

# 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

## More walking down Memory Lane! Who Remembers Camp Kvutza?

### Some Days are Good Days!

Some days go well! It was one of those very cold February days when the snow was falling nearly as fast as the temperature. Warton Willie had seen his shadow the day before which gave us hope of an early spring. However this is now; and not much good comes out of these kinds of days unless you like skiing or skating, and I don't fancy either! I had been working on funding for the cairn at Port Maitland all fall and had given up ever acquiring a lease for the Port Maitland Lock. First, I received an email from the Mosaic Company at their head offices in Regina at 10:54 a.m. The timing did not seem very important at that moment. This was an emailed letter of confirmation for a \$5,000 donation to the Cairn project; provided we follow some straightforward and standard procedures. In other words the money was in the bank! With this and other promised money still to be banked we had reached our minimum goal and the project was now a go!



By late summer, 2015, we should have our cairn at *Port Maitland Park East*, locally known as Brown's Point

### What's in the Dispatch?

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At the time of this writing, we still have a number of outstanding requests for paver stones which if purchased will permit PMHA to improve the grading and landscaping. We still have a number of families who have expressed a desire to purchase a paver stone and we wish to be able to fulfil their requests.

### Only Eleven Minutes later!

The Lock - what was!



Then at 11:05 a.m.; eleven minutes after hearing from Mosaic; I received a phone call from Mr. Syl Arduini, Manager, Real Estate Ontario for the CPR. He called to update me on information sent to me via snail mail (but not yet delivered). It was from Brenda L. MacCalder the Managing Director, Real Estate & Facilities Management for CPR. A lot of titles and names but the bottom line was to inform Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association that the CPR has a desire to issue a maintenance lease for the property at the Port Maitland Lock. "It is desired by CPR, that this transaction be completed by June 30, 2015".

This becomes the first tangible offer and confirmed date given to us by CPR. It is indeed a welcomed offer and a date we can make. In the next months we will meet with Syl at the lock. CPR will evaluate the value of the property and assess our wants. We will finally be in a position to offer a usage plan and



The Lock - what could be!

have a contact who will reply to our requests on a timely basis.

Get ready for a volunteer day and a major clean up hopefully, in mid May. I am not sure who brought up the idea of PMHA purchasing the ten acres that is connected to the lock property, but I offered Mr. Arduini a buck! He didn't bite! So I offered him a buck and a tax receipt! He didn't bite! However, he did skirt around that subject and said he needed to see the property before he could make any suggestions to his superiors or know the value of the property. We will see!

### Let's try a new way of putting together an article!

It is now 22 days since I wrote the material above. It is time to put together at least one story for the Spring Grand Dispatch. I sat down at my computer on the morning of February 24<sup>th</sup> and found an email from Pat Hayes. I could leave it for now and begin my story undisturbed, or I could answer it. I answered it; and Pat replied. Then a short coffee break (after all I did work for at least four minutes). I returned to the computer! The undisturbed part didn't work! Pat has replied again. Now the hammer hits me on the head. I don't have to write a story at all! This can be a good demonstration of how I put my stories together and how I get so much assistance from you the readers.

What follows is the email correspondence between Pat and me over a period of an hour and a quarter. I do fill in some blanks though in hopes of making it more understandable.

### Emails from Pat Hayes and a Query!

*Hi Bill – Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> @ 09:02* - The story of Beckley is a story like the story of the Mayflower. I've come to the conclusion; the basic story of the 1915 Beckley Epoch is its families and the interesting, dynamic and remarkable prodigy they produced. Most of them if not all along with the Warnick's, Hayes', Siddall's, O'Rielly's, Wilson's etc. shared a common thread of applaudable spirit. This is certainly what the cairn is all about.

When I was sixteen, in September of 1951, my father's brother Gerald, a priest died at St Elizabeth's Hospital in Manhattan. *Gerald was the last of seven Fathers of Mercy buried there. Fathers of Mercy dissolved in the 1950's - I'm looking for a blurb about them in Wikipedia for a bio I'm completing of Gerald's life.* My father and I rode the train

to Manhattan's Grand Central Station and were met by the sexton (*The caretaker of a church and its graveyard whose duties often include ringing the bell and digging graves*) of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Brooklyn church where Fr. Jerry lay in state. We stayed in the priest's house the weekend of the funeral which was held on the following Monday. I remember Mary Agnes Warnick now Moore and daughter Marilyn came to pay their respects. He was interred in Lenox MA, on the grounds of the former Motherhouse of the Fathers of Mercy, now converted into Canyon Ranch, a luxury hotel & spa in the heart of the Berkshire Mountains.

During the funeral Mass, a young woman named Loretta Ann Ford slid into our pew and embraced my father stating her condolences. She told me she grew up in Hamilton and knew my Dad and Uncle and the Hayes family. She said she had moved to New York and worked at the famous Jack Dempsey Restaurant on Times Square as a photographer and a cigarette girl.

My father recalled she was one of fifteen children of Edward Ford, the owner of the Ford Insurance Agency in Hamilton and told me there was a picture of the family (circa 1945) dinner around a big table with their father after their mother died. The Spec published the photo sometime during or before 1950. I'm still searching for the picture my father had. Do you have anything on the Fords? I only know they were a staunch Catholic clan like the rest of the early residents.

Signed Pat



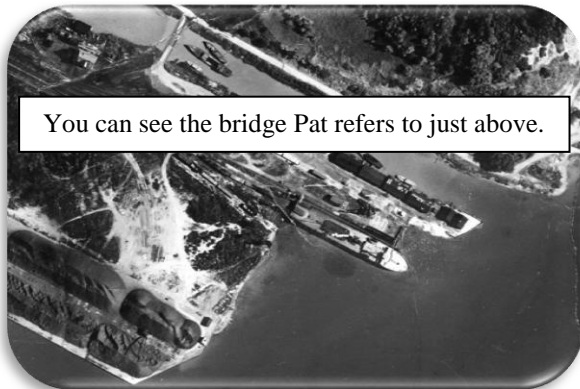
Ford Family with 15 children  
Photo courtesy of Dan Ford

*Hi Pat, Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> @ 09:06* - I am going to use this in the spring Dispatch. Can you remind me what year your grandfather landed at Beckley? I believe it was 1921, but not sure. This will save me checking my records!

I don't recall her father having a cottage at Beckley, but the rest of the story would be correct. I only know a couple of this lady's siblings. My Ford family is Ed Ford, and yes he and his wife had fifteen children. Mrs. Ford did die when the children were still very young and Mr. Ford kept the Family together with the help of his older children. They lived on Victoria St. South in Hamilton. One of his sons Ed, whom I have known for years died on Feb 6<sup>th</sup> this year in St. Catharine's. The parents had a bunch of daughters, one is Sister Loretta, (Mildred) of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (CSJ) but when I visited her about a month ago, she is now having some health issues. I believe they had a sister who moved to New York many years ago. There is still one son Michael who lives in Hamilton and I put a phone call into him. I will get the information! Oh, they never had a cottage at Port.

#### Signed Bill

Hi Bill Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> @ 09:30 - I have come to think my grandfather, Michael J Hayes, came to Beckley with the TH&B and the ship in 1915 as Mechanical superintendent however your date (1921 - 6 years later may have been when he purchased the shack that became SEYAH. I'm checking that one. Those air photos of the feeder show the TH&B station, bridge were both built in 1915 - I image the bridge was a access link to the road for TH&B people. My Dad told me his father would wave at the captain of the *Maitland I* whenever it came in but Dad would be only 11 - I'm thinking maybe Gerald, who was born 9 years later, would be just old enough for school and the whole family settled around 1921 and made it livable for summertime jaunts. When my grandfather died (Easter 1939) he was in the process of having an indoor bathroom built which never got finished and was never useful except for a store closet adjoining the kitchen. The backhouse was our only refuge until 1985.



You can see the bridge Pat refers to just above.

re: I'm also looking into the "FORD cottage" on the lakeshore that was badly destroyed in the 1985 storm. It was barely at the end of the Lakeshore Road and was painted chocolate. Wasn't there a priest - Father Ford; and a Ford present at the opening of the Cottager's Assn? Maybe your article can touch a memory or two.

#### Signed Pat

Hi Pat, Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> @ 10:30 - Father Ford along the lakeshore was Jim (Nim as a nickname). Oddly enough he had a brother Ed who was on the Hamilton Separate School Board and died young. There are/were so many Ed Fords in Hamilton that it is like separating pigeons. You can't tell one from the other! Father Jim Ford also had another brother and a sister. Brother was Johnny - a bit slow and a sister Katy who never married and took care of Johnny. This Ford family is not the same family as you met in New York, although both were devoted Catholics and Hamilton families. This cottage is now owned by Fred and Roberta Cash.



Former Ford cottage - now owned by Fred and Roberta Cash

Now for yet another oddity! My records show that your grandfather Michael Hayes purchased his cottage (Seyah) from TH&B Railway in 1921. Note the year 19-21. What are the lot numbers? 19 & 21! Neat ah!

#### Signed Bill

*Pat Hayes's family had a Cottage at Beckley Beach beginning in 1921. He intentionally left a couple blanks in his story as he could not recall the people's first name. I know this family well and slipped in the correct information to Pats emails. I called Loretta Ann's brothers Mike and Dan to fill in a few facts that Pat left out of his story.*

*The back and forth of emails and the laps of memories as well as the wonderful accuracy of other memories is the very reason*

*I publish this newsletter. I look for accuracy, but I accept good old memories as they come!*

*What I have done, here is some research on the Fords and within the emails above I have corrected some of Pat's and my errors to the extent I am able. This means you won't get to read exactly what Pat and I shared on our emails, as our errors would only ultimately become "The Word!" I have done a fair amount of research on Ed Ford's family in the past couple of weeks which led me to historical information of Corktown in Hamilton and a great night at Beer Club with Dan Sullivan Ford! Lots of fun!*

## My memoirs of the Beach at Port Maitland.

Continued from the winter 2015 Grand Dispatch.

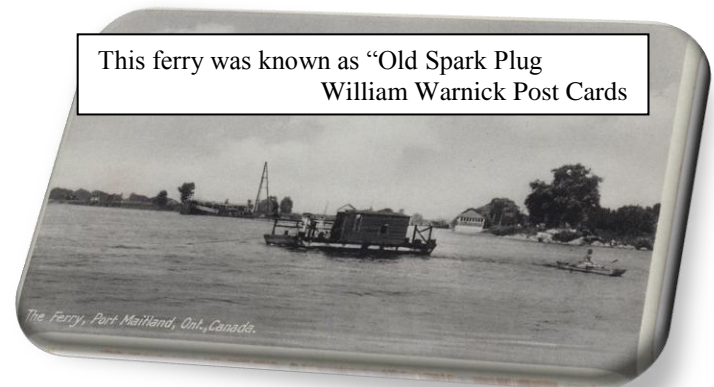
By Helen J. (Fergie) Root nee Ferguson

In July '37 a meeting was held at the chapel, and at that time the beach officially became "Beckley Beach". Committees were discussed and inaugurated. For the most part of the '30s we still had no electricity, but used \*1 gas lights, that required a mantle (how many of you can remember those). The Gas was purchased from the Dunn Gas Company. One year when Earl and I arrived a bit early we stopped in at Carroll and Evva Kenney's and mentioned the gas was not on. Carroll went to the fork in the road and within minutes the gas was flowing. In '38 electric power was available and in the spring of '39 Dad wired our cottage. On September 10th Mackenzie King declared that Canada was now at war with Germany.

The work on #6 S.F.T.S began immediately and was completed in October 1940. Today's NIMBYs would have something to complain about as the engine noise from the Harvard's was very distinct, when the pitch of the propeller was changed during take-off and landing.

By now I was working in the office of Hamilton Munitions, and Dad and I would drive to the cottage, along that very narrow stretch of pavement (known as the nine-foot-road) from Dunnville to Stromness, every weekend and vacations (Mother and my brother remained at the cottage all summer). Saturday nights, our beach pals would cross the river by ferry and hitch rides to Dunnville, being very cognizant of the fact that the ferry shut down at 11:00 o'clock. One night the operator (either Art Clark or Tom Siddall) must have decided that they would close early and of course, when we arrived at the river there was no ferry to take us to the Beach. My father was strict, in that I had to be home by 12:00 o'clock, so to keep peace in the family. I removed my

shoes and watch, and swam the river. To this day I have no idea how the others finally got across. By now most of us had our driver's license and occasionally we would pile into one car and head for Long Beach, to the Cove Dance Hall. Ten cents a dance and you had to buy tickets. Our parents never had to worry because there was no drugs, no liquor and no pairing off, just plain fun. There never was a worry about being out after dark but we did quite often take a flashlight as there were skunks around.



There were enlistments in the years to follow The Warnick family had 6 boys in the air force and 1 in the army. There was Paul, Joseph, Jim, Eugene, Ambrose and Arthur in the air force and Maurice in the army. Eugene and Arthur both made the supreme sacrifice. Murray Hurst joined RCCS (Signals), a Hamilton regiment and went overseas in 1940. My brother Marvin joined the Navy as did Ed Boyle. I enlisted in the Army in 1943, the month I turned 18. I'm sure there were others but by this time we were pretty well all going our separate ways.

The summer of '43 was rather special to me. Earl and I were both in the Army, but I managed to get a week-end pass just about every weekend, so if he happened to get one too, he knew where to find me. One balmy Saturday evening, we had been strolling along the beach and ended up sitting on the pier at the break. The full moon was reflecting on the calm waters. The sky was full of stars and I guess he must have thought it a good time to propose. I accepted. That long gone broken pier will always be special to me. By the end of the year he had been shipped to Debert N.S. and overseas, returning home late 1946.

We were married in January '47 and milk delivery was still made through Stromness 3 days a week during the

winter months, as far as Carroll and Evva Kenney's. In April we moved to the cottage and that summer we had Ted McNally helping us along; occasionally with Bruce Pittaway on weekends. Ted worked for three or four summers and he was fun to have around.

A place to propose marriage!



In the late '40s or early '50s Bill and Etta Reid managed the Maitland Arms Hotel. All of the buddies, that were available, gathered together on Friday nights, rowed, took Grightmire's launch, and on occasion paddled the canoe, across the river to have fish and chips for supper. Saturday nights would find us heading up the road to play cards with the Priesters and the Pittaways. Francis Priester loved to have a game of "Hearts" or "Crazy Eights" especially if he won.

By 1956 Mom found our cottage to be too much and as we had just purchased a house and had our 3<sup>rd</sup> child, it was inconvenient and too much responsibility for us to carry on, so it was sold. She still had my grandparent's cottage, but finally in 1963 gave the deed to my brother who remained there until he sold it around the early '80s. Sadly, it was the end of 50 years at Beckley Beach.

**The pioneers of the Beach as I remember them are as follows, starting at the east end of Erie Line:**

FORD, with Father James, Johnny and Katie; LAVELLE; LAND; JOHNSON, with Bob; MCNALLY, with Eileen, Tom and Ted; on the hill DERMODY, with Teresa, Felicitas and Bill; MCGOWAN, with Joe, Sally, Jimmy and Geraldine; BOYLE, with Catharine, Ann, Joan, Brenda and Ed; MACPHERSON, with Willis, Keith and Donna; SHORER; HURST, with Dorothy, Murray, Kathleen, Doug and I can't leave out Doug's friend Leo Nelligan; FERGUSON, with Helen, Marvin; MARTIN; with Grace; on the hill behind GEORGE, Murray, Eddie and Dean Montgomery; GRIGHTMIRE, with Rita, Helen, Joan, Louise;


DENMAN, Norman; STRACHAN, with Madge, Joan, George; MARR, with Andy; SPRINGSTEAD; FARRELL, with Bill; KELLY; ANGLE; PRIESTER, with Francis; LINNEBORN; JONES, with Karen; CURTIS, with Wilfred; O'REILLY/MCDONALD, with Father, John, Father Frank, Father Joe and the McDonald family, Gary, Terry and Denise; SPRAY, with Rose, Irene, Ernie, Hazel and Floyd; at the end of River Line there was MISNER; ERB, and his Bunkie, occupied by CONRAD, with Jean and Clearance SCHIERER who took month about using the cottage; CULP; WARNICK, Paul; on the hill WARNICK, with the boys mentioned above and I think there were a couple of girls; SINNOTT; HURFORD, and his Bunkie occupied by PITTAWAY, with Bruce; KELLY; CROSSMAN, with Margaret, Helen, Mildred; WILSON; REID with Joy, June Jo-anne and Bill; HAYES, with Patrick and Jerry; MACDONALD; PETMAN with Julie; THOMPSON; BACHMAN; KENNEY; BROWN, with Stanley, Harley and Ruth.

My sincere apologies if I have not mentioned your name. Most of the cottages I do remember but the occupants, of same, have a way of escaping my memory.

Over the years my activities have never taken me too far away from my beloved beach. In the late 50s we joined the Port Maitland Sailing Club and enjoyed crewing on a Lightning Class sail boat. It was serious racing on Wednesday nights and Sunday morning. My passion for the waters in and around Beckley Beach has never waned. Today, I open my drapes, in the morning and the first thing I see is the Grand River and it's changing landscape. I have been truly blessed.

*\*1 In 1950 the Dominion Natural Gas Company was asked to provide gas to the cottagers and a major community project began. All able bodied men pitched in and dug the trenches necessary to lay the new gas pipes to each and every cottage. I had not realized until this article that there had been gas supplied to Beckley Beach prior to this date. However, Merle Jenkinson of the Dunn Natural Gas Company did provide gas via the pipe I recently wrote about in Vol. 2-A No 1 Winter 2014 Grand Dispatch. Bill Warnick*





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## Growing up in Stromness

By Gloria Lawrence Nee Barnes

As a small child I remember walking to school in the fall and listening to the leaves crunch under my shoes. The one street (now North Shore Drive) running through Stromness was lined with beautiful mature maple and walnut trees and the falling leaves left deep cushions to wade through. The fallen walnuts we played with left our hands blackened and our mom quite upset with us. Arriving at the two room school, (which still stands today and the same one my mother attended) other children would be waiting for the bell to ring. We had to line up outside at the entrance in a quiet and orderly fashion and only then were we allowed in. The younger four classes went upstairs and the grades five to eight classes downstairs.

During the winter when the creek (Broad Creek) behind the school froze over, the children went skating during lunch hour. The teacher (Mrs. McAlonan ) would ring the bell, indicating it was time to come in. One lunch hour we decided to ignore the bell and continue skating. When finally we all warily trudged in, we were met by our angry teacher holding a belt. Each one had to line up and get that strap across the open palm. Mrs. McAlonan had sweat running down her reddened face as she struck each of our hands!

Every spring all the students in the two class rooms helped the teachers clean out the cupboards and re-arrange them. It gave us all a sense of pride in our school, when we completed the task. We also helped do yard cleanup work around the school yard when it dried up.

The skating season ended and the baseball games started. The teacher came out and refereed the games and sometimes joined in the game. We also played against S.S. # 5 at Highbanks and Lowbanks public schools on alternate Friday afternoons. It was an exciting time when the other schools competed with ours. For those competitions only the very best players were on the field.

Across the street from the school stood an old garage with a screened in window behind wooden doors. As soon as the weather warmed up, those doors would be propped opened to allow sunshine in. It gave us all a chance to see the new creations on display and watch new pieces being carved. Albert Hoto had his studio

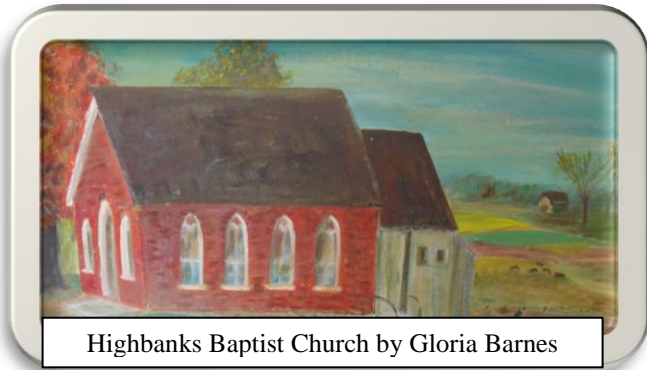
there and he would sit and carve his figures. I loved to go and watch him as he worked and see the carvings come to life. He worked on one piece that was just beautiful; it was a team of six horses pulling a carriage complete with the people inside. All the carvings were on display right there; he also had all his works on display at the local fairs. He was so talented!

One lovely warm morning, a friend Phylis Ross Pullinger and I decided that it was just too beautiful to go inside. It was our first year of school and we thought we'd rather play outside than sit in class. So we skipped across the street before the bell sounded and hid behind Mr Hoto's shop. We giggled as we peaked around the edge of the building and watched all the others line up to go inside. We had the most amazing day of play; staying out of sight was our game! We knew we'd be in trouble when we got home but no matter, we had a wonderful time. The next morning however was a different story. Mrs. Ross walked us to school pushing her baby Susan in the stroller with us clinging to each side and all the while she lectured us how serious it was to skip school. We had to apologize to our teacher, saying we would never do it again!

I was one of ten children and our yard was always full of other children from the village. Our dad had built us a sturdy wooden see saw and that was popular with all the kids. Baseball games, tag, cowboys & Indians complete with wooden shaped twigs for guns. There was always something going on in our yard. We also had a large extended family all living in the area. As a child I felt a sense of pride to have those uncles and aunts in my life. They were the most loving, caring and protective group. My Grandparents Gerald and Edna Pyle shared stories and their ancestry with me. One story my Grandfather told me was how he and his best friend Pastor Emery Shank raced their horses down over the hill by the Baptist church and across the fields towards Grandpa's home.

There's a tree by the church he said and one side turns orange and red, while the other side stays dark green. Every fall you can see that beautiful old tree as it turns its special colours. It's still standing with some limbs missing but it does look like it will be taken down soon. In the fall of 1970 I took a blanket and toys for my ten month old baby girl and she played there on the church lawn, while I painted the church with that tree in full colour.





Highbanks Baptist Church by Gloria Barnes

The Pyle family came to Broad Creek now known as Stromness earlier than that as around 1824 from Ireland with three children. An early map shows John Pyle owned property all along the east side of the road through the village. As early settlers, they built a log cabin on the property just south of where my parents built our home. Later when their sons were older they built a lovely brick home with a bay window. At the north end of the street entering the little village lived my Barnes Grandparents; they operated a senior's home in the old \*building which once belonged to Senator Lachlan McCallum. I helped out on Saturdays delivering the meals to the people living there, and one resident was my Great Grandmother Frances H Barnes.

My father George Barnes married Lilian (Lillian) Pyle on Feb 1<sup>st</sup>. 1941. Their first three children came one after the other; the year their fourth baby my little sister Sylvia came in 1945 they started to build their home. It was unfinished when we moved in and over the years they continued to work at it and enlarge it. My dad did not like working in a factory. Dad had previously worked at Union Carbide in Welland and Sylvania in Dunnville. It may be that, coupled with the need to provide for his growing family was the reason they decided to build a store. They both worked hard to make ends meet.

One day I came home from school and there was a new building standing on our property! To me a nine year old, it was like magic! This little prefab building became Barney's Store. It must have taken a lot of work and money and planning to get it to that point but, once running it became a full-time job for my mother, seven days a week working from 8am until 10pm. Dad always took over for her if he was at home and as we grew older we helped. Every weekend during the summer the little road through Stromness was bumper to bumper with carloads of people heading for the beach in Port Maitland. On Saturday nights we had hay wagons loaded with children from the Jewish Camp Kvutza

coming for ice cream cones. Shortly after they opened the store, dad started doing construction work and also maintenance at Camp Kvutza. When in 1963, the construction business increased, my parents closed the office.

With the coming of factories in Port Maitland, many things changed: The construction business grew and there were more jobs available. All the large trees lining the street through the village were taken down. The road was widened for trucks and some homes were moved further back to allow for the new road. The droves of people heading for the beaches each weekend at Port Maitland all but stopped. At times the industry could almost take your breath away with the fumes from the stacks. The acid etched the windows in homes on both sides of the Grand River. The trees were greatly affected by the fallout. Test gardens were set up by the industry in Port Maitland to indicate what affects the fallout might have on produce grown locally. My Grandfather Pyle tended those gardens. Over time improvements to the stacks led to less pollution locally. Holding pond had to be built to contain the gypsum and other waste the plants produced. The clay berms prevent the waste from seeping into the Grand River. These ponds will stand for centuries to come.

By November 1969 Dad and Mom had ten children, five living at home, five married and nine grandchildren. Each Christmas we all gathered at Mom and Dad's for dinner.

The coats and boots piled high as each family arrived. That year there would have been a total of 26. My mother baked pies, Christmas cake and her famous Christmas pudding and Dad helped her with the turkey and dressing. Together they worked hard at putting on a very special dinner. They always made our Christmas celebration very special.

During the 1980s my dad replaced the construction office with the wheelhouse of the *Fernglen* built in 1907. This ship was being dismantled in Port Maitland and Dad purchased the wheelhouse and had it moved to Stromness to be used as the office for George Barnes & Sons. Over the years it became a checkpoint for car rallies. After dad passed away in 1998 a large trailer was moved in front of the office and opened by Jim and Kim Barnes named Kim's Fire Pit. That little take out restaurant was a popular meeting place for many, and "old car nights" drew long-time friends. They closed

the restaurant in 2013. The George Barnes & Sons office wheel house has now been donated and will become part of a marine museum in Port Burwell Ontario later this summer.

On Dad's last Christmas in 1997 the family celebration totaled 68 family members. Dad turned 77 on April 1<sup>st</sup>. He passed away 30 Apr 1998; he enjoyed working on his collection of old cars right up to the day he died. All my brothers drove dad's old restored cars in the funeral procession. At the funeral home I slipped in early before anyone else. The room was dark and an old man was standing there in front of dad's coffin. I quietly walked up to him; he turned to me with tears in his eyes and said "Best employer I ever had!"



*The Fernglen is seen in this photograph being towed southbound on Lake Ontario during the afternoon hours of April 30th, 1985 by the tug Stormont. At the time it was taken the tow was approaching the piers at Port Weller and was in route to Port Maitland on Lake Erie where Fernglen was later cut up for scrap.*

Mom was always there for us. She missed Dad so much and one day we took one of her Great Grand babies in to see her. He stared at her wide eyed. She looked at him and stated to us "Oh I love those blue eyes; they remind me of your dad!" She passed away on 02 Aug 2007; she had been sick for a couple of months before and finally ended up in Hamilton Hospital. She badly wanted to come home but she died in the Dunnville Hospital. Mom and Dad left us all with many happy memories. Each summer they took their Grandchildren on camping trips up north. Even now when the cousins meet, those are the times they remember and share. My parents one wish was that we continue to get together to celebrate Christmas and we do that every year.

The family continues to grow; now numbering close to 90. Many of the children and Grandchildren continue to work at the business dad and mom started more than sixty years ago in the little village of Stromness.

## By the Shores of Lake Erie

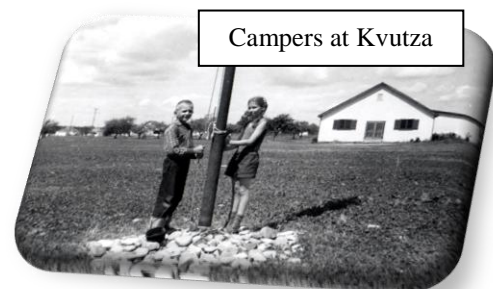
Tobi Gordon

### Remembering Camp Kvutza

Camp Kvutza's first summer in Lowbanks was in 1945. The Toronto Labour Zionist Movement bought a farm from the Minor family. A number of families named Minor settled in Haldimand County in the 19th century. This particular tract was settled by Reuben Minor, whose wife bore a son named Anson on August 2, 1877.

Originally, the camp was essentially run by teenagers. The only adults in the camp were the cook, the business manager and a programming director (shaliach). The camp would never have been possible without the direct support of members of the Pioneer Women (now Na'amat), the Poalei Tzion and the Farband.

There was a large two story red brick farmhouse, some sheds, a cabin, an outhouse, a garbage pit and a barn on the property. There was no electricity or running water. Water was hand pumped from a well near the house. However, the area had numerous gas wells so that the house was lit and the stove fired using fuel from a gas line. All indoor activities during the 1945 and 1946 seasons took place in the house. The campers slept on cots in canvas ohalim (tents) south of the house near the lake. Each ohel was about 10 feet by 12 feet in size and sheltered 4 campers and a Menahel. The ohalim had a tendency to leak when it rained.



There is no way the Ontario Department of Health would allow for such a camp today!

In the 1950's, at the insistence of my Zaida, (grandfather) a long-time Labour Zionist, my sister and I spent our childhood summers at Camp Kvutza. While other Ontarians sent their offspring north to the scenic Canadian Shield, renowned for its pine forests and crystal lakes (and its summer camps starting with 'W's'), we, journeyed along Niagara escarpment back roads to a

camp starting with, of all things, 'K'. By this time, some cabins had been constructed along the periphery and a large dining hall (Chadar) dominated the centre field.

The waterfront was on a Great Lake so turbulent that few of us ever even passed the most basic Red Cross swimming badges, although admittedly, we could body surf like the dudes in Malibu by the time we were seven. There were no sailboats, tennis courts, canoe trips or even, for that matter, permanent swim docks, like the ones offered by those 'fancy camps up north'. So we had to make our own fun.



The camp was located on the fringe of the Niagara region, so celebrated for its produce that it is known, to this day, as 'Fruitland' (no snickers, please. This was, after all, the 50's when fruit was fruit, gay was ever-so-merry and no meant maybe). Our campground was primarily flat, open farm fields but it was blessed with a small apple orchard, long neglected, but nevertheless full of stunted, gnarly fruit trees. Any klutz could climb the low-hanging branches in seconds and perch just above the long weeds in the cool shade. So naturally, we were forbidden from climbing them, although, to this day, I can't imagine why. (This was long before the days when parents sued everyone for everything. Kids were expected to break something, sooner or later. It was probably their own fault and it would teach them a lesson).

Although the programming could not be called religious, the celebration of Jewish history and culture was definitely a major part of the programming at Kvutza. From the latest Israeli songs to the elaborate productions for the Shabbath, (often of 'biblical proportions'.... and I'm not speaking metaphorically), we were encouraged to celebrate our heritage in some way, every day. We spent a lot of time and energy celebrating other cultures, as well. Diversity was invented at Kvutza. Respect and learning about the nations and peoples of the world, when introduced to the Canadian political landscape, were nothing new to us.

Each year, for example, we geared up for the huge International Folk Festival, held mid-summer, after an intensive week of study and a frenzy of creative expression. Each section was assigned a different country to represent and various 'experts' were brought in to advise and teach the songs, dances and customs. Native Indian groups from the Buffalo region taught us about historic tribal customs, folk dance troupes in full costume and folk singers like The Travelers added to the celebrations. Plays were rehearsed; the Dining Hall was festooned with international decor.



The food, of course, was a key element. Feasts of regional cooking from around the world were held each night of the week. I don't know how the camp leaders chose the countries each year, but I do know that they never chose one with famine problems. The competition was fierce between these mighty nations and the effort to outdo one another reflected the real world much more than any of us suspected, at the time.

In the last few years, horseback riding was introduced, as a way to compete with the lure of the more luxurious summer camps in Muskoka and Haliburton. It worked for awhile, but eventually the enrollment began to dwindle and the pressure to sell the land to the Ontario Provincial Park system was impossible to resist. They needed the access to the long sweep of the lakeshore beach for the Provincial Park across the road. Over the decades since, the area has returned to nature, so to speak. Gone are the vast sports fields, overgrown now with mature forests.

Many marriages and lifelong friendships were formed during those wonderful summer months on the shores of Lake Erie, so Camp Kvutza remains firmly entrenched in the memories of the hundreds of kids who spent their best summers there.

## *Walking Tour to begin this Summer*

Port Maitland, “On the Grand” Historical Association will begin a weekly walking tour this summer. We will start on Rymer Road between the two Mosaic Ponds. While there we will explain what once stood at that location, naming some of the families who once called this home. An explanation will be given why these families left the area, and what the purposes of the ponds are today. From there, we will proceed to the Port Maitland Lock. Once again we hold out hope that PMHA will have either a lease on the property or be the owners of the lock by then. The story of the lock and its former purpose will be explained, as will our hoped for future plans.

From there we will take a walk along the canal to the fish houses where if we are lucky we will meet either Wayne Siddall or one of the other commercial fishermen. Failing their presence, we will tell the history of commercial fishing out of Port Maitland. We will do our best to answer the many questions our visitors will have about the local fishing industry.

The Cairn is to be built this summer at the mouth of the Feeder Canal and hopefully, we will have some opportunity to tell the story of this little spit of land that sticks out into the River. Of course we will tell the purpose of the cairn and the stories it will reveal.

We are attempting to arrange permission and work out details with the Beckley Beach Cottagers Corporation to permit us to extend the tour into Beckley Beach.

The tour will be free of charge, but as you might expect donations of any amount will be welcomed!

## **Harley and his boat; remembered!**

An email from Jane Brown

Hi Bill, I see you have published a picture of Dad with his boat in the winter 2015 Dispatch. The boat was built by Dad in the attic of the family home on Cedar Street, Dunnville. When first launched the motor used belonged to Carroll Kenney, (they wanted to see if the boat would go), but Dad purchased the Johnson motor that you see on the boat in the picture. Also, Dad's name was Harley, not Harold. As to any question if Carroll shared in the boat, both Dad and Carroll had their own boat and used to run

around the river with them. Hope this clears up any confused thoughts on this matter. Jane Brown

## **A thought or two!**

A Theological Pick up! - I would say “Bless You” but you look like God has already blessed you!

A German proverb goes: When two dogs fight for a bone, and a third runs off with it, there's a lawyer among the dogs!

My grandkids won't eat eggs. Now I know why. Their older sister told them eggs are dead chicken fetuses! Enjoy breakfast!

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