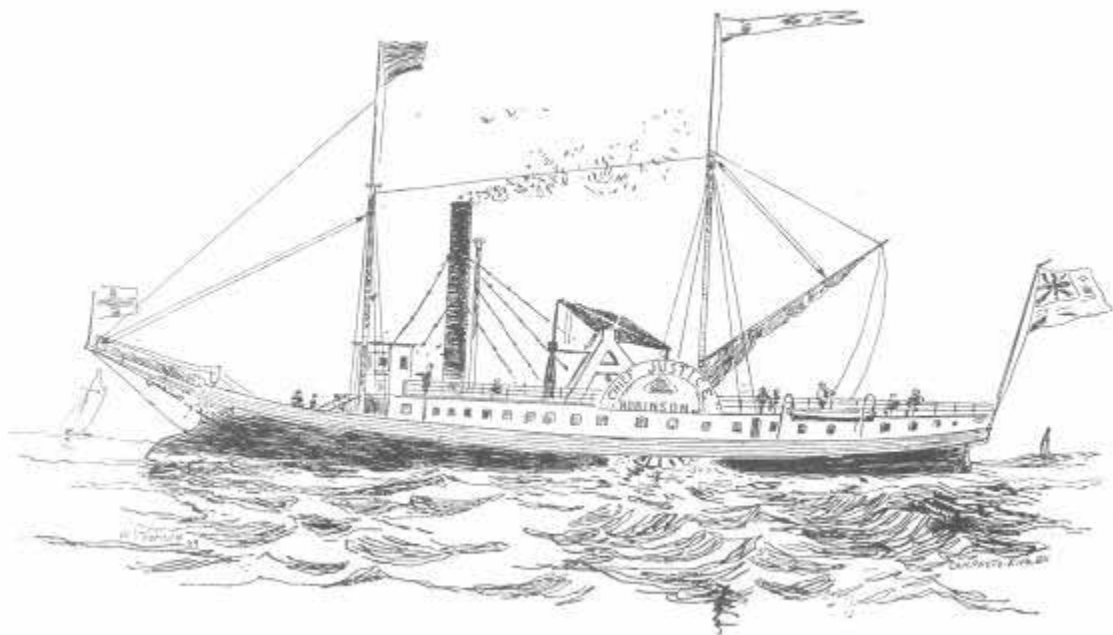




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*Preserving Oakville's  
Historical Heritage  
Since 1953*  
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STEAMER CHIEF JUSTICE ROBINSON.

THE OAKVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2008

Volume 42: Number 2

SPECIAL EVENTS

June 8th

“Concert in the Park” – Lakeside Park. Dixieland Band and, the Oakville Wind Orchestra performing. Rain Date: June 22nd. Bring a picnic hamper, lawn chairs and all your friends and neighbours. Prizes are available for the ***Best Victorian hat***. The Concert is also sponsored by the Town of Oakville. No food will be sold at the Concert. **Be there – 12 noon to 4 PM. FREE ADMISSION**

PUBLIC SPEAKERS & PRESENTATIONS

October 15th

“Gun boats on the Great Lakes”
– Cheryl MacDonald

November 19th

“An Evening with Mike Filey” – Mike Filey

HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS SCHEDULE (2 hours)

MONTH	MAIN ST	HERITAGE HOUSES	TRAFALGAR RD
JUL	Sun 6 th , 2pm	Tues 1 st , 2pm	-----
AUG	Sun 10 th , 2pm	Sun 31 st , 2pm	Sun 24 th , 2pm
SEP	Sun 7 th , 2pm	Sun 14 & 21 2pm	Mon 1 st , 2pm
OCT	Sun 5 th , 2pm	-----	Mon 13 th , 2pm
STARTS	S/W corner Navy & Lakeshore	OHS Society Building 110 King Street	St. John’s United Church 262 Randall Street

GHOST WALKS (1 HOUR)

MONTH	Thursday/Tuesday 6:00,7:00 & 8:30pm	Saturday 6:00, 7:00 & 8:30pm	Dates that have a third Walk – 6:00pm are <u>Bold & underlined</u>
SEPT	-----	27th	
OCT	Thurs 9 th , 16 th ,23 rd & <u>30th</u> Tues 21 st & <u>28th</u>	4 th , 11 th , <u>18th & 25th</u>	

ALL WALKS ARE \$12.00/PERSON

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In March many of our members attended the **Annual General Meeting** held at Knox Church. Again this year a pot-luck supper was held before the meeting. Perhaps the dinner had something to do with the attendance at the meeting. **Margaret Buxton, June Hitchcox and I** were elected to serve an additional three-year term as directors. The members of the Board of Directors are: Harry Barrett, Drew Bucknall, Ev Bullied, Margaret Buxton, George Chisholm, June Hitchcox, Walter Jennings, Lance Naismith, Barb Savage, Andrea Stewart, Karen Woolley and Jim Young. At the Board Meeting following the Annual General Meeting the Officers of the Society were confirmed and are: myself as President; Barb Savage as Vice President; Jim Young as Secretary and Walter Jennings as Treasurer. I feel very fortunate to have such a strong board to serve the Society.

The Society has three major projects on the go this year. We are the lead organization for **“Doors Open Oakville”** which is set for 27 September. Barb Savage represents the Board in this project. Drew Bucknall chairs a **Future Planning Committee** which is looking into how the Society will interact with the community. Their work is critical to the future of the Society. June Hitchcox is leading a group of volunteers in gathering information on heritage buildings in town, particularly along the **Main Street**. The long-term goal is to work with Heritage Oakville and the Town to create a fourth Heritage District along Lakeshore Road. These projects are in addition to the usual walking tours, Thomas House openings, Concert in Lakeside Park and everything else our Society and our volunteers do. It will not be a quiet summer.

George Chisholm
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georgechisholm@sympatico.ca

Oakville Historical Society E-mail
info@oakvillehistory.org

Archive Hours * Tues & Thurs –
1PM to 4:30PM at 110 King Street.

Visit the OHS website at
www.oakvillehistory.org
for the enlarged and
colour version of this
newsletter

COVER PICTURE: Line drawing of the steamer, Chief Justice Robinson

Page Two: The Granary by Oakville Harbour

A Whistle in the Distance: Steamboats at Oakville (1833-1903)

William Chisholm began work on building a harbour at the mouth of the Sixteen Mile Creek at Oakville in 1828. By 1831, despite difficulties securing a loan to complete the project, the facilities, including piers, were nearing completion. In addition, a channel was dredged at this time to allow vessels of greater draught to pass in and out.

The lack of steamer service from the western end of Lake Ontario was the subject of a meeting called at Hamilton in 1831, “to consult on the expediency of building a steam vessel to ply between Burlington Bay, York, and Niagara, the Genesee and Oswego Rivers, the last two named places being the entrance to the Erie Canal and the City of Rochester.” At the meeting, of which William Chisholm was chairman, it was decided that, “more speedy intercourse was needed to be established between Burlington Bay and the Capital of the Province”; and that therefore a vessel of sufficient dimensions to carry both passengers and freight be constructed.”

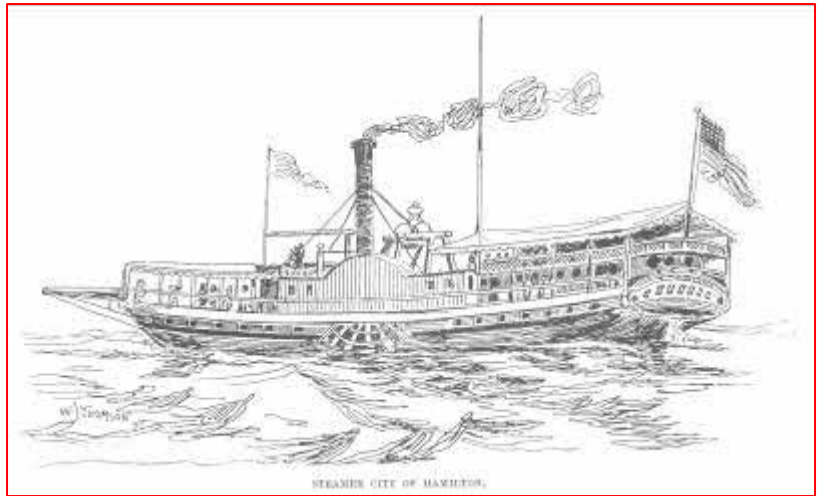
Oakville’s isolation ended in the Spring of 1833 when the steamer **Constitution** was launched at Chisholm’s Shipyard at the north end of Navy Street on the Sixteen. It was the earliest steamer to ply the head of Lake Ontario regularly between Hamilton and York and ports on the south shore of Lake Ontario, like Port Charlotte (Rochester) and Oswego, New York. The steam engine had been combined with the paddle-wheel, starting with John Molson’s Accommodation built at Montreal in 1809. Averaging five miles an hour, the Constitution could travel from Oakville to Toronto in three to four hours, stopping at Port Credit. While sailing schooners, a number of which were built on the Sixteen as early as 1829, carried bulk cargos like wheat and lumber, the steamships carried passengers and package freight. Built of tamarac, red cedar, oak and pine, Constitution had a ladies’ cabin on deck, rather an unusual feature for the time, and thirteen berths, “furnished in the most superb style.” The men’s cabin accommodated twenty-four, with extra cabins in the bow for another fourteen. Furnishings such as chairs and settees were made and upholstered “by **Rainey and Schofield of Oakville.**” Launched on January 19, 1833, the vessel under **Captain William Critchell, R.N.**, retired, made her trial run from Oakville to York in two hours, averaging twelve miles an hour.

The one-hundred-fifty ton **Oakville** was the second steamer to be launched at Chisholm’s Shipyard on May 7, 1834. Of similar size to the Constitution, she was under

the command of **Captain John Mills** and commenced her regular trips from Hamilton to Toronto, touching at the Burlington Bay Canal and Oakville each way. As was common at the time, Oakville underwent several name changes over the years to Hamilton, then subsequently Union, ending her days as a sailing barque.

There are a number of fascinating descriptions of steamer travel on the Great Lakes in the nineteenth century. **Susanna Moodie's** book, "Roughing it in the Bush", describes the experience in colourful terms. **Sir Richard Bonnycastle** asserted that, "nothing can exceed the comfort and style of many of the lake steamers. They very often have music aboard, and in the ladies' cabin there is a piano. A respectable stewardess waits on the female cabin passengers, who are ushered to dinner etc. by the captain, in short, everything is very orderly and very well conducted on board the British steamboats and, I have no doubt, it is the same on board the Americans, which are very splendid." Bonnycastle, however, deplored the American custom of mixing alcoholic beverages and calling them by such absurd names as "cocktails", "ginslings", and "mint juleps"! His observations were made while travelling aboard the steamer **Transit**, formerly the Constitution of Oakville.

The trip from Hamilton to Toronto took four hours and cost 10s cabin and 5s deck. Stops at Port Credit, Oakville, and Bronte added to the transit time. In the early 1840's the steamers, all side-wheelers, continued to be equipped with masts and sails so that full advantage could be

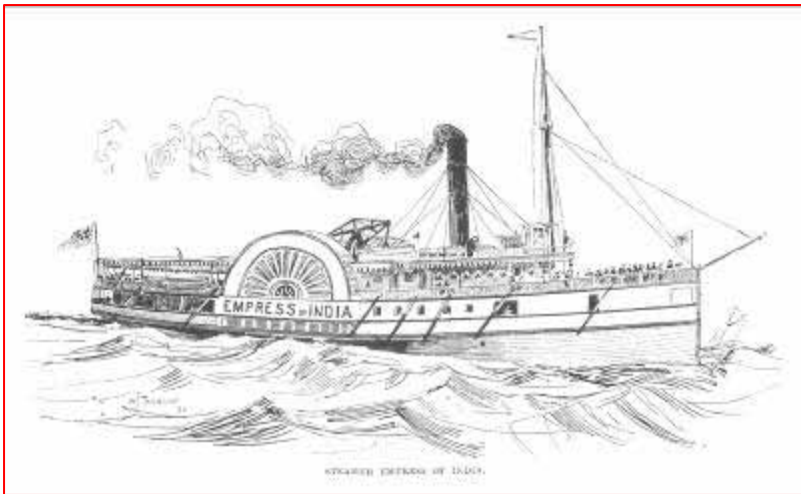


taken of a favourable wind, the engine being used only to sail against the wind. Huge quantities of fuel wood were required to fuel the boilers of these vessels. At Oakville the wood was stored along the lake bank between Navy and Thomas Streets. After "wooding up" the steamer's cannon would fire a salute (whistles were introduced during the 1840's). Competition was intense and frequently steamers raced one another to be the first to secure passengers and freight at the next port. Some captains showed little regard for the safety of either passengers or the vessel.

In the 1840's the steamers **Experiment** and **Gore** started calling at Oakville three times a week. The captain of the Experiment was **Thomas Dick**, who later built the Queen's Hotel in Toronto, now the site of the Royal York. At this point the screw propeller was starting to replace paddle wheels. Higher pressure engines assured speed and increased reliability. Such vessels were nicknamed "Puffers".

During the "**Wheat Boom**" of the 1850's, Oakville was known as one of the top ports in Canada West. From 1846 to 1853 the number of steamboat calls at Oakville rose from 946 to 1163. The **Frontier House Hotel** was built on Navy Street in Oakville in 1853 and was known as the "Steamboat Hotel" because it catered to travellers by water.

Despite the arrival of the Great Western Railway at Oakville on December 3, 1855, steamboats continued to battle this new competition for passengers and freight for some years on. Rail travel did present some danger in the early days as witnessed by the Desjardins Canal disaster near Hamilton on March 12, 1857, in which sixty people, including **Captain James Sutherland** of the steamer Magnet, perished. However, rail communication and changes in agricultural practices were bringing alterations in the economic patterns in Canada West. Consequently, many ports began to suffer economically as shipping concentrated in the larger centres like Toronto and Hamilton.



As mercantile traffic declined on Lake Ontario, the pleasure traffic increased during the 1860's. By the 1880's, often three or four excursions with 1000 to 3000 people would arrive in one day. During the summers of 1867 and 1868, the steamer **Rothesay Castle** alone transported one or more excursions

most every day of the week. Beardsley's Grove, just east of Allan Street on the lake, was a popular destination. On June 3, 1869 a Temperance excursion brought five-hundred passengers from Toronto.

By 1873 five trains running each way stopped at Oakville. With increased speed, frequency and reliability, train travel continued to eat away at steamboat passenger revenues. However, lake passenger travel was destined to last several more decades. The Rothesay Castle burned in 1874 and subsequently was rebuilt as the **Southern Belle**. This vessel was a regular caller at Oakville to the 1890's.

The **Empress of India** built in 1876 was a daytime excursion vessel. Fares were fifty cents per person from Oakville to Toronto. It was later renamed the **Argyle**, but still continued to call at Oakville. The Hamilton Steamboat Company ran the **Mazeppa** and the **Modjeska** in the Toronto to Hamilton trade. These vessels were often used in the excursion trade to various picnic grounds around the western end of Lake Ontario, including Grimsby Beach, Burlington Beach, and Chisholm's Grove (later Lewis' Grove and Harbour Grove) on the west side of the Sixteen at Oakville. By 1898 the Hamilton Steamboat Company was using a smaller vessel, the **Greyhound**, to call at Oakville with excursionists since the mouth of the Sixteen had silted up so badly.

During the late nineteenth century, the sandy soil along the lakeshore between Clarkson and Bronte became one of the most important areas of Canada for the growing of small fruit, especially strawberries. This fruit was carried from Oakville to the fruit market in Toronto (where the Sony Centre for the Arts now stands) mostly by boat. Perhaps the most well-known vessel in this trade was **White Star**, which had been purchased for \$25,000, a sum mostly raised by local fruit growers. Built in 1897 at Montreal, the vessel offered a reprieve for local growers, as no one else expressed an interest in continuing steamboat service to Oakville. It held 700 passengers and was "beautifully fitted up, lighted by electricity, stately and comfortable, a first class steamer for the Oakville, Toronto and Lorne Park route."

In 1900, during the Pan American Exposition at Buffalo, White Star was pressed into service ferrying passengers to that famous event. A smaller, older side-wheeler, **Richelieu**, was substituted on the Oakville run. In 1901 White Star resumed service to Oakville. Besides carrying huge volumes of small fruit and passengers to Toronto, White Star became known as the "**Sunday School Boat**". Sunday schools from Toronto would picnic at Harbour Grove at the foot of Forsyth Street at the lake, where there was a refreshment booth, a pavilion, a playground and sports facilities. From 1899 to 1902 White Star called at Oakville at 7A.M, 12 Noon and 6P.M.

Strawberry shipments sometimes exceeded 40,000 quarts at 5 cents per quart. In 1903 several cribs were added at the southern end of the east pier, creating an "L-shape", so White Star could load and unload passengers and freight without entering the harbour.

During repairs at Toronto on July 11, 1903, White Star burned. Thirteen were asleep on board at the time and superstitious mariners stated that as she drifted into Toronto Harbour, disaster had been diverted. She was the last steamer ever to call at Oakville on a regular basis.

With the opening of the **Radial Railway** from Hamilton to Oakville in 1904, extra competition was placed on the steamers for freight and passenger revenue. The opening of the Toronto-Hamilton Highway (now Lakeshore Road) in 1915, the first paved major highway in Ontario, reflected the growing use of automobiles, buses and trucks as the major method of carrying people and commodities. Toronto-Hamilton steamers like the Modjeska, Macassa and Turbinia lasted until World War Two, bypassing Oakville, but even their whistles in the distance have become a faint memory.

Phil Brimacombe

References: Hazel C. Mathews Oakville and the Sixteen, ‘The History of an Ontario Port’
John Ross Robertson: Landmarks of Toronto, Volume Two
The Scanner: The Toronto Marine Historical Society (Monthly Publication)



Steamer "Greyhound"

AROUND THE SOCIETY



Solution to “The Way Things Were” – March 2008

The man with the goatee is **Charlie Priestman**, continuing a tradition which started in 1922 when a group of Irishmen travelled (40 kms) from Toronto City Hall to Oakville’s downtown to enjoy bootleg green beer on St. Patrick’s Day. This task was eventually taken over by a **Barney Heard** and is presently being continued by **Eddie Williams**. The man in the top coat (2nd from left) is former Oakville Mayor, **J. M. Campbell**.

Lance Naismith

Outreach

Most of you know that we have an Outreach goal to promote Oakville and its history. During April, **Harry Barrett** outreached Outreach! Radio Canada International, owned by the CBC, contacted Harry and interviewed him about Oakville. The interview was then translated into **Arabic** and broadcast live from the Society to **Eastern Arabic countries** such as Jordan and Lebanon. Using modern technology, it all looked so easy!

Barbara Savage

A Pharmacopoeia and John Urquhart – 1802-1867

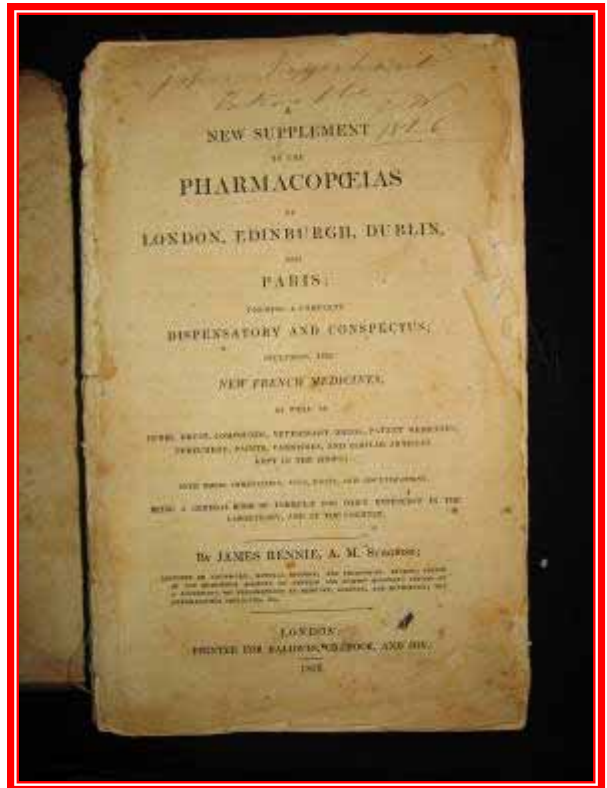
John Urquhart was born in Scotland in 1802 and grew up on the Scottish estates of the Duke of Sutherland. He was trained as a teacher but was always interested in medicinal matters. He arranged to embark to the New World and began a career in 1830 as a teacher in New York.

As New York was not to his liking, he moved to Upper Canada, and there secured a post as a teacher in West Gwillimbury, near Lake Simcoe. An epidemic of cholera was being experienced in York (Toronto) and he jumped at the chance to help at the hospital there. Two years caring for cholera patients provided him the medical experience he needed. When the epidemic subsided, he considered qualifying as a surgeon and apothecary.

After moving to Oakville he built a shop and home, giving the shop the elegant name of “Medical Hall”. It was located at 62 Colborne Street (Later renumbered 182), between Thomas and George.

There, his son Dr. John Urquhart (1844-1933) was born, the Medical Hall (See plate 29 – “Oakville & the Sixteen”) later being taken over by him after the father retired.

It was in 1846 that the apothecary acquired a copy of “**New Supplement to the Pharmacopoeia**”, printed in London in 1826. The book, derived from the medical knowledge of London, Edinburgh, Dublin and Paris, provides a complete “Dispensary and conspectus..... as well as Herbs, Drugs, Compounds, Veterinary Drugs, Patent Medicines, Perfumery, Paints, Varnishes and similar articles kept in the Shops”. It is in effect, an assembly of all these things.



There is little evidence of use, and is in good condition except for the covers, which are detached, and the spine is missing. Some notes have been written on the back cover and also on an adjacent page, but these writings do not seem of medical matters; more that the book was a convenient source of paper. The book was acquired recently by OHS from a descendent of the original owner – an interesting addition to our Archives.

The donor of the Urquhart pharmacopoeia is Dr Gerald Coleman, a great great grandson, who lives in British Columbia.

Harry Buxton

Editor's Note: Ev Bullied and Lance Naismith recently came into possession of a medicinal bottle inscribed with “Dr. J. Urquhart, Oakville”. It has been presented to the OHS for purposes of display with the Urquhart pharmacopoeia.



Recognition

Three members of the Society received recognition on April 30th from the Town of Oakville for their contribution on the **Advisory Committee for the Citizens Task Force-Oakville's 150th Anniversary**. Three cheers for Jane Hawkrigg, Francine Landry and George Chisholm.

Barbara Savage

Annual General Meeting

On March 26th, 2008, the Oakville Historical Society held its Annual General Meeting at the Knox Church. It was well attended and the pot-luck supper was again a success, unless you were on a diet.

It was opened by our official OHS Crier, Ian Burkholder. It was a good opportunity for members to meet their directors and socialize with other members of the society.



OHS Crier Ian Burkholder
officially opening the meeting



Getting ready for the pot-luck



Digging In!!!!



Socializing

Hookers' Donation

Members of the Oakville Guild, formerly "Marjorie Carberry Rug Hookers Guild", put together a very lovely quilt that commemorates Oakville's 150th. Each part of the rug visually illustrates a part of Oakville's history. The Guild donated this rug to the Town of Oakville, where it is proudly displayed in the front lobby of City Hall. It is well worth a visit to City Hall to admire this fine piece of craftsmanship. The quilt (pictured to right) is shown with Pauline Power (left), a friend of "hooker" Nancy Loosley, (right). Nancy hooked the "schooner" square second from the bottom on the right. It won first place at the 2008 Ontario Hookers Guild meeting in Midland, Ontario. This year the title was "Hooked on History".



Picture by Marianne Hawthorne



Rug hanging in lobby –
City Hall

A round of applause should be given to all those involved in the creation of this project. They are:

Barbara Rennick	Nancy Looseley
Lynn Boon	Pat Rushbrook
Carol Rhodes	Lynn Munari
Donalda Fordham	Sharon Harvey
Mary Pomeroy	Yvonne Wettlaufer
Nijole Campbell	Yvonne Muntwyler
Herb Vandewall	Gerry Sanderson
Jennifer Curran	

Lance Naismith

Doors Open

Both the Thomas House and the Society will be open to the public 10am to 4pm - Saturday and Sunday - Sept 27th and 28th. **WE WILL NEED MANY VOLUNTEERS!!!** If we have extra, Doors Open will need help in other locations. Please phone the Society and leave your name and hours available to help.

Activities include:

Saturday: A walk of the Main Street &, a night Ghost Walk
Sunday: Harvest Festival at the Thomas House 1pm to 4pm.
This includes a Bake Table and Children's Craft table,
plus free Hot Apple Cider to visitors.

Come and while involved, have fun!

Barbara Savage

HAVE YOU SENT US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS???
CONTACT THE SOCIETY (info@oakvillehistory.org) - JUNE
HITCHCOX - ANDREA STEWART AND ENSURE YOU ARE UP
TO DATE

The Library

The Library has taken possession of two interesting books. One is “**Seven Sundays**” by Julika Winkler, a member of the OHS. It is the story of churches along the Dundas Highway.

As well, we have received a book titled: “**History of Saint Mildred's-Lighbourn School**”, which was published by the school. The school has been in existence for over 110 years.

These and many more other interesting books are available at the OHS and, we have one of the largest marine book collections to compliment Oakville's nautical past.

Ev Bullied

Volunteers

Our volunteers are the very lifeblood of the Oakville Historical Society. Without their ongoing dedicated efforts, perseverance and willingness to learn and teach, our Society could not survive.

They offer their skills in various ways - research, data collection, Thomas House interpreters, event food preparers, painters and carpenters to name just a few areas of assistance.



Volunteers can be of all ages, representing all aspects of Oakville's history and future. Without knowing and understanding the past, you have doomed yourself to an unfulfilled future.

Being a volunteer at the Society can be one way you can help form the future of Oakville. A rich heritage needs to be dusted off and proudly shown, not kept in a drawer that is only opened on special occasions. Be a volunteer and help

ensure that Oakville's past is remembered so that our future is rich in promise. (above pictures, taken by June Hitchcock - volunteers planning the 2008 season for the Thomas House)

If you or a friend is interested in volunteering, please don't hesitate to contact us at
info@oakvillehistory.org



SPRINGTIME AT THE SOCIETY

Are you bored? Wondering what to do with your visiting friends and relatives? Are the kids/grandchildren driving you up the wall?

*Well, come out and visit the “Thomas House” and relive some early Oakville history. Conveniently located at Lakeside Park – open Victoria Day weekend to Labour Day, Tuesdays to Thursdays & on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. 1pm – 4pm. September * Sundays only. Mrs. Thomas is sure to be in to answer all your questions about pioneer life.*

THE WAY THINGS WERE



1. Where is this building located?
2. When was it built?
3. What was it used for?
3. Who is the current occupant?

The Oakville Historical Society: 110 King Street, Oakville

Archive Hours: Tuesday & Thursday * 1:00 to 4:30PM

Tel: (905) 844-2695 Fax: (905) 844-7380 Website: www.oakvillehistory.org

Postal Address: P.O. Box 69501, 109 Thomas Street, Oakville, Ontario L6J 7R4