

OAK HALL

On July 15, 1924, mining millionaire Harry Oakes purchased the estate of Clark Hill, located on a high bank overlooking the Dufferin Islands from Walter Schoellkopf, of Niagara Falls electric power fame. He hired the architectural firm of Findlay and Foulis, the same firm which had designed the new Table Rock House, to design a 37-room Tudor style mansion. The house incorporated portions of the historic Clark Hill house and took four years to complete. The Oakes family moved into the house in 1928 and lived there for 6 years. As a protest to the increasing taxes in Canada, Harry Oakes moved to England in 1934, and settled in Nassau, Bahamas in 1935. In 1939, Oakes was made a baronet, and received the title of Sir Harry Oakes. He died tragically in the Bahamas on July 8, 1943. In the same year, his widow, Lady Eunice Oakes deeded Oak Hall to the Government of Canada as a convalescent hospital for the Royal Canadian Air Force. When it was no longer needed, the government deeded it back to the family in 1952. Sir Sydney Oakes, the eldest son and heir of Sir Harry Oakes, and his wife moved in soon after and remained situated in Oak Hall for several years before returning to the Bahamas.

Oak Hall was purchased by the Niagara Parks Commission on May 25, 1952 and for a few years, it housed displays by the Niagara District Art Association. In 1964, the NPC furnished five rooms of the house and opened it to the public. On June 17, 1966, a nine-hole golf course was opened on the grounds surrounding Oak Hall. The Richard Strong Report presented to the NPC in December 1968 recommended that the house be remodelled and used as an Administrative Headquarters. No action was taken until 1980 when the NPC approved the recommendation. The architectural renovations to Oak Hall were done by Chapman-Murray Associates and took a year to complete. The administrative offices were moved from Queen Victoria Park to Oak Hall on October 24, 1982. Oak Hall currently houses 23 offices, meeting and storage rooms. Displays of Niagara Falls art, and the furnished rooms are still open to the public. Oak Hall is located on Portage Road, half way between Niagara Falls and Chippawa, directly opposite Marineland.

