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# Historical Society News

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



**George Sumner**

1834-1911

**Oakville Chief of Police, Dog Catcher,  
Tax Collector, Outhouse Inspector**

**Volume 56 Number 1**

**March 2022**

# Speakers' Nights

by Steve Bysouth

## Great Lakes Shipping

16th March 2022 7:20-9:00 pm  
(St. John's Church or virtual. Stay tuned)

A guest from the Lake Superior Marine Museum Association based in Duluth, Michigan will share some of the Great Lakes shipping history with us.

## Captain Francis Brown

20th April 2022 7:20-9:00 pm  
(St. John's Church or virtual. Stay tuned)

Madison Carmichael has been interning at the OHS and will share with us the story of Captain Brown and how her research led to the making of a new OHS video about the man and his adventures around the world.

In February, Bonnie Sitter, co-author of *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz* shared photographs and personal stories of young women (including our member June Hitchcox) who helped Ontario farmers by becoming seasonal workers called Farmerettes during and after the Second World War. This presentation can be seen on our YouTube channel [OakvilleHistoricalSociety](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKjKj). And you may buy *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz* by contacting us via phone, email or through our website.

We are continuing to make and share our videos which are posted on the above channel and also on Facebook and our website. So far in 2022 we have created the following:

- Bride photos from the 1800s onward.
- Cat and dog pictures from the 1800's onward.

Others are being planned and worked on.

Please contact us with your ideas for new videos.

# Annual General Meeting

Oakville Historical Society's AGM is usually held mid-march at St. John's Church. We are contemplating whether or not to have this meeting as an 'in person' event. We will contact members about this via email and messages on our website and office phone.

# Oakville History Featured

Oakville Historical Society has partnered with a local online news outlet to regularly tell readers about our Town's historic events. When were our streets paved? When was the funeral of our founder? What did our diarist George Sumner do on a Sunday in 1878? Keep an eye open here—  
<https://oakvillenews.org/news>



*The Oakville Star* A. Forster, Editor  
December 18, 1925

# A note from the Society President

by George Chisholm

First, I would like to wish all our members and the many more readers of this newsletter a rather belated happy and prosperous New Year. 2020 was a difficult year thanks to COVID, 2021 was much better as we mostly got vaccinated and learned to live with the restrictions needed to keep us healthy. Let's hope that 2022 will be the year that we get back to the new normal, get the office and all the Society functions operating 'in person' again and that the sewer line at the office can be permanently fixed.

I am sure that all of the Society members are as anxious as I am to see the office reopened. The guidance from the government is that, provided that proof of vaccination is required for access, there is no capacity limit for meeting or event centres. We will discuss the matter at our next Board meeting which will be on March 7th after which the decision on reopening will be posted

on the Society website, and the phone message (905 844-2695) changed to indicate the hours that the office is open if the decision is to that effect. Masks and signing in with contact details will be required as per government guidelines. A related decision will be made on whether or not the Thomas House will be open in the summer.



Construction is still taking place at the neighbouring Coach House; the roof, which was recently worked on to stop some leaks, is now scheduled to be completely replaced later in the spring. This will likely mean some noise and parking disruptions.

The new fence and gate, with existing ornamental posts moved further west, (photo left) were installed by the Town on the northwest side of 110 King St.

The sap is rising, surely Spring is here.

I look forward to joining you at the 2022 AGM.

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# Fugitive Murderous Doctor Nabbed!

by Ruth Verlinden

Chief Sumner was constable of the Town of Oakville for 35 years and he kept a daily diary from 1867 to 1909. These diaries (which are in the OHS archives) give us a unique perspective on small-town life in the last decades of the 19th century. For example, we read about Chief Sumner needing to ensure that everyone had whitewashed their outhouse with lime in the early spring. You can picture him going from outhouse to outhouse, opening doors, taking a look and a sniff!

However, in March of 1867 Chief Sumner writes of a much more macabre episode: Mr. George Miles had died very suspiciously two hours after taking medicine prescribed by a Doctor Perry. Chief Sumner's started the investigation by having the stomach removed from the body of the victim and taking it with the medicine to Toronto for analysis. By now, the 'doctor' had left town. The constable searched for him in Georgetown, Rockwood, Paris and Hamilton.

The Oakville Historical Society's intrepid researcher, Janet Godber, delved into the story and discovered two newspaper articles, one from the *Hamilton Spectator* and one from the *Halton Herald*, giving more exciting details.

From *The Hamilton Spectator*:

*Poison: Mr. George Miles, one of the oldest residents of the township of Nelson, and of late years of Oakville, where his daughter resided, died very suddenly. The circumstances were as follows: A quack doctor, calling himself Dr. Perry, made his appearance here, professing to cure all diseases, but more especially the curing of rheumatism. Mr. Miles, it appears, had taken wind of this medicine, and on last Monday called on the 'Doctor' at his hotel, who gave him a teaspoonful of medicine, but without a label or written directions thereon; but as Mr. Miles told his son-in-law, Captain Robert Wilson, to take a spoonful on going to bed and another in the morning. He reached home with the bottle, and on going to bed, Capt. Wilson gave him the mixture. As soon as he had taken it, he exclaimed that he was a dead man, and after an*

*agony of two hours, he expired. The coroner's jury returned a verdict that he had died from the effects of the medication given him by Dr. Perry; but without evil intent on his part. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Perry, but he has disappeared. So much for quackery.*

In the *Halton Herald* of March 14, 1867, we have this news story: *R. W. Perry, the notorious quack, formerly livery-stable keeper in this city, was arrested at Cainsville, three miles this side of Brantford, on Friday evening, in consequence of the verdict of a coroner's jury charging him with the death of George Miles at Oakville, on Monday last. The arrest was made by Mr. George J. Sumner, a constable from Oakville. At Lynden, Perry made an attempt to give the officer the slip by stepping off the cars just as they were moving out from the depot, but the motion being observed by the constable, he was followed and recaptured. The train in the meantime moved off, and the constable was necessitated to take a wagon and bring his prisoner by this means to this city. On Saturday evening at 7 o'clock they arrived here, and Perry was locked up in the cells. This morning at 7 o'clock he will be taken to Oakville, where an investigation of the case will take place. C.A. Sadleir, Esqu, of this city, has been retained by the prisoner to defend him.*

The "city" where the *Halton Herald* was published was Milton, as we learn from the Sumner diaries on the next page. We also learn that by Tuesday April 2, Perry was already on trial. Justice was much swifter in those days.

Unfortunately, we are left hanging, not knowing the verdict, as Chief Sumner does not record it in his diary!

Following are transcribed diary entries. It is interesting to read of Sumner's police duties

interspersed with details of his dinner arrangements and evening entertainment.

**Monday March 4, 1867:** Worked half a day in the afternoon getting out beams & edging clamps 4 1/2 thick. Went to the concert at night. George Miles died taking Dr. Perry's medicine. Only sick two hours.

**Tuesday March 5, 1867:** Summoned a jury to investigate the cause of the death of George Miles. Verdict: came to his death by medicine administered by one Dr. Perry, not intending to do any injury.

**Wednesday March 6, 1867:** Dr. Perry left town today. Went for him to the street then returned and started for Georgetown. Arrived there about 10 0 clock P.M. Took Martin's horse and buggy.

**Thursday March 7, 1867:** Left Georgetown for Rockwood in the 9 o'clock train & returned at 11 o'clock. Could get no traces of Dr. Perry. Went to Milton to the nomination of G.K. Chisholm. Arrived home at 9 o'clock.

**Friday March 8, 1867:** Went to the funeral of old Mr. Miles. Started to Hamilton for Dr. Perry. Fare 60 cents.

**Saturday March 9, 1867:** Left Hamilton in the nine o'clock train for Brantford for Dr. Perry. Fare to Paris 90 cents. To Brantford by rail 25 cents. Fare by stage from Brantford to Paris for Perry and myself \$1.00. To Oakville \$1.40 each. Paid for a team to go to Hamilton \$3.

**Monday March 11, 1867:** Arrived home today with Dr. Perry and took him to Milton Gaol. Got a horse and buggy from G. (J?) Baker. Roads pretty bad. Took tea with John Van Allen at Palermo.



One of Sumner's small diaries written in equally compact script with lead pencil.

**Monday March 18, 1867:** Was not working today was trying to get in some taxes. Got orders this afternoon to go to Toronto tomorrow with the stomach of George Miles, also the medicines given by Perry.

**Tuesday March 19, 1867:** Was down to Toronto today with the stomach of Geo. Miles to Professor Croft. Expenses \$1.80 and \$1.75 for the day. Returned with the 8.20 train.



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**Monday March 29, 1867:** Was not working today. Made arrangements to go out to Milton tomorrow to attend the trial of Dr. Perry for manslaughter. It Looks like rain tonight. Wm & Kate left for home today.

**Tuesday March 30, 1867:** Left Oakville at 8 o'clock in the morning with Booth. Got to Milton half past eleven. Took dinner at John Wallace's & tea & bed & breakfast at C. Van Allen's.

**Wednesday April 1, 1867:** Am still in Milton today waiting for the trial of Dr. Perry. Took dinner with Wm. Van Allen and tea with Mr. Harris. Has been a cold raw day.

**Thursday April 2, 1867:** Have not left Milton yet. Stayed all night at Mr. Harris & breakfast. Took dinner with Charley Van Allen. Dr. Perry trial came off after dinner. Arrived at home at ten o'clock. Very cold.

And the trail runs cold. Dear reader, if you can provide us with the verdict we encourage you to contact us.

## Here We Go Again

You may remember enjoying artist Steve Nease's work in local media. He donated a collection of his work to the Oakville Historical Society. Below are two editorial cartoons that show there is nothing new today. [www.neasecartoons.com](http://www.neasecartoons.com)



### COME ENJOY OAKVILLE

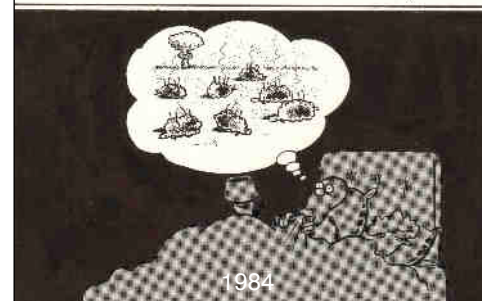
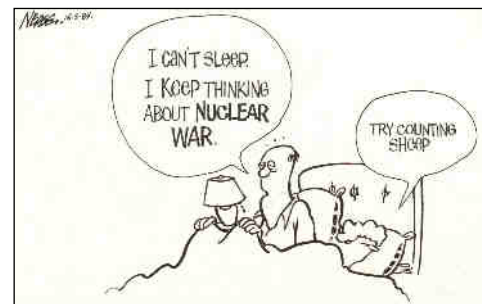
Where in Toronto can you find for \$72,900 a 2-storey, 4-bedroom home located in a demand residential area? East Oakville, living room with fireplace, renovated kitchen with breakfast area. Please call David Nairn 845-4267, res. 845-2153.



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*The Oakville Beaver* May 28, 1975



## The Person Behind the Plaque

# Ronald R. Hart

## 382 Douglas Avenue

by Janet Godber

Ronald Reid Hart was born on September 8, 1888 in Toronto to parents Samuel Richmond Hart & Janet Hay Wyllie. At the time of Ronald's birth the family was living at 25 Wilcox St. near the corner of Huron St. in Toronto. The house no longer exists, and the property is now part of the U of T Campus.

Ronald Hart grew up at 25 Wilcox St. with his family and attended the University of Toronto. He was married in Toronto on 17 August 1915 to Edna Juanita Cromarty.

While their house was being built in Oakville, Ronald & Edna welcomed two children into their family. Janet was born in 1917, Kathleen in 1918. and later, a son Ronald. Ronald Hart Sr. travelled into Toronto each day to work in the family business.

In 1873, Ronald's father Samuel had purchased the retail department of Copp, Clark & Co. with his partner Thomas Rawlinson. Over the years, through different business partners, it eventually became known as Hart & Co. It is here that Ronald held the position of vice president, working with his father and brother Melville.

The family resided in Oakville for 12 years until they sold their house in 1930 and moved back to Toronto to live at 5 Cluny Ave. in Rosedale.

Ronald Hart was an avid angler and sportsman and was vice president of the Toronto Anglers Association. He belonged to the Glen Major Fishing Club north of Pickering, as well as other clubs in Ontario and Quebec, and fished extensively throughout western Canada.

It was during his enjoyment of the outdoors that Ronald met his untimely death on September 18, 1933. He was out on the property of the Glen



382 Douglas Avenue

Major Fishing Club training his new springer spaniel pup and was putting him through a wire fence when his gun accidentally discharged, causing a large wound in his right shoulder. He was found hours later by his concerned friends and transferred to Toronto General Hospital where he died the following morning. His loss was felt far and wide among the fishing and angling communities. He is buried at St. James Cemetery in Toronto.

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## Membership

by Andrea Stewart, Marie Descent, Susan Bowen

We currently have the 205 members with 85 still to renew for a total of 290 and are pleased to welcome fourteen new members since our last report: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barclay, Ms. Mary Cassidy, Mr. Eric Currie, Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost, Mrs. Sandra Gordon, Ms. Maria Hushovd, Dr. David Imrie, Dr. Stephan Konasiewicz, Mr. and Mrs. Mike and Sunadda Moffatt, Mr. and Mrs. David and Marlene Sculati, Ms. Reena Sidhu, Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Pamela Storie, Ms. Sharon Tiraborrelli and Ms. Munira Virani.

## The Person Behind the Plaque

# William Wilson

## 328 & 330 Sumner Ave.

by Janet Godber

Since its founding in 1827 by Col. William Chisholm, Oakville has been well populated with ships' captains, builders, carpenters, and artisans whose work was tied to the shipping of grain. Many of the finely crafted homes in Old Oakville can be attributed to these ships' carpenters who made productive use of their time ashore. These homes were built for themselves as well as for local shipyard workers.

One such family of mariners were the Wilson brothers—Robert, William (at right) and George. They were the sons of John & Jenny Wilson of Belfast, Ireland, where John was a linen manufacturer. John died in 1815 and Jenny emigrated to Canada with her 10 children in 1817, settling in Perth. The three brothers eventually relocated to Oakville where the eldest, Robert, became First Master of the *Lady Colborne* the second schooner built in Oakville. He assisted the escape of slaves by stowing them away in the hold of his grain ship.

His two brothers soon followed him in this career, eventually both becoming captains. William sailed as Master of the cargo schooner *Three Bells*.

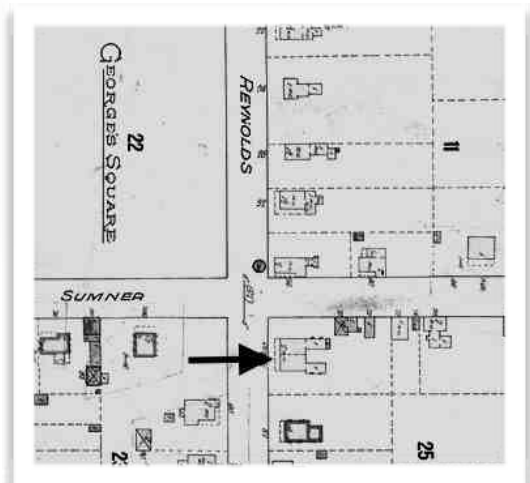
William married Margaret Miles sometime before 1838, but sadly she died in 1844. In 1847 William married Jane Atkinson. There was a total of four children: Robert, Thomas, George & Mary Jane.

In 1856, William Wilson purchased lots 1 and 2 of



330 & 328 Sumner Ave.

block 91 from William King Chisholm and by 1866 had built what is now at 328/330 Sumner Ave. The house, believed to have been originally one residence was a Georgian-style frame, plaster and lime two-storey, built on the southeast corner of Reynolds St. and Sumner Ave. (below).



1910 Fire Insurance Plan

William Wilson held the property until his passing on the 12th of December, 1873. His will outlines his extensive holdings in Oakville and beyond. The property, comprising of lots 1 and 2 was left to his son Thomas. In 1874 Thomas married Mary McAulay and by 1876 they had two children, William and George.



Perhaps to aid in supporting his growing family, In 1877, the Oakville Tax Assessment Roll reveals that the lot was subdivided into two portions. Thomas Wilson leased one portion to William Lackie, while keeping the other portion for himself and his family. It is believed that this is when the house was divided into two separate living quarters. The addition to the back may also have been built at this time.

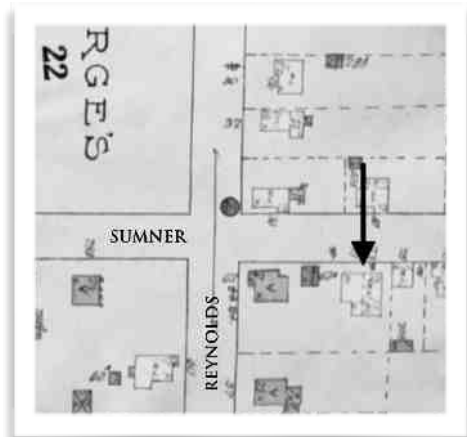
In 1879 Thomas Wilson and his family emigrated to Pennsylvania and lots 1 and 2 in block 91 were sold to Samuel & Phoebe Harris for \$800.

Samuel Harris, a carpenter, and his family were living in Milton before purchasing what is now 328/330 Sumner Ave. He and his wife Phoebe lived in one side of the house while their son Thomas Talbot Harris and his family lived in the other. Samuel and Phoebe died in 1889 and 1892 respectively. The property was willed to Thomas who was a dentist by trade and conducted his business from home. A door was discovered at the side of no. 328 which is thought to have been a separate entrance for his patients.

Thomas and his wife Anna had 7 children between the years 1874 and 1890: Talbot, Ada, Samuel, Anna, Hubert, John & Thomas. Sadly, the five oldest would pass away while in their childhood, leaving just John & Thomas. In 1892, Anna died and he later married Margaret Patton.

The house remained on Reynolds St. until 1915, at which time it was moved backwards and swung around to face onto Sumner Ave. where it stands today. This is reflected in the 1915 Tax Assessment

Roll which indicates whether there is a structure on the property or not. The 1910 Fire Insurance Plan shows where the house once stood on Reynolds St. before its move in 1915, while the 1924 Fire Insurance Plan shows where the house stands today.



1924 Fire Insurance Plan

On 25 April 1923 Thomas Harris sold the north half of lot 1 to Arthur & Florence Gibson who built a house on the property facing Reynolds Ave. Thomas died the same year, on December 23rd and all his property was transferred to his wife Margaret. Margaret died in 1936 but lot 2 where 328/330 Sumner Ave. stands was not sold until 1942 by her executors. The south part of Lot 1 was held by son Thomas Harris, where he built a house which was eventually sold in 1944.



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Sole ownership of 328/330 Sumner Ave. remained intact until 1977 at which time it was sold to two separate parties.

Recently, the current owners of no. 330 have gutted and restored the inside, leaving beams exposed to reflect its old bones (below), just in case William Wilson should pay a visit to admire his handiwork.



Oak pins, called tree nails were used to hold the post and beam together.

Somewhere in the house is hidden a time capsule with a few items reflecting our world today, among them a bottle of 99 Wayne Gretzky Whisky and a request to toast the Leafs on the present homeowners' behalf if they should ever win a Stanley Cup, as it isn't likely to happen in their lifetime!

## Archaeological Finds

Recent renovations to the Coach House (part of Oakville Museum) next door to our OHS offices necessitated archaeological studies to be undertaken. This clay tobacco pipe (right) was one of the items found near the upgraded building. Pipes like this are one of the most common artefacts found on colonial and post-colonial sites because they were both fragile and cheap. Fashioned in Europe and Canada, they often have the maker's name on the stem which can lead to a date and place of manufacture. They were in use up to the 1850s and 1860s until the advent of briar (wood) pipes, and cigarettes; in fact the latter did not become the primary means of taking tobacco in Europe and North America until after World War One.



# Facts and Figures 1925, 1951, 1974 & 2021

**License Fees Collected**

Chief Kerr reports collecting the following license fees during the year:

Tobacco and cigarettes.....	\$285.00
Junk dealers.....	30.00
Teams and motor trucks....	124.00
Auto livery.....	100.00
Peddlers.....	62.00
Dogs.....	478.00
Pool rooms.....	86.25
Theatres.....	50.00
Restaurants.....	175.00
Poll tax.....	410.00
<b>Total license collected</b>	<b>\$1,392.25</b>

*The Oakville Star* Dec. 18, 1925

ities Commission chairman.

The town at present has slightly over 1,800 single-dwelling homes, and duplexes and apartments add another 200 dwelling units. Nine new residential subdivisions have been opened in the last four years and at least 300 additional new homes are to be built by the fall of 1952. According to Mayor James Black, only about 250 building lots remain available in the surveys and, of these, only about 100 are in the lower cost bracket. The remainder, he said, are for homes in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 class, beyond the average industrial worker. There are very few homes for rent.

Oakville's real estate assessment at present is \$11,314,118 of which \$9,623,223 is rateable. Business assessment is of course additional. The

*The Hamilton Spectator* Nov. 10, 1951

Then came industrialization—the Ford Motor Co. plant in 1953, followed by Procor, which makes railway equipment, G. D. Searle and Co., which produces pharmaceuticals, and dozens of smaller industries.

Finally, in the 1950s, the commuters arrived—mostly well-paid professionals and executives who could afford Oakville's relatively high-priced housing.

"The reasons for the town's high average incomes is obvious," says Mayor Barrett. "A hard core of old rich; workers who make good money because they have strong unions; and the high proportion of professionals who work in Toronto."

With its healthy industrial and property tax base, Oakville can afford to indulge the whims of its 62,000 residents.

It seems that nearly every second store is a boutique, an antique place or a gift shop that caters to the Wedgwood tastes of the affluent.

The chic can be overwhelming. The storekeepers favor signs printed in ornate Old English script and in Oakville, a shop is almost invariably a shoppe.

Oakville has three yacht clubs, nine major parks and 37 smaller ones, four covered rinks, two indoor swimming pools, three pet hospitals, a community college, and it's planning to build a \$1.6 million performing arts centre.

*The Toronto Star* Oct. 5, 1974

## Oakville by Numbers

- 1925 License fees. Looks like dogs were the best source of income for the Town.
- 1951 Compare with 2021 census data—Private dwellings: 68,617
- 1974 Compare with 2021 census data—Population: 213,759  
Yacht Clubs: 3  
Indoor swimming pools: 7

# The *way* things were...



## Do you know?

The location?

The occasion?

*Look for the answers in our next issue!*



From December 2021 **The way things were...**

Taken in 1989, this photo shows archaeological excavation at Sixteen Mile Creek at Dundas St. In 1827 Chalmer's Mill operated here at Sixteen Village (or Sixteen Hollow), later called Proudfoot's Hollow.

Photo: Trafalgar Township Historical Society

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