

Oakville Historical
Society
since 1953

Historical Society News

www.oakvillehistory.org



Help us Build our Collection

Volume 58 Number 1

Spring 2024

Finding Freedom on the Sixteen

Brenda Chisholm

George and I were honoured to be guests at the Oakville premiere of Finding Freedom on the Sixteen on February 26, 2024 at Film.ca. This fascinating documentary relates the stories of former enslaved African Americans from the State of Maryland and Louisiana who fled to the small town of Oakville in search of freedom. In the mid 1800's, these early Black settlers helped shape the future of Oakville and made significant contributions to the history of Canada. Narrated by Karolyn Smardz-Frost and Arlene Duncan, it is produced in association with Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton (See page 9 of this issue for the story of Arlene's father, Alvin.) CCAH was founded by a descendant of the Duncan family, one of the first Black families to settle in Oakville as part of the Underground Railroad. OHS President, George Chisholm and Carolyn Cross, Supervisor of the Oakville Museum were interviewed in the film.



Arlene Duncan and George Chisholm



Carolyn Cross, Anthony Sherwood,
George Chisholm, Andrew Tyrell

An official selection for the Baltimore International Black Film Festival 2023, this film won Audience Choice-International Feature. As of 1 March, it has been made available to schools in Oakville through the support of the Oakville Community Foundation.



Family Day 2024

Carol Gall



WHAT IS CURSIVE WRITING?

That was a popular question as visitors got 'schooled' on Family Day at the office at 110 King St. Visitors of all ages practised their cursive writing skills on slates with chalk as they sat in the school desks of our current School Day Exhibit.

But it wasn't all work and no play! Cup and Ball, Jacks and Cat's Cradle string games tested our young visitors' skills and showcased the talents of their grandparents who remembered well the time they spent playing these now "old fashioned" games during recess.

As a family craft, a historic plaque could be designed to tell the history of your home. When the bell rang at the end of the day, over 80 visitors had attended the OHS offering.

Thanks to Marci, Susan, Shona, Stewart, Brenda and Phil for supporting the games stations and promoting the society and our resources.





Speaker's Night

NEW LOCATION

The Coach House - 114 King St



April 22, 2024

7:30

Join us as our very own Secretary to the Board shares her passion, love and knowledge of cameos! Marie Descent will bring some of her collection for us to view. She will tell you that she has collected too many in one breath, and that she doesn't have enough in the next! Light refreshments will be served.



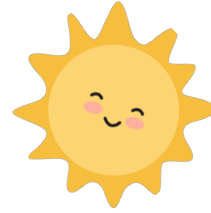
Stay tuned....



We are very fortunate to have two volunteers creating a new website for us. Geoff Isaac will be our new Superuser and Sheena Curran our Webmaster. They are busily creating a fresh, modern looking site while incorporating the fantastic content that has been created by our present Webmaster, Stan Smurlick.

The Society owes a huge debt of gratitude to Stan for his 10 year long commitment to maintaining the present site. Thank you Stan for stepping up when we found ourselves unexpectedly in need.

Mayor's Picnic 2024

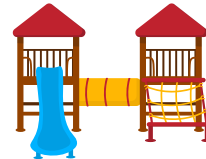


Sunday June 9 12:00-4:30

Fun for the whole family,
invite a friend!



Bring your lunch and a
chair




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Help us build our Collection

Mark Verlinden

Have you ever wondered what happens to the photographs and documents that you donate to the Society? How do all those photos and documents make it onto the internet? Do you have an interest in preserving the history of Oakville? Might you have time during the week to help us with our collection?

The Accessioning Process is how we receive donations into our collection and is at the core of what we do as a historical society.



Mark Verlinden and Barry Watts
examine donations

Barrie Watts and Mark Verlinden are our current archivists and they could use your help.

It all starts with people such as you who care about the history of Oakville. They bring in some old photographs or other documents that they think might be worth preserving and sharing, we collect

the donor's name and any information that they have about their item. In some cases, after we have a good look, we decide that we can't accept the donation and return it to the owner. Perhaps it is not really about Oakville or maybe we already have the item in our collection. If we accept the donation, we ask the donor to sign a Deed of Gift to transfer ownership to the Society. Then the Accessioning Process kicks into high gear!

We use a museum management system called PastPerfect to keep track of the whole collection. The first step is to set up the Accession Record, giving each donation of items an Accession Number. Here is a sample Accession Record with three donated items:

The screenshot shows the 'Accession' form in PastPerfect. The accession number is 2024 050. The source is Mrs. Jane Doe, 123 Any Street. The contact is Jane Doe. The form includes a table with 3 cataloging records:

Object ID	Object Name	Title	Description / Summary
2024 050 001	Print, Photographs	Numbered Print of the O'Connor House	Adapted by local Database Artist of the O'Connor House
A 2024 050 002	Blueprint	Blueprint of the O'Connor House	
A 2024 050 003	Personal Documents	Diary of John O'Connor, 1897-1899	

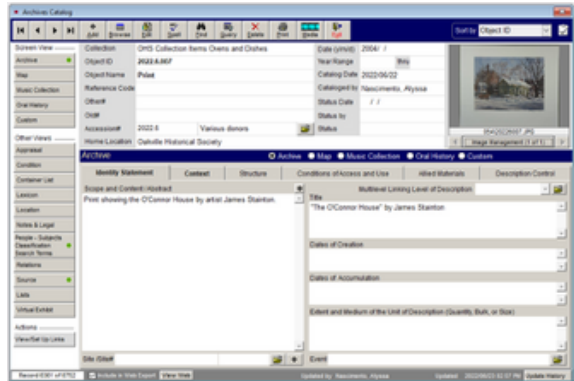
Each specific item in a donation gets its own Object ID number. This number is really important because this is how we find the item again. We write that number onto the back of the item in pencil so as not to damage the original.

Once the Object ID, donor's name and details are recorded in PastPerfect, each item is given a title and a description. We enter as many search terms as we can into PastPerfect. The search terms may include the names of people, location, size and scope of the donated item, when the item was created and what you can see in the picture. It is important to be very detailed with this step. I tell our students that they may be looking at a picture of a house, but if they just entered the search term "house" and its address, then only people looking for that house will find it. Maybe someone is interested in the people, the pet dog on the porch, the 1929 Ford in the driveway or the horse and buggy on the street delivering milk. All of that information has to be entered for people to be able to find what they are looking for. It makes the entire collection so much more valuable when it can be searched in many ways.

Help us build our Collection (cont'd)

Once all the information about the item has been entered, the next step is to record where the original item will be stored in our collection. It might be in a photo box, a document box or a map drawer. A completed catalogue entry looks like this:

In order for people to view what is in the collection, we take a high-resolution scan of the item. If it is too big to scan, we take a photograph of it. The digital image is named with the Object ID number, the digital file is stored on our shared drive and attached to



the information in PastPerfect. To complete the Accession, we need to protect the physical item. It may be put in a special sleeve, or wrapped with tissue paper, whatever it takes to properly protect it from damage over time. We use archival quality materials that contain no acids and avoid plastics that can stick to photographs. We want to pass our collection onto future archivists in really good shape. The physical item can then be stored in the collection.

Periodically, we run a routine in PastPerfect to upload all the information and the images in our collection to a PastPerfect online website. The result is what you see as the “Collections” page on our website. Anyone can search online and browse our collection. The images online are of low resolution, appropriate for the internet, and

have our watermark on them. We really appreciate when people contact us with more information or to correct errors in the collection. No one is perfect and mistakes do happen!

We sometimes have requests for high resolution copies with no watermark for various purposes. These high-resolution images are appropriate for enlargement. We have produced the images that you can see through the windows of the Metrolinx Centre on Cornwall Road. The largest size that one of our images was blown up to was 40 feet long! Generally there is a modest fee for this service, as creating and maintaining an online repository of 20,000 items does incur expenses.

Does this sound like an activity that is of interest to you? We provide full training and support and you contribute as you are able. We are open on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, so it is easiest if you have time on one or both of those days, at least to start. Contact our Archivist, Mark, at information@oakvillehistory.org to arrange a discussion.



Alvin Duncan

Stewart Sherriff

When war was declared in September 1939, recruiting centres were inundated with volunteers. This surplus gave units the opportunity to pick only the “best” possible recruits. Many were summarily rejected if they didn’t meet the minimum standards of being a British citizen, a minimum height of 5 foot, 4 inches tall and perfectly fit. Social prejudices also saw many men of colour rejected even if they met the recruiting standards.

By 1940, the need for more men saw the minimum height lowered to 5 feet and other requirements were also adjusted. Twenty seven year old, five-foot three-inch Alvin Duncan was one of the Black men who saw this as their second chance. Rejected by the Royal Canadian Air Force, he joined B Company of the 2nd Battalion, Lorne Scots in his hometown of Oakville in June, 1940 as an infantryman. He attended weekly evening training parades until the summer of 1941, when he took part in the Battalion two-week summer camp at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Living in canvas bell tents, the men of the Lorne Scots fired their weapons, practised field manoeuvres and foot drill and took part in route marches to build up their physical fitness.



Lorne Scots B Coy, Alvin Duncan, 2nd row, centre

In August 1942, Alvin's persistence paid off. He finally convinced the Air Force his heart wasn't in the wrong place! This had been their last, desperate reason for not signing him up. He joined the RCAF, trained as a Radar Operator, was loaned to the Royal Air Force and spent the



Alvin Duncan, RCAF

last two years of the war in Britain monitoring shipping traffic in the North Atlantic. Of the several thousand Canadian Radar Operators loaned to the British, Alvin was one of two Black men. Upon discharge at the end of the war, he returned to Oakville where he operated a television repair shop and worked diligently at collecting and disseminating local Black history.

Fundraising

Brenda Chisholm

February 10-11 were unseasonably beautiful days, warm and sunny. This was the setting for our first used book sale. We were incredibly fortunate!

Members, friends and complete strangers donated over a thousand books and puzzles, and our fantastic fundraising team sorted, organized and categorized them. We hosted a steady flow of customers on both days, and people were extremely complimentary about the selection, set up and pricing.



We raised over \$1640.00, increased our community visibility and awareness, and fielded questions about membership. Many people commented that they had no idea of our location, and there was great interest in attending similar events.

I was surprised to see the number of younger people, 25-35 who attended and heard their expressed gratitude. There is a real fear that physical books will gradually die out and this seemed to be most dreaded by the younger generation.

Thank you to everyone who supported this endeavour. It was a huge success and it could not have happened without the enthusiasm of our membership.

Our next fundraising event will be the annual yard sale, this year held on August 10, with the 11th as a rain date. Please start setting items aside. We will begin collecting May 28; donations can be dropped off at the office Tuesdays and Thursdays between 1-4:30.

If you are new to the Society, or would like to volunteer to help with any aspect of fundraising, please let us know. These events are a lot of work, but also a lot of fun.

From the Archives



Mayor's picnic 1986

We are open:

Tuesday & Thursday and Third Sunday of the month 1:00 -4:30

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