

# The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area.

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## Siddall Family and their fish tugs

### Old-timers recall with delight, Early Fish Tugs

From time to time I run into someone who will cause the conversation to turn to Port Maitland. If they happen to be ten or more years older than myself, one of the first things they reminisce about is some well known Port Maitland fish tugs. They say, "Do you remember this boat or that boat," But the name which always comes up is the Earleejune.

From an article in the Dunnville Chronicle in 1900, I find a mention of two Siddall fish-boats. One is a tug named Lena, owned by "Siddall, Jones & Co." The other is a sailing boat named the Solid Comfort. It was owned by "Captain Siddall." I do not know who these Siddalls are. Clearly they are members of the Siddall family we all know from Port Maitland. I don't know their given names or where they fit into their family tree. We know from the Dunnville Gazette that James Siddall, an uncle of John Percy Siddall of Port Maitland had a new fishing yacht built by Chase Bros. of Port Colborne in September 1886. James is the earliest known Siddall to go into commercial fishing. Someday, when I least expect it I will find an article explaining who Siddall, Jones & Co and Captain Siddall are, but for now we will have to wait until that happens.

Operating a motor launch at the beginning of the twentieth century was a lucrative and fascinating business. John Percy Siddall owned a beautiful river launch named the Silver Spray in which he carried passengers up and down the river for the purpose of tourism as well as transportation. In 1907, his cousin, George Little, also had a launch and catered to the same crowd. At this time Percy lived with his parents John W

and Henrietta (lot 11) on the Beckley Beach side of the River. George was married by then, but he had grown up at Port Maitland, the son of George and Sophia Little. (lot 41)

In 1907, many of the residents including John and Henrietta Siddall, owned boarding houses. There were a variety of hotels to choose from on both sides of the river. My calculations show that there were more than one hundred and twenty rooms to let to tourists who came primarily from the Buffalo NY and Erie PA area. Port Maitland was the summer home for some very well-known American artists and serious sports fishermen as well as a regular stopping spot for the wealthy American yachtsmen of the Buffalo Yacht Club.



Percy Siddall with cruise boat Silver Spray

Photo courtesy; Earl M. Siddall

### The Percy Siddall Fisheries, formed by fifteen year old

These early days of sailing the Grand River would steer

These early days of sailing the Grand River would steer the cousins to a fishing alliance which would lead them to ownership of a number of fish-tugs they owned jointly, as well as individually. At age fifteen, Percy established the Percy Siddall Fisheries with only a few gill-nets and a row boat. Some of the boats that they owned over the years were boats with names like; Saida, Kaiser, Caldera, Our Colleen, J. P. Siddall and of course Earleejune.

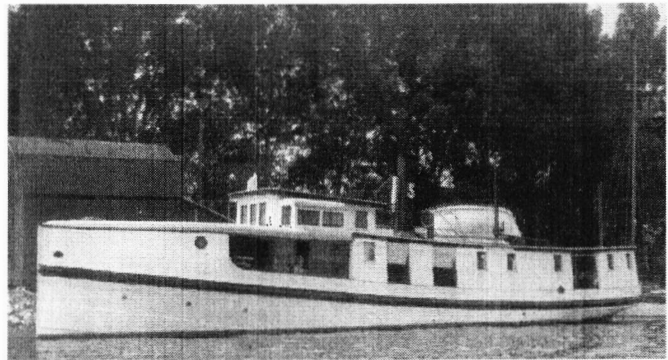
Fishing was not always a safe job, as Percy found out in 1915, when he was badly burnt in a fire on the tug Kaiser. Mind you he didn't seem to learn his lesson as later, while owning the Caldera, he found a way around some safety regulations. It seemed that the Caldera, an American-built boat had some problems meeting Canadian Boiler inspectors requirements. In order to get a permit to operate her in Canada Percy was forced to accept a lower boiler pressure than he wanted. He found by placing a wood plank over the safety release valve on the boiler he could increase the pressure from the sixty-pounds permitted to as much as one hundred-pounds and more. Somehow he survived and no one was injured.

In 1931, the Port Maitland Fish Co. which was located on the north side of the Feeder Canal was owned by a consortium of fishing partnerships. They were Percy Siddall & George Little, John McKee & Steve McKeown, Charles Crumb & John Crawford. One of the tugs that fished for this consortium was the Caldera, now owned solely by Percy Siddall. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, some work had been done on the Caldera during the afternoon and a fire resulted from some unknown cause due to that work. The fire spread to the company's fish houses, destroying them. Either cut loose, or burnt free from the dock the Caldera floated into the river where it burned to the water line and sank a few feet from shore between the former ferry dock and the mouth of the feeder.

### **The Earleejune is re-created!**

By this time Percy also owned the Earleejune. She had an interesting, if not confusing history. She had originally been built with a composite hull using iron ribbing with wood planking bolted to the ribs. She was once a passenger-freight boat on the lakes in the

Muskoka's. There is some confusion about when the Earleejune was built. We know from records of gill-net licenses issued, that Percy Siddall had a license for both her and the Caldera in 1925. Yet Carroll Kenney, who worked for the Canada Coal Company when it came to Port Maitland in 1927, says it was the Canada Coal crane that removed her from a railway car at Port Maitland. We know from the Bluebook, a record of ownership and registration of commercial craft that the



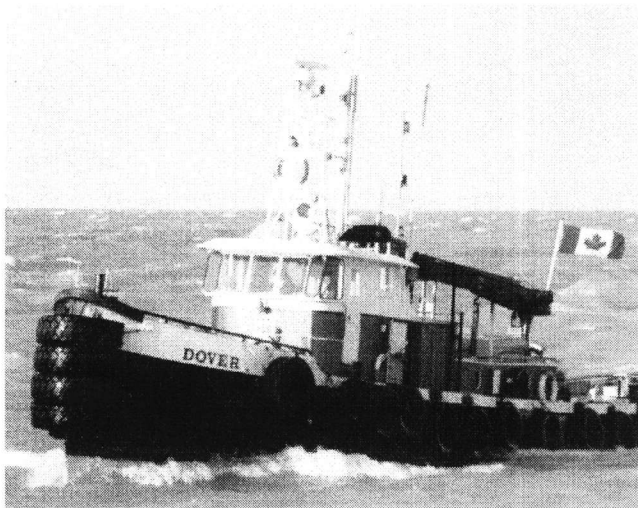
Earleejune at Port Maitland

Photo Courtesy; Patricia Kelly

eight-five foot long Earleejune was registered as new in 1931.

As mentioned Percy purchased the Earleejune and shipped the boiler, engine, propellor, and iron ribs to Port Maitland by train. The parts were removed from the freight car and placed across the tracks from the Port Maitland fish-house. After much hemming and hawing he decided what should be done and signed a contract with Canadian Mead-Morrison Co. in Welland to rebuild the tug. He loaded the ribs on some trucks and shipped them to Welland. Once the hull was complete, it was towed to Port Maitland to have the original boiler and engine put in it. With the engine and boiler installed, she was towed back to Welland to be fitted, decked, and have her bulwarks and pilothouse built. The bulwarks and pilothouse made of one-quarter inch steel were much heavier than most tugs which would be built using no more than one-eighth inch steel. This would in the end cause some problems as it made her top heavy and susceptible to rolling and pitching. To reduce some of this, it was necessary to lower the boiler and set it directly on the boat's frame. There had been a drip pan installed under the boiler creating a high centre of gravity due to the height of the boiler. With

What the Earleejune lacked in stability, she compensated for in appearance. She was a streamlined and impressive-looking figure, one that caught the eye of all who saw her. The name Earleejune is a composition of Percy's three children's names. They were Earl, Leo and June, thus the Earl-Lee-June or Earleejune. The Earleejune was sold to the T. A. Ivy Greenhouses of Port Dover who removed the bulwarks and converted her into a tow tug. She was to be used to tow a coal barge named the TA Ivy, from Erie PA for their greenhouses in Port Dover and would be renamed the Ivy Rose. She continued as a tug for Ivy's Greenhouses for a number of years before she was purchased by Harry Gamble Ship Yard of Port Dover. At this time she was renamed Dover and used among other things, as an icebreaker, breaking ice from Kingston to Wolfe Island in the St. Lawrence River. She was then sold to a cousin of Percy's by the name of Eddie Siddall, of Goderich. Then in 1997, Captain Ian MacAdam of MacDonald Marine in Goderich purchased her from Eddie Siddall. She joined the fleet of two other tugs used in Goderich for various uses, one of which is to guide the large lakers into their berth in the small harbour. The Dover is still a vibrant vessel, recently competing in "The International Freedom Festival's 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Tugboat Race" in the Detroit river at Windsor Ontario. She remains a bouncy boat and of some concern to Captain MacAdam. Captain MacAdam, tells me that he is contemplating adding a keel to her in hopes of stabilizing her a bit more.



Dover, formerly Earleejune as she is today.

Photo Courtesy; Captain Ian MacAdam

## The Our Colleen

Another boat would join the Percy Siddall fleet. It was the Our Colleen. Wally Clark would operate the Our Colleen for a number of years and would have at least one hair-raising experience on her. In 1955, while washing nets in the river, they ventured too close to some excited hunters and were shot at. A crew member, Sid Ross was struck in the arm and side. Wally was also shot but sustained no injury as the pellets did not penetrate his heavy parka. The Our Colleen was also purchased by Eddie Siddall of Goderich who fished with her for some time. Eddie sold her and she has since been sold again. I have been told that the Our Colleen is renamed, rebuilt, and is presently a tour boat on Georgian Bay. If anyone knows anything more about her, I would appreciate hearing from you.



The Our Colleen at Port Maitland

Photo Courtesy; Patricia Kelly

## Earleejune Fisheries is formed on West-side of River

In March 1940, the Percy Siddall Fisheries, now located on the west side of the river, would become the Earleejune Fisheries. By 1946 it was time to modernize the fleet, so Percy decided to have Northern Marine of Bronte build him a new boat. Only a year before, another of his cousins, Maitland McKeown, had a boat built by the same builder. Percy liked the new and sleek James B, and decided to contract Northern Marine to build his newest boat. She would be named the J. P. Siddall, after himself.

My memories of the Earleejune fisheries take me back only to the J. P. Siddall and the Our Colleen. I barely recall the Our Colleen. Though I never sailed on her, it is the J. P. Siddall I remember most fondly. She was

powered by a General Motors diesel engine (which tended to be noisy machines) and Earl did not like a noisy boat. He had a special muffler built for her (which by the way is still in her today) rendering her almost silent. I recently wrote in my column in the Dunnville Chronicle that I could tell by the sound of its engine which boat was entering the harbour long before it arrived at the river's mouth. Not so, with the J. P. Siddall. It was not uncommon to have her enter the harbour, pull up to the dock and I would not have heard a sound. It was always spotless and seemingly painted the whitest white of all the tugs in Port.



J. P. Siddall as she turns into her Dock on Westside of Grand River.

Photo Courtesy; Patricia Kelly

In March 1953, the J. P. Siddall, was seized by the U. S. government for allegedly poaching in US waters near Buffalo. After some reconsideration it was determined that she may have been in Canadian waters and was released the same evening. However the US government issued a fine of \$1,000 and insisted on receiving payment before they would return the nets. When the Canadian fishermen arranged a meeting with New York State officials to resolve some problems related to the seizure of their nets, Roy Muma, the Conservation Officer in Ontario, forbade the fishermen from attending this meeting without him and he was not available to attend. This led to all levels of both governments getting into the free-for-all, but eventually matters were resolved.

Less than a month later, the J. P. Siddall was once again in trouble. The J. P. Siddall, the Earleejune and the Playfair all had their gill-nets seized, this time by the OPP, and William Kellar the Conservation Officer from St. Williams. It seems that a salesman for John S.

Brooks Co. complained that these boats were using undersize nets. Earl Siddall often suggested to me "there may have been some bad blood with certain people." Earl was the only supplier of nylon nets on the north shore of Lake Erie and these nets were being supplied directly from Du Pont and Brownell in the USA. The seized nets were subsequently lost by the Ministry and a nasty lawsuit resulted. Eventually payment for the nets was awarded to the Earleejune Fisheries. That is yet another story!

### **A fishing era comes to an end**

With only the J. P. Siddall left, Earl would disband the Earleejune Fisheries in March 1980. After being sold and resold again she is now owned by Steve Vary of Kingsville and can often be seen in either Kingsville or Port Stanley.

### **June Grand Dispatch is Dedicated to Earl Siddall**



Earl Milford Siddall

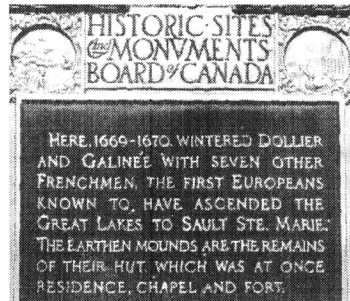
The last fishing member of this branch of the Siddall family is gone. He died at McMaster University Medical Centre in Hamilton on the evening of May 17, 2000. Earl was a good friend and he supplied much of the information you read in The Dispatch. He was always there to answer any question I had and to set me straight when he knew I was heading in the wrong direction. It is for these qualities and many unsaid that I dedicate this issue of The Grand Dispatch to my friend Earl Milford Siddall.

### **A Mae Culpa!**

I have always found history to be a challenge full of unexpected twist and turns. No matter how many facts you gather in front of you there will always be another one to prove those ones inaccurate. This was certainly the case in my last issue of the Dispatch when I told you about the Sculpician priests. My sources were

impeccable, yet mistaken. I gave you information obtained from "The Canadian Register" (a Catholic newspaper) of December 1, 1956. It reads as follows; "The Sulpician missionaries, Rev. Francois Dollier de Casson and René Brehaut de Galinée encamped along the shores of Lake Erie (Port Maitland) for five months and eleven days during the winter of 1669-70. About a mile and a half inland on the margin of a small stream a large hut had been erected by the small band of French explorers who had accompanied these priests. One end of this building was reserved for a chapel where Father Dollier celebrated Mass three times weekly. On Sundays and festivals, High Mass was chanted and a sermon delivered. This group claimed this land for the French King, Louis XIV, planting a cross and affixing the King's arms to this religious emblem. From here this band journeyed westward to Pelee Island."

I have since discovered that though the story is correct, the location is not. My good friend John Burtniak, Archivist at Brock University in St. Catharines sent me an article called "The Lake Erie Cross" This is an article put out by the Department of the Interior in 1922, in which it describes the above paragraph, but places the location at the forks of the River Lynn and Black Creek in Port Dover.



Plaque on shore of Lynn River at Port Dover

Wm A. Warnick Collection

Here is a paragraph from this article. "The priests and the remaining seven men descended the Grand River, six in the canoes or dragging them through the shoal water, the others following the trail along the bank. Lake Erie seemed to them like a great sea. The wind billows rose so high as Lake Erie, because, as Galinée naively suggest, of its great depth and its great extents." The next paragraph begins "They wintered just above the forks where Black Creek joins the River Lynn otherwise know as Patterson's Creek, at Port Dover. . ." Yes they likely were at Port Maitland, but did not winter here!

**Let me try to fog-up yet another matter!** You will

recall I pointed out some confusion regarding dates when the Jesuit priests visited Port Maitland. My friend Steve Catlin, the Archivist for the Martyr Shrine at Midland, wrote me in response to my inquiry about this confusion saying: "Dear Bill, You are right to say the Missionaries did travel to your neck of the woods but on separate occasions. Daillon travelled with the two French Laymen in 1626 (according to a letter he wrote to a friend in 1627), and Brebeuf went there in 1640 with Fr. Joseph Marie Chaumonot (see Jesuit Relations vol. XXI pgs.187-231 Thwaites). Daillon was a Recollet (Franciscan) while Brebeuf and Chaumonot were Jesuits." Ain't history fun!

### Next Issue of the Dispatch will be written by a guest Historian.

Jack Docker, a retired Anglican priest who descends from a vintage and well-established Port Maitland family, will write the feature article in the next issue of the Dispatch. Jack is a historian well-versed in the former naval depot here at Beckley Beach. This past spring he and his wife Georgie visited England to research old naval files pertaining to this naval depot. I think you will be pleasantly surprised to learn many more details about our local naval history.

### Talking about the next Dispatch

As you know, I got behind this winter and did not get out a January Dispatch. For this reason the next Dispatch will arrive in late August, with the final one for the year arriving in late October.

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

**Lake Erie Fisheries Assessment Unit Report; 173 years ago (1827)** "Storm washes away wharf Port Maitland," A storm washes away wharf and four building at Grand River Naval Depot.

**The Dunnville Gazette; 116 years ago (1884)** Mr. David Livingstone of the Stromness Hotel, has fitted up his hotel in first class style making it much larger and by the addition of paper, paint, a new balcony and a lot of

valuable furniture, wonderfully added to its accommodations and appearance.

**The Reform Press; 110 years ago (1890)** Port Maitland, Mr. Ballantyne shipped from here on Friday last, about \$2000 worth of cheese-products of the Stromness and Port Maitland factories.

**The Dunnville Chronicle; 100 years ago (1900)** Stromness, The Bay View Fish Co. are running excursions daily to Mohawk Island and receiving a very liberal patronage.

**Looking for someone!**

Does anyone know where Tom Priester is? His grandparents both had cottages at Beckley Beach. The Linneborn's at lot 32A and the Priester's at 34A. Tom would be in his early 50's.

**In Memoriam**

**Earl M. Siddall:** Died May 17, 2000, Earl's Great grandparents came to Port Maitland in the 1880's

**Do you know anyone who wants a Dispatch?**

If you know anyone who wants to get the Dispatch, have

them send me a book of stamps. I will mail them one Dispatch for every two stamps.

**Full Text Available**

In putting together this issue, I discovered many more facts about the Siddall fish tugs than space permits. If you are interested in a more complete text, send me a self-addressed stamped envelope with an extra stamp (to cover photo-coping etc.). I will mail you the complete text.

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