

Buffy's Corner

Conserve, Educate and Celebrate Brampton's History

The Official Newsletter of the Brampton Historical Society

Winter 2025

From the Editors

In this edition, we are profiling Brampton's favorite son: William G. Davis. Bill Davis, the 18th Premier of Ontario, lived his whole life in Brampton and was always a big supporter of this city. Giulia Geraci writes about the life and legacy of this great man.

Continuing on this theme, we are also looking at Bill Davis' childhood home. Affectionately known as "The Castle", the house was built in 1853 when the population of Brampton was around 500. Looking a little different from the original building, it is still standing in downtown Brampton on a beautiful treed property. The current resident is the Brampton Caledon Community Living organization.

BHS has been busy this fall. In partnership with the Brampton Public Library, member meetings are being held at Cyril Clark library branch. After the summer hiatus, we had a great line-up of speakers this fall: Gregory Klages, Adam Bunch, and Coral Harkies. BHS also took part in Doors Open Brampton and the Farmers' Market. BHS had a private tour of the Region of Peel Archives. Check the back pages!

We wish everyone Happy Holidays and all the best in 2026!

Let us know if there are any historic persons, places, and events that you want featured here. Of course, member stories are welcome.

Buffy's Corners

**Editors Elizabeth Charters
& Giulia Geraci**

The Honourable
Bill Davis
PC CC OOnt QC



Davis in 1979

Bill Davis - Brampton's Most Beloved Son

"But more than that, he (Bill Davis) was a decent man and a great Canadian."
Steve Paikin*

William Grenville Davis, commonly called Bill Davis, was the 18th Premier of Ontario from 1971 to 1985. Prior to this office, he was Minister of Education in Ontario from 1962 to 1971. As a Progressive Conservative candidate, he never lost an election and represented Brampton as a Member of Provincial Parliament from 1959 to 1985. A number of public policies implemented while he was in office continue to impact how Ontarians live and work today. Bill Davis was also instrumental to the successful patriation of the Constitution of Canada. After his retirement from politics, many

sought his counsel on the prevailing state of affairs. In 2012, the Institute for Research on Public Policy magazine, "Policy Options", named Davis as the second best Canadian premier of the last 40 years; Peter Lougheed, former Premier of Alberta was first. Earlier this year, a unique and beautiful piece of artwork, *Contours of Connection*, honouring the legacy of Bill Davis was unveiled on the grounds of the PAMA building. Let's look at this man whom many admired and is considered Brampton's Most Beloved Son.



Contours of Connection, views from opposite sides



Born on July 30, 1929, Bill Davis spent his entire life in Brampton and died in Brampton on August 8, 2021. At the time of his birth, Brampton was a town of just over 5,000 people. By 2021, it was a city of over 650,000 people.continued on page 2

Bill Davis

(Continued from page 1)

His father was Arthur Grenville Davis, a lawyer for the Crown Attorney for Peel County for over 30 years. A. Grenville Davis founded his own law firm in 1916 which continues to operate in Brampton. His mother was Vera Mildred Hewetson, daughter of J.W. Hewetson, owner of the former Hewetson Shoe Factory in Brampton. Bill Davis became involved in politics at the ripe old age of 15 after attending the annual meeting of the federal Progressive Conservative party. He attended University of Toronto (BA, 1951), Osgoode Hall Law School (1954) and was called to the bar in 1955.

Political Career:

Ministries of Education & University Affairs



Bill Davis: saved farm land with Ontario's first experiment in green belting, and was a major force behind stopping acid rain.

In 1959, Bill was elected Conservative MPP for Peel. In 1962, at the age of 29, Premier John Robarts made him Minister of Education, and in 1964, he was given the Ministry of University Affairs portfolio. Bill remained Minister of these two large portfolios until 1971 when he became Premier. His accomplishments in these portfolios are some of the ones that he is most recognized for.

Bill Davis was a strong proponent of Education. He oversaw an overhaul of the education system in Ontario. Outdated school boards were amalgamated; the number of school boards were reduced from 3676 in 1962 to 192 in 1967. Rural, often

single-room, schools were consolidated. New public schools were built. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education was opened in 1965. New public Ontario universities were established: Trent University, Brock University, University of Windsor and University of Guelph. Existing universities added more colleges and campuses to their organizations. Most importantly, the public Ontario Community College



system was created which offered specialized skills education and training for post-secondary students. In 1966, the Province of Ontario Student Awards Program (OSAP) was started to provide grants to students for post-secondary education. In 1970, the Ontario Educational Communications Authority educational television network, also known as TVO, was created.

By 1971, education was transformed. Funding for education increased over 450% from 1962 to 1971. Changes made by Minister Davis were instrumental in linking education to job creation through the college system to meet the economic growth needs experienced in post-war Canada. This led to Ontario becoming a centre of manufacturing, finance, and practical skills.

"Show me a good doctor, a good lawyer, a good whatever and I will show you a good kindergarten teacher, a good high school teacher and a good university professor. There is no more important commitment that a government can make than to education." **Bill Davis**

.....continued on page 3

The Castle

In 1978, the City of Brampton Heritage Board published a softcopy booklet called "Heritage Brampton - An illustrated review of some fine old buildings in the City, 1978". The book contains the history and beautiful illustrations of several iconic buildings in Brampton. We are fortunate that most of the buildings in this publication continue to stand in Brampton. In this and future newsletters, we will be reprinting excerpts from this book along with current pictures and locations. In this edition, we are reprinting the chapter about the Wright Castle, 1853. This building is located at 53 Church St. West and is listed in the City of Brampton Downtown Heritage Walking Tour.

George Wright, who was born an Orangeman in Northern Ireland in 1811, came to Brampton with his wife Elizabeth at a time when the area was developing quickly in competition with neighbouring towns. He was an energetic and imaginative man and his dealings in land and grain contributed greatly to his own, and Brampton's prosperity. He was active in municipal as well as federal politics and served as Conservative Member to the Fourth Parliament in Canada for three years.

Wright was most influential in the construction of the Grand Trunk - now the Canadian National- Railway through Brampton. The money he received for the railway lands appears to have been used to finance the construction of "The Castle" on Church Street West, opposite the station.



.....continued on page 5

Bill Davis (continued from page 2)

Premier of Ontario

In February, 1971, Bill Davis won the Progressive Conservative leadership by 44 votes on the fourth ballot and became the Premier at 42 years of age. He presided over 4 elections as Premier; a majority government in 1971, minority governments in 1975 and 1977, and a majority government in 1981.



His leadership was marked by moderate reformism and a calm leadership style. Bill Davis once stated that his new slogan should be "Bland works." Per John Mallory, Carleton University, "bland works" rewarded pragmatism and caution over boldness and ideology.

In the 2013 TVO Gala presentation, "A Tribute to Bill Davis", accolades across political parties abounded. Bob Rae, former Ontario Premier (NDP) and current UN representative, said "He is the gold standard for leadership of this province". Andrea Horwath, former leader of Ontario NDP, quoted "He is a shining example of how politics can be done with intelligence and with wit but with integrity." Mike Harris, former Ontario Premier (PC), said "He was fair. He was decent. He was honest." Stephen Lewis, former Leader of the Opposition of Ontario, chuckled when he said that "he (Bill Davis)" managed to achieve inclusiveness by visiting every village and hamlet in the province in perpetuity." Hugh Segal, Sr Aide to William Davis and Deputy Minister summed up his leadership style best. "He is probably

the most humane and human leader that I have ever worked with in terms of thinking about the average person in their day to day life and how the government might do or not do will affect them."

During his tenure, Premier Bill Davis and his administration had many accomplishments while governing during difficult economic times for Ontario and the rest of Canada.

Some of the highlights of his tenure:

-1971 to 1975: stopped the construction of the Spadina Expressway; appointed the first ever in Canada, Minister of Environment, George Kerr; appointed the first female cabinet minister in Ontario, Margaret Birch; set-up regional governments for Durham, Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand-Norfolk, Waterloo, Peel; implemented rent review system (now known as the Landlord-Tenant Board system) to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords



Davis previews one of the 1978 Canadian National Exhibition's upcoming attractions. (John McNeill/The Globe and Mail)

-1975-1981: enacted Canada's first mandatory seat belt law; expanded the provincial public health and education systems including French Language schools; expanded provisions of the Ontario Human Rights Code; the first comprehensive

Ontario Health & Safety Act (OHSA) in 1978; expanded bilingual government services

-1981-1985; supported Prime Minister Trudeau to patriate the Constitution of Canada; implemented the 3 person committee to study the feasibility of a domed stadium (now the Rogers Centre) in Toronto; full funding of Catholic secondary schools to Grade 13

Bill Davis is also recognized for his prominent role to bring the Constitution of Canada home. Bill Davis was a committed federalist.

"I enjoyed being Premier of Ontario but I found it more important to be a Canadian first." Bill Davis



Davis in 1984

Going against the federal Progressive Conservatives position on this, he worked with Prime Minister P.E. Trudeau to patriate the Constitution of Canada and entrench the Charter of Rights and Freedom. Premier Bill Davis was the mediator during the Constitution negotiations between the federal and provincial governments. Davis insisted on the inclusion of the notwithstanding clause in the Constitution which won over the support of the other premiers.

.....continued on page 4

Bill Davis (cont'd from page 3)

Tough Times

The Davis government struggled with the economic hard times throughout its tenure. From the 1950s to early 1970s, there was rapid and strong post-war economic growth in Canada. The prosperous economy allowed governments, including Ontario, to support economic expansion by subsidizing and assisting every sector of the economy and making significant investment in highways and expansion of the provincial electricity output. However, by 1971, the post war upswing was nearing an end. Stagflation in the 1970s and the 1973 oil crisis led to multiple global and Canada wide recessions between 1973 and 1985. Between 1975 and 1980, economic growth slowed and by 1980, it slowed to 0.2% while inflation remained high. Between 1979 and 1982, Ontario inflation peaked at 12.1%, unemployment reached 9.8% and interest rates reached 21% in 1981.

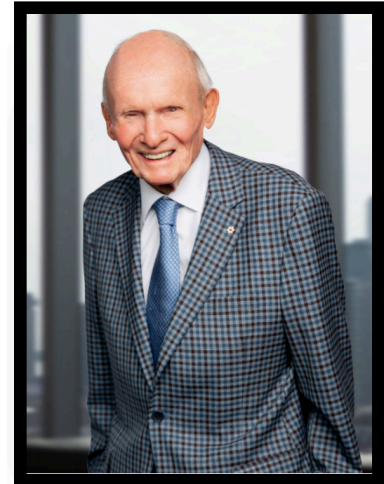


Consequently, reduced tax revenue and high interest rates warranted reductions in spending at all levels of government. In 1975, Davis appointed the Special Program Review Committee to look at ways and

means to slow the rate of public expenditure growth in an inflationary period. The rate of growth in spending decreased from 24.7% in 1974-75 to 6.4% in 1978-79 where, being the largest departments, education and healthcare spending were most impacted by the reductions. This resulted in larger class sizes, reduction in the number of hospital beds, closure of psychiatric hospitals, privatized health labs, and the contracting out of highway maintenance and snowplowing services. Between 1975-1980, over 7000 public sector jobs were eliminated. Needless to say, these policy actions led to increased large scale labour action and strikes. In spite of this and other actions such as 1982 Inflation Restraint Act and 1983 Public Sector and Compensation Review Act taken by the provincial government to stem spending, the provincial deficit did increase from \$2.2 billion in 1971 to \$28.9 billion in 1985. These were difficult and challenging times for the provincial government or, indeed, for any government.

Post-Political Career

After 25 years in politics, Bill Davis resigned in October, 1984 and left public life in February, 1985. In addition to returning to the legal profession, he served on numerous corporate boards: Seagrams, Power Corp., CIBC, and Rogers Cable to name a few. In 1985-86, he was appointed the Canadian Special Envoy of a joint task force with US Special Envoy, Drew Lewis to look into the ongoing acid rain issue affecting the Great Lakes. Their report laid the groundwork for the 1991 Canada - United States Air Quality Agreement. He also remained active in the Progressive Conservative Party and influenced candidates in provincial and municipal politics.



Bill Davis was often called upon and offered his counsel to others regardless of political party. In Policy Magazine "Remembering Bill Davis" [August 8, 2021], Bob Rae, former Ontario Premier, wrote "When my own surprise victory came in 1990, Bill Davis made a point of reaching out in the earliest days and he was a constant advisor and mentor to me in what would prove to be a challenging time.....He made it clear that he wished nothing but success for me and for the province. – "If you do well, we all shall do well."

"I am a Tory but I respect others of other political persuasion who have the best interest of this province or this country..." Bill Davis

Many honours were bestowed onto Bill Davis reflecting his numerous accomplishments. Some were: Companion of Order of Canada 1985, Order of Ontario 1987, Queen's Privy Council 1982, Knight in Legion of Honour of France 2001, Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee 2002 and Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee 2012. Appropriately, his name also graces a number of schools and post secondary buildings.

.....continued on page 5

Bill Davis (cont'd from page 4)

Bill Davis did not actively seek public recognition. He only allowed the new Brampton courthouse (2000) to be named The A. Grenville and William Davis Courthouse because it recognized his father.

Bill Davis lived his entire life in Brampton. His first wife, Helen, died in 1962 and left him a widower with four children. He married Kathleen MacKay, a childhood friend, in 1964 and they had another child. He was the grandfather of 12 and great-grandfather of 6. Kathleen passed away in January, 2025. Bill Davis always promoted his hometown and was affectionately known as "Brampton Billy". He was given the Key to the City of Brampton in 2019.

On the website of the family law firm, Davis Webb, the tribute page to William Davis states "William Davis leaves behind an unmatched legacy and, aside from his very notable accomplishments as Premier, he will be remembered for his kindness, sincerity, and decency." Many people, including myself, concur.

*Steve Paikin wrote an authorized biography of Bill Davis in 2016, "Bill Davis: Nation Builder, and Not So Bland" in 2016. He also wrote the tribute on the Contours of Connection.

— Giulia Geraci



The Castle (cont'd from page 2)

The house which arose was described by a contemporary writer as "... a mansion of brick in the old English style of Elizabeth...". It is indeed a dignified example of the mid nineteenth century Elizabethan influence. The construction was of red brick in Flemish Bond, but the whole exterior has been painted white in recent years. The front is double gabled with a recessed entrance containing a wide, deeply paneled door with sidelights in a heavy frame. The door is topped by a semi-circular fanlight with a sunburst pattern of stained glass. The opening of the recess is protected by a large hood moulding supported on carved consoles.



The roof is steeply pitched and covered in grey, topped with chimneys constructed in decorated brickwork. Roof beams project through the outer walls of the gable ends and have been decoratively carved.

George Wright's fortunes did not run smoothly and when he suffered financial ruin, the house became occupied by John Alexander Thistle and his wife, Ellen Wigley. Thistle was a prominent businessman in the town and his short but influential life is commemorated in a stained glass window in the chancel of Christ Church, of which Wright has been a benefactor.

In 1900, the house was purchased by George L. Williams....Mr. J.W. Hewetson acquired the title in 1914 and then, in the early 1930's it passed to his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. & Mrs. A. Grenville Davis. Mr. Davis was the Crown Attorney of Peel for thirty-one years, and Chairman, in

turn of both Brampton and Central Peel District Boards of Education. His son, William, spent his childhood years in "The Castle", and eventually became Premier of Ontario. In 1952, the property was sold to Mr. S. Stonehouse, and then, in 1973, to the present owners.

Additional facts related to this building:

—"The Castle" was designed by William Hay (1818-1888) an internationally renowned Scottish architect who specialized in gothic architecture. He lived and worked in Toronto from 1853 to 1861. Toronto buildings that he designed and can be seen today include St. Basil's

Church, St. Michael's College, and Church of the Holy Trinity. He also designed the original Toronto General Hospital and Yorkville Town Hall.

—John Alexander Thistle (1832-1871) was also a Justice of the Peace who died tragically by suicide.

—John William

Hewetson (1857-1930) was the original owner of the "Hewetson Shoe Factory". This shoe manufacturing factory was located at 57 Mill St. N. in Brampton and operated for over 65 years.

—in the early 1900's, "The Castle" suffered considerable damage from fire whereby the turret and south

wing were destroyed. During subsequent alterations, a belvedere on the roof was removed and the building is now covered in white



siding.

—"The Castle" is currently occupied by Brampton Caledon Community Living.

Member Fall Meetings

Gregory Klages, "Bush Friends All Around: A Ranger's Experience of Early 20th Century Algonquin Park" - September 18

Dr. Klages found and later published, with family's permission, the personal diaries of Mark Robinson, an Algonquin Park Ranger & Acting Park Supervisor whose career spanned several decades in the early 20th century. Starting from 1908, Mr. Robinson kept personal diaries continuously for over 30 years; a rare accomplishment. The diaries provide insight into the minutia of daily life in rural Ontario at the time. Dr. Klages' presentation of snippets of the diaries and his journey to find the diaries made for a very interesting evening. Dr. Gregory Klages is a history instructor at Guelph-Humber and, in addition to the 2 volumes in the Algonquin Diaries collection, has authored "The Many Deaths of Tom Thompson: Separating Fact from Fiction". Volume 3 of the Algonquin Diaries is due out in 2025/26.



Adam Bunch, "The Toronto Book of the Dead & the City's Morbid Past", October 16

Adam Bunch presented a few of his spooky stories in his book "The Toronto Book of the Dead". Quite appropriate for this time of year! Mr. Bunch is a fabulous storyteller of Canadian history. From stories about the grisly death of Toronto's first lighthouse keeper - John Paul

Radelmuller to old cemeteries such as Toronto Necropolis and First Nations' burial mounds, BHS members were entertained. Adam Bunch, a huge history buff, is active on social media with a youtube channel "Canadiana", and an on-line newsletter in addition to providing lectures and tours. His website is www.adambunch.com.



Coral Harkies, Ontario Genealogical Society, November 20

Coral Harkies spoke about her genealogical research into the lives and 1940s court cases of 2 Canadian immigrants. Among her sources of information are census lists, immigration records, newspapers, government records, and on-line ancestry sites. The amount of detail that she was able to research and present was quite amazing. Coral is a regular presenter on genealogy at the Brampton Library - Four Corners. Check the library website.



Doors Open Brampton - September 21, 2025

In partnership with the Brampton Library, BHS participated in Doors Open Brampton 2025. Geoff Acheson and Megan Gilpin, both



dressed in costume, manned a few display tables at the Four Corners Library Branch. A couple of the tables showcased some of Geoff's wonderful collection of antique lamps. Another table of artifacts was used as a guessing game for visitors. As you can see from the pictures, it was a great presentation that was enjoyed by many patrons. Well done Geoff and Megan! Many thanks to you both and to the Brampton Library for hosting our display!





PAMA Archives- Archives Tour - Christmas in Peel



Brampton Farmers' Market 2025

BHS had a booth at this year's Brampton Farmers' Market. Literally rising very early to the occasion, Steve Collie, President of BHS, set up and manned the BHS for 3 Saturdays of this market season. Megan Gilpin also gave a hand for a couple of mornings. The booth was popular with many local shoppers stopping to inquire about the history of Brampton. The rotary phone on display brought smiles from the old and perplexed looks from the young. Thanks Steve! The booth will be back in 2026!



On December 4th, members of BHS braved a particularly cold night to attend a unique tour of the Region of Peel Archives and vault located at PAMA on Wellington St.

Our tour guides were Archivists Kyle Neill and Jacob Keszei. The theme of our tour was Christmas in Peel. From the Archives, some of the items shown to the group were:



Christmas family pictures from glass plate negatives to pictures in the 1940s, novelty Christmas cards from early 20th century, photo Christmas cards from Williams Perkins Bull, and a child's letter to Santa from the Benares family.



.....Continued on page 8

Christmas in Peel - Archive Tour (cont'd from page 7)

Kyle provided the background stories to the displayed items and the people who provided the artifacts. The history of the Dapper Cat, a treasured Christmas postcard from 1910 and fondly regarded as the Archive posterchild, was just one of those funny stories. Jacob provided a tour of the PAMA galleries and the jail. We found out that the Region of Peel Archives has an extensive (and growing) collection of artifacts that are available to the public by appointment.

Many Thanks to Kyle & Jacob! A good time was had by all.



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

Upcoming Events

2026 Membership Dues
Your support is greatly appreciated!!

If not already done so, please ensure that you complete and print the on-line membership form and pay the 2026 membership dues at the January 15th meeting. We have a fine line-up of speakers already queued up for 2026 and a couple of members-only events planned. It will be a great year!

Thursday, January 15, 6:30 pm -
Cyril Clark Library- **BHS Members Show & Tell**

Thursday, February 16, 6:30 pm -
Cyril Clark Library- **Tom Tran**, Heritage Planner, **"Modernist Architecture in Brampton"**

Thursday, March 19, 6:30 pm - Cyril Clark Library- **Annual Meeting & Charlton Carscallen**, Principal Planner, City of Brampton