

# The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area.

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## Rum Running from Port Maitland

### **Proud to be a Rum Runner's Family!**

The Port Maitland area had its share of daring young men who pursued numerous adventurous and even illegal occupations. Some families still prefer to keep them anonymous, while others wear their ancestors' indiscretions as a badge of gallantry or at the very least a jewel in their family genealogy. I am sure in their day, they would be equivalent to today's cigarette and booze smugglers. Who knows, maybe that friend of mine who told me of his exploits during the cigarette running days of the early 1990s will someday brag to his family and maybe my grandson/daughter will write about him.

Prohibition which began in Canada in 1915 came into effect in the USA with the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The United States used the Volstead Act, enacted January 17, 1920, to enforce the ban of liquor. Ontario ended its experiment in 1926, while the American continued until 1933, when the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was passed ending a turbulent period for both countries. It was the period between 1926 and 1933 that provided considerable excitement along our river front and on the north side of the Feeder Canal.

One early Port Maitland resident, well known for his trips across the lake with his boat-load of contraband liquor, was Milan Culp (lot 47A) (

who by the way is likely a distant relative of mine). Maybe once I figure out the connection, I too can tell of cousin Milan's escapades with the fascination his grandchildren, Bev Zon and her brother Dick Culp do today. Milan (Mathias) Culp was born at Sweets Corners on January 28, 1867 in a house which remains even today. Sometime in the late 1800's he and his wife Carrie Dils moved to Buffalo where Milan worked for the railroad, likely the New York Central. In jest, Bev has suggested that "this going to work every day and making an honest living was not to his liking. He would rather be up here at Beckley Beach, on the water fishing and doing that kind of stuff, rather than making an honest living over there."

It is understood that in the early part of the twentieth century Milan arrived at Port Maitland and simply decided to build a house there. As far as it is known, he never filed a claim for the property or owned the land, or claimed to own it. He simply lived on it! Most Beckley Beach residents will recall how we often referred to Milan's occupancy as that of a squatter's rights. (A term, which may not be totally correct).

It is not known for sure what brought him here, but his son Bill, often related to his children, Dick and Bev, how their grandfather was involved in rum running—a very lucrative living while it lasted. Milan is remembered by many of the more senior residences of Beckley Beach for his pound nets, commonly known as “pond nets,” and could often be seen tending to them or at the rivers edge cleaning his days' catch. His fish were sold to the Victoria Hotel and Milo Gollap's restaurant in Dunnville. The cottagers did not have to travel far to buy their fresh filleted fish to take home for dinner. Milan also cut ice from the river and stored it in his icehouse which was part of the old house at the foot of the pier. Covered in sawdust and burlap it would keep all summer. This ice could be purchased for twenty-five cents a block to provide cooling for the cottagers iceboxes.



With the onset of prohibition in the 1920's, came an immense demand for illegal booze in the United States and of course right here in Canada.



**Old Man Ohio is in the ring! Old Man Ohio's fighting blood is up.**

Work your heels, Old Man Ohio will lead out a couple of knock-out punches tonight—while Ohio's heels are hammering the States "over there."

**J. C. H. HARRIS** (Ohio's) has got so many good men down and **FRITZ WHEATLEY** (Ohio's) the legs have champagne from **WINDMILL** have a boxing coming to them. And they're going to get it.

These **SCOTT HARRIS** in the ring are at the **STATE BREED** as the State over there. They represent the liquor traffic in Ohio.

They don't fight fair. They are **BOB HILLIES** when they're going their way. They have a strategy. Neither have they any conscience. They begin to **WINE** as soon as they're hit. They don't want the game. They beg for the fight to be stopped as soon as the legs get against them—**HILL LIES THE BUNS OVER THERE**.

The liquor traffic—using Ohio's money, rolled up—writing and begging down. The Scott Harris have been whipped in a number of engagements.

They thought to be allowed to hit those to hit them.

They thought for **PROFIT**—no matter what the **DRUGS** were the new to hit.

They thought to have received around some customers.

They thought **AGENTS** to receive the amount of **PROFIT** **STUFFS** arranged to make transactions.

They thought against everything that interfered with their selfish and **DESTRUCTIVE INTERESTS**, regardless of the national credit.

These **WINDMILL** about have been **BELLOW THE BELT**.

Now they're winning. They need the prohibition of the fight. They are trying to wear the opposing game on the people they need to build.

Symptoms for the liquor traffic is like towards for the State. It would be regarded by a **STAR** to the **WINE**.

Now it the time to put the liquor traffic out the **WINDMILL'S** **WINDMILL**—the same principle the younger fellows are fighting for across the sea.

Do your best—make it a **DISCLOSE** knock-out for whiskey and beer in Ohio.

**Vote "Yes" for Prohibition November 5th**  
The Ohio Dry Federation  
P. O. BOX 10000

Strangely enough, it was legal to produce this defiled liquid in the United States or Canada and then sell it to the Cubans. It was this oversight that provided a lucrative opportunity to anyone with a seaworthy (“or sometimes not so seaworthy”) boat, the courage to challenge the lake and the authorities, and of course the desire to make great bundles of money.

**Fifteen Boxcars of Booze a Month**

The TH&B would ship boxcars loaded with various alcohol products such as rye, whiskey, rum, and gin to Port Maitland. Some well known liquor brand names like Johnny Walker, William Penn, Gooderham and Worts, Carstairs, Argyle and many others found their way to our little port. The brands of beer and ale were names like Dawes, Black Label, Frontenac, Cromiller and White Beer, Kuntz, Symonds, Regal and Grant, the latter two being brewed at Hamilton. To make this all seem legal the railway needed paperwork as did Canadian Customs. All that was needed were the

export/entre bills, or to be specific the B-13, identifying the shipments as cargo departing for Cuba, Mexico City or elsewhere in the West Indies, via the Welland Canal. The railway received freight for shipping and demurrage for the cars while they sat on the siding. During the height of the rum running days as many as fifteen boxcars a month would be shipped to Port Maitland. Each boxcar held up to as many as five hundred cases of liquor with twelve bottles in Numerous Americans and a handful of Canadian lawbreakers made regular nightly clandestine runs to these ports, crossing in crafts anything from a thirty-foot long open boat to forty-foot twin engines, covered tugs. Even larger vessels such as the Unkus, which had been designed as submarine chaser for the American Atlantic Coast with its two five-hundred horsepower Liberty engines were brought to Lake Erie and put to work in the illegal booze trade. The Unkus had bullet proof plating around its engine room and cabin. The Hawk, owned by Mike Semple and Earl Shugart, of Erie PA, was a particularly fast boat capable of reaching speeds of forty miles an hour and could make two trips in a night. Earl Shugart, I understand, became a bar owner in Erie. Other crafts with names such as You and I, Over The Top, The Erie, Rubber Boot, Cuba, Columbia, Morning Star, and many unknown speedboats, to mention only a few, plied the dangerous US Coast Guard infested waters of Lake Erie.



each case. The funny thing is there were never any large ocean-going ships arriving at Port Maitland to transport this cargo beyond here to its foreign destination. Booze did however find its way onto boats and out of Port Maitland. These boats-surprise, surprise-headed for ports such as Dunkirk, or Barcelona NY, Erie PA, Ashtabula OH, or smaller ports and inlets on the south shore of Lake Erie!

Talk about speedboats, the celebrated race boat builder and racer Gar Wood, of Algonac MI, a repeat winner of the Harmsworth Trophy, saw many of his company's boats used as rum boats. Gar himself was not in favour of the rum runners. In fact not only were his boats used for transporting booze, others were used by law enforcement to catch those laden down with it. Gar unwittingly, and maybe even unwillingly, benefited from both sides.

The cabin cruiser Cuba was once used in a short-circuiting caper, when the cargo was cleared by Customs then diverted to local drinking establishments. In this instance, the captain loaded the Cuba with about a hundred cases of ale, then went to the customs office and cleared her for departure. Seemingly out of the sight of all officials, the cargo was then unloaded onto a truck. The boat never left port, but ostensibly returned the next day as if she had gone to Cuba, Mexico City or some other exotic location.

### **Smugglers would dump their cargo overboard**



Beer and ale arrive at Port Maitland in bags of

twenty-four bottles to a bag and would sometimes be loaded on top of the open boats in plain view. Larger boats would ship the cargo in their cargo holds. In the early days of the trade, liquor came in pine boxes and was shipped as it arrived. This soon proved to be frustrating and a bit dangerous when arriving in American waters. Rather than be Young fellows like Carroll Kenney (lot 5) made a few dollars each evening working for rum runners such as Mike Semple and Earl Shugart. Carroll could stuff up to two hundred and fifty bags of liquor a night. The bags were sewn up making sure to leave ears at each end for lifting. By using bags, if the smugglers were being pursued, all they had to do was to toss them overboard and the evidence would sink out of sight and disappear forever. The wood cases were broken up and used for firewood, keeping more than one home warm during the cold Port Maitland winters.



When prohibition first started the American law enforcement agencies were not too concerned about the import of liquor and beer from the Canadian shore. It is said that in the beginning a

caught with the liquor, the smugglers would dump their cargo overboard if being pursued by American authorities, but the wood cases would float and the evidence could be collected from the lake. To resolve this, burlap bags were put to good use.

few bucks passed hands from smuggler to police officers at ports like Erie PA or Dunkirk NY and occasionally the cops even helped unload the boats. Things did get much rougher and much more serious as time went on. The Americans built faster boats with armaments and carried machine guns that they were not afraid to use.

There was not only danger out on the open waters of the lake. Carroll Kenney remembers the night when he was nearly shot. Carroll lived in the TH&B railway station during this period. One night after being on the west side of the river, he rowed his boat under the bridge which crossed the canal at the station. He suddenly was confronted by a man carrying a gun. Luckily, he recognized John Siddall and John recognized him. "Oh, he's all right!" John said. "I had the gun right on me, and I went on home!"

Boats were not the only way that booze from Port Maitland made its way into the United States. I am told that cars were used in convoys crossing the Peace Bridge into Buffalo. It seems that a customs agent could be bought for a few dollars and maybe some of that booze. When everything and everyone was in place, these convoys of a half, dozen cars would cross into Buffalo unmolested with the customs people looking elsewhere.

### **Milan Culp and his Speakeasy**

For many years, before, during and after prohibition, Milan Culp ran a "blind pig," (a name given to a bootlegging establishment-the older locals refer to it as a speakeasy) from his

home at the foot of the east pier. Obviously, he never had a licence to sell liquor or beer, but his customers would heartily imbibe in India Pale Ale, Canadian Bud Beer, and good Canadian Whisky. It is hard to imagine that my grandfather Wm. J. Warnick (lot 43) would tolerate the likes of Milan Culp. You see, Grandpa was a confirmed tea-totter and to add to this, as superintendent of the TH&B Grandpa must have found Milan's refusal to recognize the Carroll Kenney, was once asked by an OP P officer looking into the actions of Milan Culp, "What about this fellow, Culp?" Carroll replied, "Well, I don't know. He's not hurting anybody. Its sort of an oasis in the middle of a desert." The officer replied "I will have to go out and take a look anyway." When he came back, he said with a laugh "Yea, he's doing all right. He had twenty-one empty cases out on the veranda going to the warehouse."



This historyletter is composed using only the memories of longtime residents such as Bev Zon, and Dick Culp, as well as Earl Siddall and Carroll Kenney. I did no research whatsoever using primary documents and only a few original newspaper articles while putting together this story. I have every confidence in my sources.

railway or anyone else as owner of his property a bit of an affront. And just to add a bit of tittle-tattle to it all, I have often privately wondered, and will now do so in writing, how my grandfather who became the superintendent of the TH&B in 1926, the year Ontario repealed the Temperance Act, reconciled the unmistakable use of the railway for the purpose of smuggling that filthy fluid!

However, when reading history, we must keep in mind that people's recollections may alter over time. I know mine does.

One thing I did do was attempt to learn a bit about Gar Wood. He was a world class boat-builder and racer. If you enjoy boat racing, you must read about him. I would be happy to direct you to some great sources. A thank you goes out to Wood Alef of Algonac MI for his information about Gar Wood.

### **Did You Know?**

Those who have a cottage at Beckley Beach and live in Hamilton are finally able to call toll-free between the cottage and home. Did you know the late Jimmy McGowan (lot 57) petitioned Ma Bell for this many years ago? Jimmy tried tirelessly to get Bell to make this a local call. Jimmy, you never got to make that free call, but thank you for all your work. Everytime we make that free call home, maybe we could remember it as "A Jimmy."

### **Who is that Baby?**

With the June 1999 issue I ceased the "Who is that Baby?" item. In that issue, I featured the very young Boyle family including; Anne, Joan, Catharine and little Eddie. Brenda had not yet arrived.

## From Old Newspapers and Books Etc., Etc.

**Grand Heritage; 151 years ago (1848)** *John Burgess, a farmer from Burgess Point (Rock Point) was the first person hired to man the lighthouse on Mohawk Island at £65 per season.*

**The Reform Press; 117 years ago (1882)** *Something remarkable, H. W. Dodge, of Stromness has a ewe that recently gave birth to two lambs, one of which the unnatural parent abandoned, and the little outcast died in consequence. Two weeks afterwards the enterprising batch of wool became a mother to another pair of twins, much to the surprise of its owner, who can vouch for the truth of the above statement.*

**The Reform Press 115 years ago (1884)** *Port Maitland, We learn from Capt. Smithers keeper of the lighthouse on Gull Island that there is a solid mass of ice from Morgan's Point six miles west of Port Colborne, to Buffalo, and an open space of water on the Canadian shore about ten miles wide as far as can be seen from the lighthouse, indicating a late opening of navigation this season.*

**The Dunnville Chronicle; 94 years ago (1905)** *Port Maitland still comes to the front in new inventions, it now possesses a breed of poultry that produces hard-boiled eggs.*

## Dispatch will Publish only three times a year

Due to changes made by the Beckley Beach Cottagers Corporations, "The Grand Dispatch" will only be published three times per year. Members should see their Corporation Bulletin this month.

**The Reform Press; 117 years ago (1882)** *Mrs. Geo. R. McArron of Port Maitland, has a goose that laid an egg measuring 9¼ inches in circumference, 5½ inches long, and weighing 8 ounces, the result of three days work of the goose.*

## Special Thanks

Father Jim Valk, C.R. pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Hamilton has let me use his computer since our first Dispatch. He also allowed me the use of his photocopier which prints the size paper required for the Dispatch. Starting this issue, the Dispatch will be put together at home and photo-copied at St. Joe's. Thanks Fr. Jim.

## Financial Support

Thanks again to Paul Dermody, of P. X. Dermody Funeral Homes for your continued financial support of this historyletter.

## In Memoriam

**Tessier, Sue Ellen:** died April 18, 1999, Sue Ellen is married to Mark Tessier and is the daughter of Sue Zon. Bev and Mark had (Lot 49) from the early 1980's until January 1992.

**Levely, Stanley (Bud):** died May 6, 1999, Bud and Betty owned their cottage (Lot 49) from the early 1970's until about 1980.

**Cahill, Dale Michael:** died July 3, 1999, husband of Helen Warnick; formerly Grightmire (Lot 42A). Helen was married to Ambrose Warnick who passed away in 1963.

**Blunt, Jim:** died August 1, 1999, Jim and Mary has had their cottage at (Lot 72) since the 1957's however, Mary has been associated with Beckley

Beach for much longer than that. Their son Don and his wife Elizabeth own (lot 73).

**Zon, John:** died August 7, 1999, husband of Bev Zon (formerly Culp) (Lot 48A). Bev's family has had this lot since the early 1920's or earlier as mentioned in this historyletter.

**Geisenhoff, Claire:** died August 11, 1999, Claire is the wife of the late Neal Geisenhoff and the mother of Patricia Bleich (Lot 64). The Geisenhoff family has a long history at Beckley Beach.

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