

Oakville Historical
Society
since 1953

Historical Society News

www.oakvillehistory.org



Oakville and the First Canadian VC

Volume 57 Number 3

Fall 2023



A Note from the Society President

George Chisholm

As I write this, fall weather has arrived which heralds two important events for the Society. The Thomas House has closed for the season. Most are aware that it was moved to Lakeside Park in 1953. For 70 years, now, it has been an important part of Society operations and has had many thousands of visitors over the years. Like all old buildings, it needs a bit of work which is scheduled starting in the spring.

Ghost Walks are in full swing and are, as usual, pretty much sold out. Our thanks to all those involved. Not only is it a good fundraiser, it's also an important community outreach event. Many families attend year after year.

Please spread the word about our upcoming annual book sale. This is a chance for members and non-members to visit our

office to purchase our books and other publications. It is not a used book sale. New in our inventory are two maps taken from the 1877 Halton Atlas and decks of cards featuring photos from our archival collection. Thanks to Steve Bysouth for coming up with this idea and implementing it. The sale will be held 25 and 26 November from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Payment may be made by cash, cheque or credit card. For a complete listing of our publications, visit our website.

The annual members wine and cheese party is approaching and will be held on Friday, 1 December starting at 6:30. This year it's being held at St John's United Church where we'll have more room. Yes, wine and non-alcoholic punch will be served. I hope to see a huge turnout.

Ontario Honours and Awards Ceremony

Andrea Stewart



On October 11, five Oakville Historical Society volunteers were honoured for their length of service to Oakville Historical Society at a large gathering of volunteers at the Mississauga Convention Centre. It was heartwarming to recognize the importance of volunteerism in our community and to recognize young and old for their participation. Thank you to our own volunteers; Susan Bowen, Steve Bysouth, Shona Rochefort and Stewart Sherriff, and Brooke Nelson-Muzzatti (absent from photo).

The First Canadian VC

Stewart Sherriff
(front cover)

Street signs tell more than just the name of a street.

They link us to people, places, events and their stories. Most people don't know the story behind Dunn Street. It includes political nepotism, possible improper use of government funds, military heroism and a mysterious death.

The street is named after John Henry Dunn, an English gentleman who arrived in York (Toronto) in 1820 to take up the life appointment of Receiver General of Upper Canada, which he had received through the influence of his wife's family. The 28 year old Mr. Dunn and his 19 year old wife soon became solid members of Upper Canadian society. He would be, at various times, a Director of the Bank of Upper Canada, President of the Welland Canal Company, a Trustee of the Home District Grammar School, a member of the Board for General Superintendance of Education, President of the Upper Canada Temperance Society, The Auxiliary Bible Society, Treasurer of the Masonic Lodge of Upper Canada, a member of the Upper Canada Club and a militia colonel. All of this led him to know or be associated with the leading personalities of the day such as William Hamilton Merritt and William Chisholm at the time when downtown Oakville was being developed.

In his role of Receiver General, Mr. Dunn was a member of the Legislative Council, also a life appointment. His official responsibilities were to keep track of all money coming into and going out from the colony's Treasury and keep the Government accounts. In 1836 he was appointed to the Executive Council of Upper Canada but resigned six weeks later when Governor Bond Head ignored a request from the Reform Party members of the Council.

As Receiver General, Dunn began a policy of Government investment in what are now referred to as infrastructure projects, rather than leaving them to be paid for by purely private money. These projects included the Welland and St Lawrence canals, among other projects. This policy led him to make wide spread use of borrowing from the private sector to finance Government operations.

On the union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841, he was persuaded to stand for election as one of the two Members for Toronto in the Legislative Assembly. He was elected and served as both an MLA and as the Receiver General for Canada West (as Upper Canada was renamed) until the dissolution of the Assembly in 1844. He lost the subsequent election which led to the end of his political life in Canada.

First Canadian VC

continued from page 3

Personality clashes with senior political members and their displeasure at what they regarded as his outdated and antique accounting methods and physical control of Government money led him to return to England with his large family in 1844. He died there in 1854, six months before one of his seven sons secured a place in Canadian history.

On the 25th of October 1854, Alexander Roberts Dunn rode into history at the Battle of Balaclava, winning the first Victoria Cross awarded to a Canadian.

The 5th son of John Henry Dunn was born in York (Toronto) in Sept of 1833. He attended Upper Canada College and Harrow School in England after the family returned to England. At the age of 19, he purchased a commission as a Coronet (2nd Lieutenant) in the fashionable light cavalry regiment, the 11th (Prince Albert's Own) Hussars.

The 6 foot 3 inch, blond Dunn made a striking impression in the blue tunic, cherry red trousers and gold braided uniform of the 11th.

The 11th were sent to the Crimea as part of the army sent out following Britain's declaration of war against Russian in 1854. Dunn was now a full Lieutenant and in command of F Troop of the regiment.

On the 25th of October, through a series of misunderstood orders, the Charge of the Light Brigade took place. Unsupported by guns or other troops, 637 light cavalymen including 110 from the 11th Hussars, rode into a valley surrounded by Russian troops and artillery with a 12 gun artillery battery at its' end and attacked the guns. When the 11th were ordered to withdraw, Lt Dunn went to the rescue of a Sergeant of the 11th on a badly wounded horse who was being attacked by several Russian cavalymen. Lt Dunn cut down 3 of the Russians, mounted the Sergeant on his own horse and sent him towards the British lines.

On foot, he then saw a dismounted Private of the 11th being attacked and went to his rescue. Cutting down another Russian, Dunn and the Private were able to return safely to the British lines.

On returning to safety, Lt Dunn found that only 25 men of his regiment had returned uninjured. He is said to have wept at this information. The Light Brigade lost half of the men involved in the Charge and gained permanent fame in Lord Tennyson's poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade".



Victoria Cross (VC)

The Charge of the Light Brigade spurred the creation of the Victoria Cross in 1856 and the 11th were told that they could nominate 1 man for actions in the Crimean campaign. Lt Dunn was the unanimous choice and was the only cavalry officer to win the VC in the Crimean War.

He received his VC from Queen Victoria at the first presentation, held in Hyde Park on June 26th, 1857. He had sold his commission and left the army by then due to his scandalous behavior in running off or “eloping” with the wife of a senior officer of the regiment whose husband refused to give her a divorce.

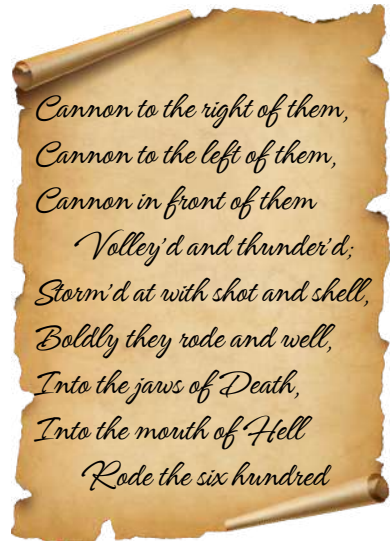
Lt Dunn had returned to Canada and was running the family estate when the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857. He became involved in raising the 100th (Prince of Wales Royal Canadian) Regiment of Foot as part of an empire wide call for troops and returned to army service in the regiment as a major in that regiment.

The regiment was sent to Gibraltar on garrison duties. In 1861, Dunn exchanged to the 33rd (Duke of Wellington’s) Regiment, on purchase,

buying his Lieutenant Colonelcy for 10,000 pounds. He would become the youngest full Colonel in the British army on promotion in 1866.

In 1868, the 33rd were sent from India to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as part of a British/Indian force tasked to rescue a large group of European hostages being held by the Emperor Theodore. Near Senafe, on the 25th of January, he died under mysterious circumstances. All that is known for certain is that he rode out of camp to do some hunting. Dismounting, he sent his servant to a nearby stream to collect some water. Returning, the servant found Col Dunn suffering from a gunshot wound in his chest. Dunn told the servant to “Run for a doctor” but by the time help arrived, he had died.

His regiment declared the death to be accidental; the result of dropping his gun, held between his knees, which discharged while he was trying to open his brandy flask. Speculation arose that it may have been a case of suicide or even murder as he had recently changed his will in favour of his valet but accidental death became accepted as the official cause.



“Charge of the Light Brigade”
Stanza III
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

First Canadian VC

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Colonel Alexander Dunn was buried near where he died. The grave was eventually lost and not rediscovered until the end of World War Two. The Canadian Government assumed responsibility for it in 1974 and a restoration was carried out in 1982. Political instability in the country has made it difficult to visit the grave in recent years.

His medals were purchased by the Canadian Government in 1894 and were for many years displayed at his alma mater, Upper Canada College. Due to the value of the medals and increasing security concerns, his Victoria Cross, other medals, sword and camp stool from the Crimea are now on display in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

A park in Ottawa has been named after him and a plaque has been erected in Clarence Square at Wellington Street and Spadina Road in Toronto, near the site of his boyhood home .

Often the story behind a street name is quickly forgotten, Dunn Street is one of these streets.

Discover more about the history of Oakville street names by purchasing David Ashe and Joyce Burnell's informative book *Oakville Street Names and Landmarks*. Copies can be obtained through the society website www.oakvillehistory.org or purchased at our sale of publications to be held on November 25 & 26 at 110 King St from 2:00-4:00 pm.



Col Alexander Dunn's grave
near Senafe, now Eritria

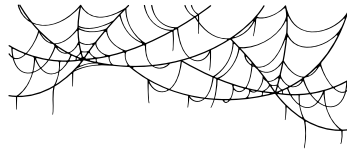
Welcome to our New Members!

Mr. Jia Yechun	Ms. Elena Wang
Mr. Robert Quinn	Ms. Mia Milevski
Dr. Joel Hundert	Mr. Raashid Azeem
Ms. Jozanne Walker-Battick	Ms. Igne Momberg
Mr. Chris Selman - Curator	Ms. Lisa Whitall-Chuang
Mr. Donato Atoni	Ms. Charlotte Zhang

Yard Sale



Our yard sale, held in July, was a resounding success, drawing in people from Oakville and beyond. Glorious weather combined with a wide variety of quality donations allowed us to show a profit of \$4100.00! A huge thank you to all our members, especially Sheena Curran, Brenda Chisholm and the cadets from 1188 Army Cadet Corps. Without our hard working, enthusiastic volunteers, we would be nowhere.



Ghost Walks tell spooky tales of Old Oakville



Our ghost walks are up and running, and are completely sold out! It takes a lot of planning and many helpers, but our committee is very well organized and the evenings run smoothly. If you know of a family, group or organization that is interested in history, this is a unique, fun way to learn about Oakville's past.

Early registration is recommended. This year, Ron Currell offered a brief talk to participants about the Halton County Radial Railway. Congratulations to everyone on another successful year.

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Paranormal Seekers visit Thomas House

Steve Bysouth

On Saturday August 19th, the Thomas house was visited by the Paranormal Seekers, a paranormal research and investigation group based in Oshawa, specializing in historic locations and providing afterlife awareness. In attendance from the OHS were directors Carol, Janet, Marie and Steve.

Part of the process is to create a positive environment inviting "entities" to communicate with those that are present. They used many different techniques including a medium, radio frequency technology, lights, motion detecting cat balls, and a thermal imaging type equipment. They also had someone blindfolded wearing noise cancelling headphones sitting in the dark so any afterlife presence could speak through them.



Two of the more exciting moments occurred when the Thomas House china cabinet door opened seemingly by itself during one of the sessions, and multiple lights triggered, possibly indicating a presence of some kind. There was no specific indication of any of the Merrick family being present.

A short video of the experience has been created and can be seen on our YouTube Channel- @OakvilleHistorySociety.

At the time of this writing we have not received a written report on their findings but based on our own observations and experiences it was clear that

"something" appeared to be present, and we eagerly await their official findings and will share them on our website, facebook and other locations when they become available.



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Thomas House

Mary Davidson

We are very proud to report that the Thomas House was awarded first prize from the Visit Oakville competition – congratulations go to our excellent interpreters. Certainly, going by the numbers this is a much-visited venue – there were 3,872 visitors during this season



which opened to a cool, breezy May and ended with this amazingly warm and sunny Sunday October 1st! Special thanks to Shona Rochefort for taking over the job of scheduling during my absence and to all the interpreters who have kept our House open and welcoming to our visitors, they are all a credit to our Society.



Kudos

Our 2021 summer intern, Julie Suh, has kept in touch with us and reports she was hired as an Administrative Assistant at Mysuem of Toronto in May 2022. She has since been promoted to Associate Manager, Operations and Development. As such, she is responsible for the Myseum's fundraising activities, working closely with the Director of Development on donor cultivation, stewardship and donor data management. She manages the daily operations of the organization and finances including monthly expense reconciliation and tracking, and preparing for the annual audit. Julie also oversees Board Meeting organization, and communication materials. Congratulations Julie, we are very proud of you!



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Upcoming Events....



Speaker's Night

Monday November 13 @ 7:30

Tracing the Norman family tree....

Alan Norton, while not a genealogy expert, has extensively researched, over the last 50 years, multiple branches of his family's history. Not only will he share some of the fascinating stories and pictures he uncovered about his family tree, but he will also share some of his learnings for those of you who might also be interested in tracing your own family history. This is an in person event, held at **St John's United Church, 262 Randall St.**

Book and Publication Sale

November 25 & 26 from 2-4, 110 King St.



Join us for our annual sale of books, publications, maps and prints. ****NEW**** this year, we have two different decks of playing cards! Each card has a different historically significant photo on the face, with two iconic options for the back- the Oakville lighthouse or the Town clock. What a great stocking stuffer! Also two **"new"** maps from the 1877 Halton Atlas which are suitable for framing.



Of course, we also have the much loved standbys... *Oakville and the Sixteen*, *Ghosts of Oakville*, *Boo Too*, *Old Oakville*, *Oakville Street Names and Landmarks*, *Oakville A Small Town*, *Oakville Memories Old and New* and *The Walker's Guide to Old Oakville* to name just a few.



Save the Date



Santa Claus Parade

Saturday November 18

Costumed members of the OHS will walk in the Santa Claus Parade for the first time this year. If you would like to join us, please let the office know asap. Costumes provided as able. Or... come out and wave at us!



Festive Gathering

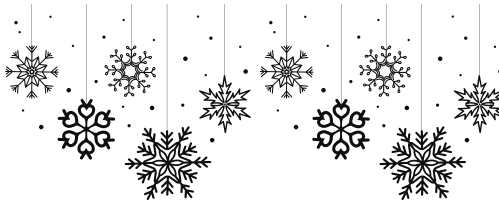
Friday December 1st @ 6:00



Join us for a Festive Gathering to celebrate the holiday season.

All paid up members are invited to our annual wine and cheese event.

NEW this year, to be held at a larger venue to allow more room to enjoy socializing. We have decided to try a larger space to allow for more tables and for safe movement. St John's United Church, 262 Randall St.



The way things were...



Do you know...

The location and the significance of this picture?

From Summer 2023,

The way things were...

This photo was taken from an advert for Canada Cement Company in 1920. The ad highlights the durability of their cement, as half of the roadway was paved 5 years earlier and showed no obvious signs of deterioration. Photo taken at Dunn and Dundas Sts.



Archive Hours:

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

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