

The Grand Dispatch

A brief social history of Port Maitland Ontario, and the surrounding area
Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association (PMHA) Price \$2.00 - Free to PMHA members

Port Maitland to Celebrate Bicentennial!

The year 2020 is a bicentennial year for Port Maitland. A sign located at Kings Row and Port Maitland Rd. states that Port Maitland was established in 1820. To date I have not been able to find if it was incorporated or simply established. They are two very different things. At any rate two hundred years for a community in Canada is a lengthy record. Oh sure there are a number of communities that go back four hundred and maybe even five hundred years, but Ontario or should I say Upper Canada was still the outback in 1820 compared to today.



This view is looking toward the lake from the east side of the river. Note there is no pier!

Photo NAC

If Port Maitland wishes to celebrate its bicentennial then yesterday is not too soon to begin planning for this momentous occasion. The occasion will be meaningful no matter what plans we make, but will it be a momentous event? That is up to you!

When I was asked by my committee to write on this subject for this Dispatch, my intention was to write a lot of history. I am now not so sure that writing about history at this point is the best idea. Maybe what is fairer to you is for me to ask you to tell me

what you know and then together we will go looking for confirmation of those events or stories. There are many families in this area who have roots back to 1820 and some even go back further than that.

I would like to hear from you. I would like to see photos or paintings etc. of your ancestors. I would like to see photos or painting etc. of your ancestral homes. I would like to learn stories of your ancestors even if we never get a chance to put your story to print, let us at least get them on paper or in this day in age onto a computer.



Port Maitland looks a lot like Hannibal MI

Earl M. Siddall Collection

It is my job to at least to give you a boost by providing some subjects we would like to hear about and some people we would like to know more about.

This question often comes up; "Where is Port Maitland; is it on the east or west side of the River?"

Port Maitland consists of communities in both the former Sherbrooke Township on the east side of the river and in the former Dunn Township on the west side of the river. However, the cottage area on the east side is now known as Beckley Beach and is owned by the Beckley Beach Cottagers Corporation.

If anyone knows information about the following subjects please contact me.

- 1 Tourism
- 2 Farming
- 3 Military
- 4 Commercial fishing on the lake
- 5 Disasters or near disasters on the lake
- 6 Commercial fishing for rough fish on the river
- 7 Commercial clam fishing on the river
- 8 Sport fishing
- 9 Hunting
- 10 Industrial development
- 11 Ferry service on river
- 12 Commercial shipping
- 13 Ice storms
- 14 Flooding
- 15 Memorable storms of any kind
- 16 Spectacular fires
- 17 Pioneer families
- 18 Development of the harbour including the piers
- 19 Shipwrecks
- 20 Pleasure boating
- 21 Building of roads and installation of drains
- 22 War efforts especially the airport
- 23 Rebellion of 1837
- 24 Personal family losses
- 25 Politics
- 26 Religion
- 27 Drownings
- 28 Railways
- 29 Any other subject of interest

Short stories of Port Maitland Past

You can see that there is a lot to write about. I have only touched the surface. We need your help, so start early, and start now! Next, you will find short paragraphs about some of these subjects. They are here to tease you a bit and to solicit information, photos or any material that will help us to better understand the subject.

Did you know that for about twenty years Port Maitland was home base to a number of international artists including Merritt Clarke of Buffalo who ran a summer art school here? Well it was. Unfortunately very few paintings can be found of the thousands that were produced by both the students and the teacher-artists. For a number of years annual Bohemian Sketching Club art shows were held in Buffalo where numerous paintings of Port Maitland were sold. One of the things I found interesting while researching them was that they took the Grand Central Railway train to the Stromness station and from there at first took the Feeder Canal to Port Maitland. Later William Tweed ran a horse drawn taxi between the station and Port which became their new mode of transport.



Cable ferry Chummy Heaps circa 1952
Photo courtesy Julia Hall nee Clark

Earl Siddall often asked me if I could find any information as to when the ferry service started at Port Maitland. I was never able. However, recently I came across a 1818 map of Port Maitland and on that map is a notation of ferry service at the mouth of the Grand River.

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Some, including myself were of the misguided impression that the Grand River Naval Depot was established and used during the War of 1812. I believe John Docker has clearly and conclusively resolved that issue in his book *Grand River Naval Depot*. I believe many also thought it was called the Port Maitland Naval Depot. Thanks to John we are now better informed.

Flooding reveals its ugly head from time to time, but not so much as it once did. With the establishment of the Grand River Conservation Authority and the installation of the steel break-wall flooding occurs much less often and is much less destructive than in the past. Ice jams are better dealt with by the Canadian Coast Guard and from time to time with the assistance of the U.S. Coast Guard.



This building represents what a building at the Grand River Naval Depot may have looked.

William A. Warnick Collection

At the turn of the century 1899 to 1900 more than a hundred and thirty rooms were available for rent on any given night in and around Port Maitland. Events took place at Port Maitland which gathered so many overnight visitors that the hotels and rooming houses in Dunnville were also filled to capacity.

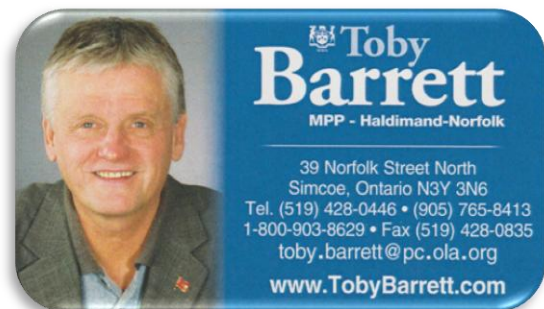
In the early twentieth century Port Maitland was considered the largest commercial fishing port on the Great Lakes with as many as fifty fishing boats. At that time the boats were experiencing a great industrial transformation themselves. First they were propelled by sail. This was ending and steam was becoming King. Then the internal combustion engine became the new King. At first gasoline was used and soon thereafter came diesel fuel. All these

generations of propulsion took place within many of our fishermen's lifespan.



This is NOT a photo of the house boat that the artists Merritt live on. It is very similar. More on these boats in a later Dispatch
Earl M. Siddall Collection

Religion meant a lot to our permanent residents as well as the many summer visitors who called Port Maitland home in the holiday season. In front of what is now the Port Maitland Apartments on the esplanade was a wood gazebo where, for many years, religious services were held every Sunday during the good weather. Of course there was Christ Church Anglican and its wonderful old wooden church. Unfortunately that building burnt to the ground in 1926. Fortunately our Anglican friends wasted no time in rebuilding our current beautiful stone church.



Pleasure boating was a major source of income for both Port Maitland and Dunnville in the early 1900s and to some extent into the 1960s. Many of you may still remember when the west side of Port Maitland docks from the Earle June Fisheries building to the present location of the Port Maitland

Sailing club was lined with one, two and even three mast sailboats docked side by side.

I don't know if the fishermen charged the boats a docking fee or let them tie alongside for free. I would be interested to find this out. Then on another weekend the Dunnville Boat Club would host power boats, many of them were large yachts from Buffalo. Though they docked in Dunnville, Port Maitlandites had a great view as they made their way up and down the river. I believe in both cases the boaters were participating in a three point cruise. I am sure the sailing boats were. I believe they left the Buffalo Canoe Club at Point Abino in Ontario, sailed to Port Maitland for the first leg. From Port Maitland, I believe they went to Erie PA for the second leg, and finally back to Pt Abino to complete the circle. If you know this information, I would very much like to hear from you.



Terry Powell's home on King Row Road; Wow!
Earl M. Siddall Collection

Have you ever read Tom Sawyer? (See photos on pages 1 & 3) I suspect so. When you were reading it, did you ever imagine what Hannibal MI looked like as the sleepy Mississippi River leisurely slid along its untouched shoreline? (See photo on front page.) Could you see the sandy beach or the muddy gravelly water's edge where a cattail or two stuck out of the water tilting just a bit as a red winged blackbird hung gracefully on its seedpod, and the swimming was just perfect? There were no break-walls, no rocks placed along the shore and you could fish while sitting on your blanket brought from your bed, placed carefully at the water's edge. That was the Grand River for the first half mile from it mouth before the white man decided he could do better than Mother Nature.

The river was so shallow at its mouth that in the summer you could walk from one shore to the other. The piers were not yet there and the sandbar drifted from here to there with each and every storm. The east side of the river was one big sand hill reaching from the lake to about where the Feeder Canal is today. From there to Dunnville back from the shoreline for about a half mile was marsh with animals and birds we could not imagine in our area today. Bears, yes bears were common place, as were wolves, coyotes, so many water fowl that they turned the sky dark when they flew over. I am not just copying the descriptions of our country as written by others; Port Maitland really did have all these features.



No comments have come re: Lakescape Action Plan

I wish I could tell you that we have had lots of response to the Information letter we distributed on the west side of Port Maitland earlier this spring. Port Maitland belongs to you and you should have some say in what happens there. The County of Haldimand is spending approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars along the Grand River at Port this summer. It is likely too late to affect where or how that money will be spent, but more is coming in 2014. We can be a spokesperson for you, but you need to write to us and tell us what you want – or don't want!

It happened when?

In the original Grand Dispatch I ran a column where I provided information found in old newspapers and other articles. It was well received and will be tried once again. Enjoy!

1827- Work is started on the Grand River dam at Dunnville.

1840 – Christ Church in Port Maitland had its first services in a log house. In 1842/3 a small church was built on the same spot as the current Christ Church sits. This current church was built in 1927 after the original church was destroyed by fire the year before.

1841 – First Burial at Christ Church was that of a 3 year-old who died of whooping cough; the son of Wm. Smith

1880 - Absalom Hoover began fishing in the area. "I have not connected Absalom Hoover to any of the local Hoover family. I am certain that one of you will be able to assist me in this. Please do!"

1881 - The tug HUMMING BIRD has a contract of towing the stone scow for the new pier at Port Maitland this summer. Note "This pier is believed to be the replacement for the original pier".

January 1, 1998 – The First GRAND DISPATCH is published to provide historic information for Beckley Beach and the surrounding area and was published quarterly for five years. It was reintroduced in January 2013 with a larger scope and now connected with the Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association.

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**The Grand Dispatch to be delivered
Free in 2013!**

The Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association want you to know about our association as well as *The Grand Dispatch*. To this end, we are

delivering the next three issues to as many of you along the lake shore as we can reach from Sandy Shores Trailer Park on Niece Road westerly to the western end of Sandy Bay Road. It is our hope to encourage you to be more interested in your history and to join us by taking out a membership in PMHA.

In our July issue Marilynn Havelka, Chief Administrative Officer of Ruthven Park National Historic Site will have an article on the Ruthven Historical Park in Cayuga. Its original owner and Storminess' major businessman and citizen (Senator Lachlan McCallum) of the 1800s were political enemies and rival for business.

The subjects for our issues in October and December have not yet been decided. Here is where you can have some say. What would you like me to write about?



**Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical
Association (PMHA) needs you!**

If we are to have a good celebration in 2020 we need you. We need your ideas. We need your volunteerism. As you can see, I have gathered some interesting photos but more are needed. Will you consider permitting me to add some of your Port Maitland photos to my archives? Please consider joining PMHA. Membership is by donation until September 30, 2013.

Please support our Sponsors!

Beginning with this issue we have procured six sponsors who have made it possible for us to distribute *The Grand Dispatch* free to you. It is out of generosity and support of PMHA that they are

offering this sponsorship. Please support them whenever you are in need of their product or services. In the event that you are unlikely to need their assistance, please send them a note or email telling them of your appreciation for their support. We hope these sponsors will remain with us into 2014 and beyond, when we will no longer be distributing this history letter free. We have a number of projects on the go and hope to use their sponsorship in supporting these goals.

We also still have room for two more sponsors. If you or anyone you know would like to sponsor THE GRAND DISPATCH, please have them contact us at the address given at the end of this history letter. In the event that we have too many sponsors for a particular history letter, we can rotate them so as some sponsors will not feel obliged to sponsor every Grand Dispatch,

Two monumental projects are on the Books for PMHA!

As result of our hopeful find of a cemetery at Beckley Beach in 2012, it has been decided to create a cairn at what was once Brown's Point. For some of you younger folks Pinky's! For yet some of you still younger folks; this is the place at the mouth of the Feeder Canal where the boat ramp is today. At one time this now rather fallen-down little spit of land protruding into the river at the mouth of the Feeder had a beautiful stone wall around it which has now fallen into the river. Proudly sitting on this tiny lot was a sparkling white cottage and garage. Later it became the property of Pinky and George Martin who established a hotdog and ice cream stand there. Bill and Betty Siddall lived there during the summer and fall of 1963 as they waited for their baby Jimmy, and their new home to be built on Rymer Rd.

Now back to the cairn! Sylvia Weaver will take on this project on behalf of PMHA. She will be in touch with the Beckley Beach Cottager's Corporation, the County of Haldimand, PMHA, and of course those in the area who have an interest in this project. It is hoped that the County of Haldimand will accept PMHA's proposal to rebuild

the stone wall at Brown's Point as part of their ongoing Lakescape Action Plan. If an agreement can be reached with the County on this matter it is hoped the cairn will be placed there. What will be commemorated on this cairn is still a bit fluid but the Grand River Naval Depot and the recent archeological assessment at Beckley Beach will be part of this for sure. It is expected that both the Port Maitland lock including the Feeder Canal and Commercial fishing at Port Maitland will be included.

PMHA is also involved in the restoration of the grave stone at Christ Church in Port Maitland remembering the soldier of the Reserve Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers (23rd Foot) who drowned in 1850 when their ship was struck by the *Despatch* (not me!) off the mouth of the Grand River. Much more later!

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