

# Buffy's Corner

## Conserve, Educate and Celebrate Brampton's History

The Official Newsletter of the Brampton Historical Society

Summer 2025

### From the Editors

On March 27, 2024, Michael Avis, the long-time President of both the Brampton Historical Society and Friends of Bovaird House passed away at the age of 84. This edition of our newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Michael who is sorely missed by his family and many friends.

Michael Avis was well known and recognized in Brampton for his many volunteering achievements and passion regarding the heritage of Brampton. He was an integral part of the Brampton Historical Society initiative to preserve and restore the Brampton CPR station that is now located at Mount Pleasant. He was instrumental in establishing Historic Bovaird House and the Pendergast Log House as living museums to 19th century life in Peel. Michael received many awards for his tireless volunteering and community involvement.

We have assembled some of the people's recollections, stories, and photos of Michael. We thank all who took the time to speak to us for this edition.

#### Buffy's Corners

Editors ..... Elizabeth Charters  
& Giulia Geraci

### Michael Avis: The Life Behind the Legacy - An Interview with Jane Avis *By Elizabeth Charters*

*"Michael was the love of my life for over 50 years and the best husband and friend I could have ever imagined." – Jane Avis*

Jane Avis describes her late husband Michael Avis, who left us in the spring of 2024, as a "doer and creator". His flair for innovation and leadership was a gift to the Brampton community, and Michael had a high profile in the City of Brampton for many years. For 60 years, he was an expert piano technician whom many trusted to care for their instruments.

He was one of the founders of the Brampton Historical Society and a leading actor in their project to rescue the historic CPR station from demolition and ultimately move it to the Mount Pleasant Library site. He served on the Brampton Heritage Board for 20 years and, while serving on the Board, contributed to the plaque program on historic homes and provided input during the restoration of Alderlea.

Most famously, he brought together the Friends of Historic Bovaird House and spearheaded their efforts to turn Mossie Bovaird's gift to Brampton of a virtually unfurnished house into one of its



more interesting attractions. His vision of the house as a showcase for the way of life during Brampton's earlier years made it a valuable learning resource for the community. At the same time, many people enjoyed visiting Bovaird House because unlike many museums, it felt like a home. In recognition of his "tireless work on heritage," Michael received numerous awards and volunteer recognitions, including an Ontario  
..... Continued on page 2

**Michael Avis: The Life Behind the Legacy (continued from page 1)**



Heritage Trust Certificate of Achievement in 2008, a Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of his contributions to Canada in 2012 and Brampton's Citizen of the Year award in 2019.

It is easy to be impressed by his legacy, but his many friends, and especially his wife of 50 years, know there was much more to Michael Avis than his public face.

Michael met Jane on a blind date in the early 1970's. They were both English by birth but were living in Toronto. Michael was well established in his career as an expert on building and maintaining pianos, and Jane was working as an Occupational Therapist. It was almost by chance they moved to Brampton soon after their marriage and bought a pre-war heritage house near Gage Park. They both loved that house. Michael and Jane

spent many happy hours furnishing it with lovely antique furniture and unique collectibles and tending its beautifully designed garden.

Michael and Jane were both "home bodies" who spent much of their time in their home or immediate neighbourhood. But they were also socially active, entertaining friends in their home, visiting restaurants or attending concerts and sports games.

Michael was an aficionado of jazz music and a major fan of the Toronto Argonauts. Jane has a treasured photograph of Michael arm in arm with Pinball Clemons, a big grin on both their faces. He loved sports cars and over the years drove several Mustangs and a Triumph TR. He insisted that every car should have a stick shift, as did Jane. Anyone who

has attended events at Historic Bovaird House also remembers how much he enjoyed dressing up as a 19th century gentleman, wearing his top hat, a collapsible opera hat which had previously belonged to Jane's father.

Michael had many other creative gifts. He was known for his skill in calligraphy, difficult for a left hander like him, which he used to make name tags for Bovaird Volunteers and place cards for their public events. Jane likes to wear a necklace made from a replica of his signature. He was also a confident writer and editor for the Brampton Historical Society's newsletter: "Buffy's Corners". He was a highly articulate speaker, able to provide entertaining and forceful speeches off the cuff during public events or City Council meetings. He designed the attractive flyers, invitations and

menus for Bovaird House events and played a deciding role in the harmonious décor of its rooms.

Michael was, above all, a natural leader and supportive friend to so many people. He was loyal and generous to his piano customers. He never asked the volunteers in his various organizations to do something he wouldn't do himself, and he patiently worked with them to overcome problems. Even if meetings became fractious, he never lost his cool. He and Jane rarely had disputes. "Keep Calm and Carry On" was the Avis family motto. He was never too busy for a friendly chat, and he recruited many volunteers by his interest in their own stories. Always "upbeat and positive," he was widely liked and respected. When asked how he was, he always replied "Great!" with a grin and a thumbs up. Over the last few weeks of his life, he charmed the staff and volunteers at Bethell Hospice as he enjoyed their British-style afternoon tea, had his bed rolled into the gardens so he could bask in the sun and participated enthusiastically in his lively birthday party.

Michael met life's ups and downs with courage and optimism. He focused on the joys of the present moment, and he took an interest in his many projects until he was no longer with us. Jane herself planned the memorable "Celebration to Honour Michael" held at Alderlea on June 9, 2024. Still, she is sure he would have loved to have attended it, once more spending time with his enormous circle of friends.

On June 6, 2025, a thriving red maple was planted on the grounds of Historic Bovaird House in Michael and Jane's honour. Many friends and volunteer colleagues attended.

*Though a tree grows ever so high, the falling leaves return to the root. – Malay Proverb*

## Michael's Involvement in BHS – The Beginning *by*

*Michael Seaman*

*Michael Seaman was a friend of Michael Avis for 25 years until his passing in 2024. Michael Seaman was the Chair of the Brampton Heritage Board and was instrumental in the creation of the Brampton Historical Society in the fall of 1998. The BHS was created to save the Brampton CP Rail Station from demolition. The article below, edited for space, is an excerpt from an original 2024 email sent to Jonathan Scotland. Michael Seaman has set up a tribute at: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/bx8zWmsL7YwkDYNs5>*

At one of those cloudy Saturdays (at the Farmers' Market) in September and October of 1998 we were greeted at the booth by an English man like myself, named Michael Avis. He was carrying his fruit and vegetables from the market on his way home. I gave him my sales pitch about the new Brampton heritage organization and he said he would go to the inaugural meeting.

The meeting was held on October 1, 1998. Roweena Cooper, past president of the Ontario Historical Society was the keynote speaker, then Paul (Hunt) gave a speech and went over the draft constitution that I had drafted, he and I answered questions for those who came to the meeting. We also sold memberships and I was proud to be member #1. It wasn't a large group but there were enough new faces to give us hope. Men and women, young and old. One of these was Michael Avis. A few of the members decided to form the initial executive of the Brampton Historical Society. Members included Paul Hunt as the first President, Susan Barnes and

Patricia Carlos as co-vice presidents, Jerry Clarkson as treasurer, Denise Churchill as Special Events, Dorithy Willis as communications. She founded the original Buffy's Corner newsletter. There were one or two others including Heather Gunter.

The first activity of the society was to secure the dismantled components of the CPR station. With public donations and money kicked in by City Council and Kanneff, enough funds were generated to ensure that the building was properly dismantled.



Heritage Enthusiasts, including many who would become Brampton Historical Society members had spent much of the summer of 1998 documenting the building, marking each brick and stone and structural component so that it could be put back together. I came up with the documentation plan. You can still see the numbering marks today on some of the stones at the reconstructed station at Mount Pleasant. The station components had been relocated to the property owned by Bob Crawford who operated the successful Pine Valley Farms, famous for their Butterscotch Pies in Norval. Bob had earlier run a camp on the property and he offered up the former camp washroom as a place where we could store the station. We received donations of rope and tarpaulins to help with the rest.

At the first society meeting on October 1, we asked for volunteers to help us to put the station into storage. Michael Avis was one of

those who put their hand up. Sure enough when the time came on a cold late October Sunday, Michael Avis was there helping us to put the station to bed so to speak until the people and money came forward to put the building back together.

(Michael Avis is helping out below - one of the many pictures on the site)



The next big task of the Brampton Historical Society was to set up the first Public event. I came up with the idea of bringing in a series of speakers to entertain the group. The first speaker I recruited was Ron Brown, a noted author about Ontario Ghost Towns and Railway heritage. The meeting was set for the Cyril Clark Branch of the Brampton Public Library for January 27, 1999. By this time my time as chair of the Brampton Heritage Board had come to an end so I was announced as the second President of the Brampton Historical Society at this meeting. Paul "Our Founder" was given an embroidered Railway driver cap with the name "Founder" written on it. The meeting was a success. We pretty much filled up the entire theatre and all the well known heritage enthusiasts from the Brampton Heritage Board, Friends of Bovaird House and former members of the Peel County Historical Society came out for an enjoyable meeting. Michael Avis was one of those who came out. I believe it was then that Michael became acquainted with the folks at the Friends of Bovaird House which was another long time volunteer activity for Michael Avis.

...continued on page 4

### **BHS - The Beginning *continued* from page 3**

The first few months of 1999 were busy for the Brampton Historical Society. We had learned that the Heritage Theatre (formerly the Capitol) which had been renewed and rejuvenated only a decade or so before was being proposed for demolition. We also learned that the McClure House, one of the City's finest Georgian style farmhouses had been ransacked and dismembered under the authorization of the developer who owned it. Michael Avis was there with us to inspect the damage to the once stately home and was there with us at Council when Paul



and I made presentations to Council about improving support for heritage conservation.

The next big event for the BHS was a Strawberry Festival set for Downey's farm on the weekend of July 17, 1999. .... Michael Avis was one of the historical society members who volunteered to help with the set-up and operation of this successful event.

As 1999, the century and millennium drew to a close, I had moved to Aurora, and I believe Michael Avis joined the BHS executive at that time, also being involved with the Friends of Bovaird House. I stepped down as Chair at the end of the year but remained involved through recruiting interesting speakers to the BHS schedule of meetings. One of these was Mike Filey, a noted author.



At this time we were talking about the Millennium new year and the old Dominion Building Clock came up in conversation. It was learned that the clock had not been running for some time. Michael Avis decided to investigate this and it was determined that it wasn't running because it wasn't being wound. Michael took the steps to ensure that the clock started running again just in time for the ringing of the year 2000. This timely event placed Michael Avis on the front page of the January 1, 2000 edition of the Brampton Guardian newspaper and was a great publicity boost for the BHS. Michael Avis was indeed our man of the Millennium and the work that he did for the BHS, Bovaird House and later the Brampton Heritage Board ensured that all these organizations continued on strong into the new century.

Despite my moving away from Brampton, Michael Avis and I continued to be in touch. I would return now and then to see speakers at the historical society meetings. He invited me back as the featured speaker for the BHS 10th anniversary celebration in September 2008 at the Peel Heritage Complex.

It was at that meeting that I heard the rumblings that something good was happening with the CPR station, the building that the society was set up to rebuild. Michael Avis had worked tirelessly to keep the

station in the news and on the agenda of the City Council for the 10 years after it was dismantled. With community planning underway for a transit hub in the Mount Pleasant area and the emergence of significant infrastructure funding in the wake of the 2008 economic meltdown, the City of Brampton, the Peel Board of

Education, the Brampton Public Library and Mattamy Homes came together to propose a community hub, the centrepiece of which would be the reconstructed CPR Station. The role of Michael Avis, Paul Hunt and others who kept the station in the public eye for those 10 years was essential in getting us towards this incredible moment when the dream of the BHS founders had come true. Sadly Paul Hunt passed away before the building was completed but Michael Avis was pivotal in seeing it through and also in ensuring that his old friend Paul Hunt was recognized through the Paul Hunt Bursary and the Paul Hunt Room at the reconstructed station.

I was pleased to see in 2008 that Michael as Chair of the Friends of Bovaird House was awarded the Lt. Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for community leadership in 2009.



It was one of the most incredible days in my career in heritage planning and as a long-time  
...continued on page 5

## **BHS - The Beginning *continued from page 4***

supporter of Brampton's heritage to attend the grand opening of the Brampton CPR station in 2012 and to do so with Michael Avis, Guardian Reporter, Pam Douglas and John Hutton, who had saved the station the first time by my side. Incidentally, Pam Douglas was named the first winner of the Heritage Canada Foundation (National Trust for Canada) Journalism Prize for her extensive reporting advocating for the saving of the Brampton CPR station and for better heritage preservation in Canada. Michael and I prepared the nomination for Pam and She was presented the award by her journalism hero, Pierre Berton.

Michael organized many of the Brampton Historical Society tours. In 2014, he brought the BHS members to Grimsby where I was working as Planning Director at the time and I was pleased to work with him to organize and attend the tour of historic Grimsby sites and Grimsby Beach.

In spring of 2021, I took a job as Manager of Heritage Planning for the City of Brampton. I was happy to be back and one of the first people I reached out to when I arrived was Michael Avis. Michael by this point had also volunteered for the Brampton Heritage Board along with Paul Willoughby. We sat at Michael's home and he filled me in with all that had happened in the preceding years including the relocation and restoration of the Pendergrast Log House at Bovaird House. Unfortunately due to my receiving an offer of

another position close to my home in Niagara, I didn't stay long at the City of Brampton. ... On my last day with the City, May 14, 2021, I met up with Michael Avis at Bovaird



House and met for what turned out to be the last time. Michael gave me a tour of the Pendergrast Log House and it was clear he was very proud of this remarkable achievement. I took a photo of Michael on that day standing proudly in front of the old log home. It's hard to believe that it had been nearly 24 years since we had met at that point. He looked as healthy as ever and I had no idea it would be the last time we met.

It was a very sad day for me when earlier this year I found

out about Michael's passing.... I am forever grateful that I met Michael and that he carried the torch so successfully for heritage preservation in Brampton for so many years. And always did so with a warm smile on his face.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story of Michael Avis and the early days of the BHS.



## **Historic BOVAIRD House**

AUTUMN 2009

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2009

### **H.B.H. CHAIRMAN MICHAEL AVIS RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD.**

On Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup> Historic Bovaird House Chairman Michael Avis was the proud recipient of an

#### **ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST 2008 HERITAGE COMMUNITY RECOGNITION PROGRAM CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT**



Presenting Michael with the framed certificate issued by the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and current Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust Foundation, is Lynda Voegtle, Co-Chair of the Brampton Heritage Board.

Fellow H.B.H. volunteer and also Co-Chair of the Brampton Heritage Board Paul Willoughby (pictured right) was Master of Ceremonies for this gala event.

Held at the magnificent residence of David and Iris Nava, attendees included the Mayor of Brampton, Susan Fennell, members of both regional and city council, many members of the Brampton Heritage Board, the Brampton Historical Society, a large contingent of volunteers from Historic Bovaird House, friends and family members.



Michael has been a Board member of the Brampton Heritage Board for 10 years and is currently Chairman of the Outreach & Marketing Sub-Committee and also sits on this organization's Budget Sub-Committee.

He has been with the Brampton Historical Society since its inception eleven years ago and currently holds the position of Vice-President.

## Memories & Legacy

*On June 6, 2025, a tree was planted by the Pendergast Log House on the Bovaird House grounds to honour both Michael and Jane Avis for many years of volunteer work for Brampton Heritage. We took the opportunity to ask attendees about their fondest memories of Michael. Their responses are reflected below.*



**Bill Hutton (Brampton Historical Society):** I first met Michael at the Farmers' Market. There was a display for BHS and Bovaird House. He and Paul Willoughby were in Victorian costumes. Later I took a tour led by Steve Collie. Michael answered many questions. My wife and I were pleased to meet someone so interested in Brampton's history. I was also involved in Michael's projects to move the old CPR station and save Bonnie Braes (the Hutton Family homestead).

**Geoff Acheson (Brampton Historical Society):** Michael was a true gentleman. Energetic, cheerful, optimistic, and modest to a fault. He embraced life; relishing every moment. My fondest memory of Michael is that it took him so long to tell a joke because he couldn't

stop laughing while telling it. Michael was passionate about Brampton's heritage and fought tirelessly to preserve it. Historic Bovaird House is his crowning achievement.

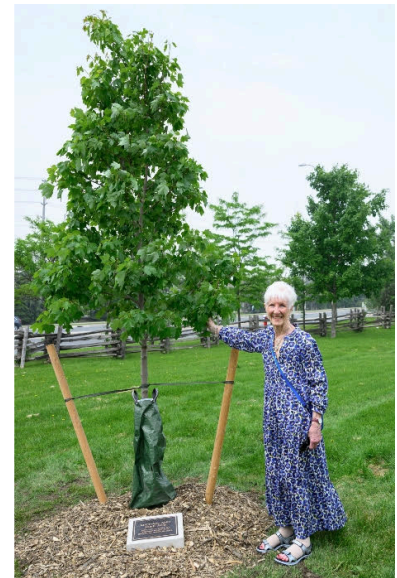
**Paul & Cathy Willoughby (Friends of Historic Bovaird House & Brampton Historical Society):** Michael was a gentleman, full of knowledge and a great host. Cathy's fondest memory is sitting with Michael in the Bovaird House office solving the world's problems while eating egg salad sandwiches. Paul and Michael could always be found in costume during the many House events. Michael was the heart of Bovaird House.

**Jean Thompson (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** I was always fond of Michael and volunteered with him for over 25 years. He was always enthusiastic and pleasant. He knew so much about history, especially Brampton's. When he was in charge, everything had to be done well. He paid attention to details like the designs on tea cups.

**Steve Wallace (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** When I first approached the Bovaird House volunteers, Michael was opposed to showcasing my blacksmithing skills because there was no space for a full sized forge. Later, I showed him my portable forge and then he was right on board. The funniest conversation I remember with Michael was about the whisky decanter in the Bovaird House parlour. We tried filling it with tea but it went mouldy. Then we used whisky. I was concerned that

people might steal it and suggested we put a line to check. Michael wasn't worried; he said we could just add water.

**Faye MacLachlan (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** I have known Michael for over 25 years. Michael was entertaining, knowledgeable, and always had a story. Michael's legacy is his love of Bovaird House and his dedication to the preservation of history.



**Tammy & Jeffrey Bowman (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael was passionate, patient, fatherly, and diplomatic. Our fondest memories are of Michael's emails; they were so exquisitely written that we looked forward to receiving them. Both Jane and Michael were wonderful hosts at their get-togethers. Michael was an historian extraordinaire.

**Joe & Cindy Jensinski (Friends over 20 years):** Michael was the ultimate gentleman. Our fondest memory is Michael dressed in period costume at various events.  
.....continued on page 7

Michael was a great mentor to our daughter Cassie, a heritage planner, and taught her a lot about Brampton.

**Susan Armstrong (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael was an elegant and friendly person.

I am so impressed by what he has accomplished in the community.

**Kathryn Leach (long-time friend):** Michael had a musical background which is not as well known to many. My favourite memory is laughing with Michael and Jane when visiting together and swapping stories. He will be remembered for his impact on the preservation of Brampton history. He was a lovely man.

*.....continued on page 8*



**Hanna Rytel (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** I met Michael in the summer of 2016 when I went with my mother for a tour he led at the Bovaird House. My mother had difficulties climbing stairs, so she sat on the antique sofa with the sign "Do Not Sit Here." Michael didn't even blink. Michael was a huge inspiration to me. He was a role model of leadership and devotion to a cause.

At the House teas, he made everyone feel extraordinarily welcome.

**Joanne Warren (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael Avis was the first to greet me when I joined the volunteers at Bovaird House. He was very welcoming. My favorite memory of Michael is when he played Mr. Bovaird in a Murder Mystery Dinner, one of the House events. It was a lot of fun.

**Jane Banks (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael was a fun-loving, adventurous, and lovable guy. He was a live wire. His legacy would be the Bovaird House.

**Elizabeth Charters (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael loved Bovaird House and everyone who worked there. He was a real leader and kept the impulsive volunteer group working well together. Michael's legacy is the house and its furnishings. He used his expertise to make it believable not just as a period piece but as a home.

**Roopa Punnen (Friends of Historic Bovaird House):** Michael was simply awesome. He was also flowery long in his correspondence; it was enjoyable to read. My favorite memory of Michael is to see him dressed up in his period costume. He looked so sharp. He was dedicated to the very end to his historic causes.

**Colleen Weatherseed (Friend of 30+ years):** Michael was always upbeat. He had amazing handwriting and did signs for the Occupational Therapy Department.









### Upcoming Events

**Brampton Historical Society**  
New members are most  
welcome!

Join us monthly!

Our meetings feature fascinating  
local history presented by  
knowledgeable guest speakers.

Meet many other individuals  
concerned about heritage  
preservation within our community  
and region.

All BHS meetings are held on the  
3rd Thursday of the month  
(except July, August &  
December)

[www.bramptonhistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.bramptonhistoricalsociety.ca)

**Saturday, July 26, 2:30 pm - "All  
Aboard! The Railways of Peel!"**  
Presented by Thomas McIlwrathe at  
PAMA. This free guided tour is  
exclusive for BHS members. Please  
register via the BHS email. **Same day  
- drop-in!!** Join us for a casual BHS  
get-together at Gage Park. Bring your  
coffee, lunch, & chair and join us near  
the bandstand. We are gathering right  
after the Farmers' Market.

**Thursday, September 18, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Gregory Klages,**  
Author/Historian **"Bush Friends All  
Around: A Ranger's Experience of  
Early 20th century Algonquin Park"**

**Thursday, October 16, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Adam Bunch,**  
Author/Creator **"The Toronto Book  
of the Dead & the City's Morbid  
Past"**

**Thursday, November 20, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Coral Harkies,**  
Genealogist, Ontario Genealogical  
Society

