakville, Ontario, and he trained to be a pilot while working as a navigator for Air Canada. He and his wife, Anne, chose Oakville because it was in easy commuting distance



Neil Harrison on board ship wearing tropical uniform taking sextant sightings, 1955.

to the airport and near a lake. The fact that there was a significant British immigrant community here was a plus, but even more important was the existence of an established Scottish Country Dancing group!

In 1975 Neil finally flew as a third pilot. Then he became the first pilot on a DC9 flying in northern Ontario. He was away from home for long stretches when he was piloting a Lockheed Tristar flying Singapore to Bombay, but these absences were only two to three weeks rather than the two years if he had been a ship's captain. He was criss-crossing the ocean again, high above the seas this time: London, Paris, Copenhagen, Duesseldorf.

Neil retired at age 60 because that was required by the airlines at that time. He looked for a useful way to fill his days, and that's how he ended up at the wheel of a school bus. The students liked him; he was friendly and knew how to control the behavior on the bus in a calm, quiet way. Neil never told them about being a jet pilot. He saw them arriving at the bus stop with their mom or dad and wondered whether they would have the same opportunities for independence and adventure as he had experienced, on their voyage through life.

Cover photo: Neil aboard his first ship, 1952. All photos provided.

# Historical Tour

By Ruth Verlinden

After a COVID-19 year of not being able to lead walking tours in person, Ruth Verlinden was very happy to have a very enthusiastic group of four young adults join her on a two-hour tour of the historic area of Oakville on a sunny Saturday in late July.



Three of the group were teens from Quebec participating in an exchange program called 'Summer Work Student Exchange', which is run by the YMCA. The fourth person was the local coordinator of the program, Michelle Faheim, whose job involves finding summer work places for the students, and creating activities for them to do together on the weekends. Our historic walking tour was an ideal activity as it was combined into a scavenger hunt in which the Oakville group was competing with groups in Brampton and Mississauga. Ruth is holding up a photo of Colonel William Chisholm, the founder of Oakville, which represented 'A famous person of the city' for the group's scavenger hunt.



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# Annual Bursary

By George Chisholm

We're delighted to announce this year's winner of the bursary we award to a graduating cadet from 1188 Lorne Scots Oakville Army Cadet Corps. This award was established three years ago to honour a volunteer from the Society. This year we presented the bursary in memory of Mrs. Evelyn Bullied and Mr. Arthur Bullied. Ev was born in the Village of Sheridan and was the youngest and only girl of eight children in the Savage family. She attended Maple Grove School and worked for many years at Dunn's Drug Store. While

Ev and Art did not have children of their own, she loved chatting with the teenagers who frequented the soda bar at Dunn's. Ev was a long-time society member and was a Director for several years. She passed away in 2018 at the age of 102. During the Second World War, Art served as a Leading Writer in the Navy. He was on the Society board as Treasurer.

The winner of this year's award is Master Warrant Officer Darren Zhao who will be attending the University of Waterloo in the fall to study Computer Science. He is a graduate of Abbey Park High School. We wish him success in his studies at Waterloo.



MWO Darren Zhao

Photo provided

MWO Zhao had this to say in his application for the bursary.

"When I joined cadets back in 2015, I had no idea what to expect. I had very little experience outside of school, and I was a shy kid. Since then, I've made great personal achievements that I am happy to share. First of all, I'm proud to have completed the Expedition Instructor course at Blackdown CTC. This is widely considered to be one of the most difficult courses that could be taken, as it involved going on a physically demanding 18 day expedition away from civilization. It was a great test of all I had learned from my field training exercises.

Secondly, I received the award for best dress and deportment in 2020, which acknowledged the work I put in to maintaining my uniform as well as my dedication to upholding professional standards for the other cadets. This leads me to my proudest accomplishment, which is the positive impact I've had on younger cadets. Whether it be drawing well-prepared backpacks with the green stars (first year cadets) or describing styles of leadership with the gold stars (fourth year cadets), I know that when I teach a lesson, the cadets will be learning something important, whilst also having fun. Although expeditions and learning to iron my uniform were memorable, the time I spent mentoring the cadets is time I will never forget."

# Victoria Hall - St. Jude's Church

By Phil Brimacombe

The main part of St. Jude's Church was completed in 1884, replacing the original church situated at the northwest corner of Colborne Street (now Lakeshore Road) and Thomas Street.

However, it wasn't until 1887 that Victoria Hall was added on the south side of the present church. The hall was intended to house a growing Sunday School, as well as accommodating church functions such as meetings, receptions, and various social events like church suppers and bazaars.

back-up source of illumination in case the new and as yet unreliable town electrical system failed to function.

The heating system was run from a coal furnace, the most common source of heating in houses and other buildings at the turn of the Twentieth Century.

During the incumbency of Reverend C.E. Riley (1922-1925), and with the economic prosperity and consequent population growth of Oakville during the 1920's, the congregation of St. Jude's grew substantially. As a result, the growing Sunday school was accommodated in an expansion of the Parish Hall (Victoria Hall). The contract was let in 1924, and the addition completed the following year. The addition incorporated a recreation room in the basement, a hall upstairs (now the Helen Poole Room and church library), and classrooms for the Sunday School on the second floor. Offices were included on the main floor, A stairway linked Victoria Hall on the lower level to the new addition on the upper level.



A beautiful stained glass window (above) was installed on the east side of Victoria Hall when the building was completed. It commemorated Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and was a gift of Christopher Armstrong, an owner of the Marlatt and Armstrong Tannery in Oakville. For many years, he was a warden at St. Jude's.

The church, including Victoria Hall, was initially lit by oil lamps. However, at the Easter vestry meeting in 1893, it was decided that the church, including Victoria Hall, was to be lit by electricity. For many years thereafter, the oil lamps remained in their brackets throughout the church, as the

Victoria Hall and the adjacent addition reverberated with the sounds of Sunday School teachers teaching lessons, children singing hymns, and the sound of the piano being played by Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Alec Chisholm. The Sunday School commenced each Sunday at 2:30 and continued throughout most of the afternoon. Mr. E.T. Lightbourn was the Sunday School Superintendent for thirty years. There was a weekly homework assignment for the students from the Sunday School leaflet. A Christmas concert was held annually under the supervision of Miss Kathleen Appleby. The Sunday School students also enjoyed many social activities to enrich their programme,



including sleigh rides along Lakeshore Road, and an annual Sunday school picnic by excursion steamer from Oakville to pleasure grounds in Port Dalhousie, Burlington Beach or Wabasso Park (now La Salle Park) in Aldershot.

Not only did the Sunday School make good use of Victoria Hall, but other church groups used the facility for various functions. Among them were the Mothers' Union, the Altar Guild, and the Women's Auxiliary. In days past, churches functioned as important social centres of every community. The congregation grew during the



Victoria Hall south facade

postwar years. Consequently, a further addition was erected to the southwest of St. Jude's. The westerly part of the church was extended to the north and included a choir vestry, sacristy, as well as offices for the Rector, Canon T.C. Jackson, and the secretarial staff. The work commenced in 1954 and was completed in July 1955. On May 22nd of that year, the addition was consecrated by the Anglican Bishop of Niagara. In 1957, a narthex was built to the church extending north of the bell tower.



Oakville Historical Society plaque

Today, Victoria Hall is still used extensively for events like church meetings and social events such as the annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. In 2021, the hall received a commemorative plaque from the Oakville Historical Society. It has been installed on the outside wall at the southeast corner of the hall.

Sources:

1. "The George Sumner Diaries", Oakville Historical Society Archives
2. "Recollections of St. Jude's Church", a booklet by Frances Robin Ahearn
3. "St. Jude's Church, Oakville", 1942-1957, by A.H. Lightbourn

Photos: Steve Bysouth



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# Thomas House Repairs



Many a meal has been prepared in the 1829 Merrick Thomas House fireplace and the beach stones needed a modern upgrade. Fortunately we have members like John Hodgkinson and Dana Beeton who offered their stonemasonry and carpentry skills to tackle the job in the July heat.

Stonemason John Hodgkinson, in top left photo, assesses the damage before work begins. In top right photo, John at left and Dana Beeton at right show their finished work.

Loose stones, bricks and mortar were removed before new work began. The back wall now has two rows of fire brick, the hearth received a complete new surface of the same and the front edge has old stones repositioned and mortared in place.

Although the materials used would not have been available in 1829, we are pleased that the fireplace is now structurally sound. The light brick colour will soon be covered with good old-fashioned soot which will disguise the upgrades.

## St. Andrew's Belfry

“When building the St. Andrew's Belfry, John Cavin, father of Martin Cavin, a carpenter, gave freely his time and labour to help erect the church, and was engaged high up when the rope that went through the scratch pulley was let loose by some incompetent workman at noon hour, and the wind blew it over to where Mr. William Davis now lives. With quick thought and presence of mind, he took off his stocking, unravelled it, let it down, and the ground men tied the rope to it. John was soon down for dinner. Would the yarn to-day lift the rope up?”

Oakville Record. Date unknown

# Gardening Crew

By Mary Davidson



Above left to right: Jim McMulty, Cathy McNulty, Jim Bond, Andrea Sewart, Susan Bowen, Mary Davidson, Claudette Shaw, Donna Moran, Caryl Hamilton. Photo Steve Bysouth. Above right: Mevan Gamage. Bottom left: Lois Badley. Bottom right: Nalin Gamage. Photos provided.



By gathering all the people who noted on their membership forms that they wished to garden, we managed to not only keep the garden alive, but help it thrive! Our intrepid gardeners have provided a beautiful space for us to enjoy. A new bench is installed and we hope you will drop by and enjoy a respite there.

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# The *way* things were...



## Do you know?

Where these images are located? What they represent?

*Look for the answers in our next issue!*



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

Built in 1872, this one-room school house is now part of a much-expanded Maple Grove Public School at 288 Maple Grove Drive. Local farmers raised \$100. to purchase one acre of land from farmer and innkeeper Barnet Griggs. In 1993 it was proclaimed a Designated Heritage Property Under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

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