

The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area.

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Spiders Catching Fish, and Dad Catches Me!

A story from the Dunnville Chronicle.

In April 2000, I began a monthly column in the Dunnville Chronicle and had every intention of interchanging the stories from the Chronicle and the Grand Dispatch. As it turns out I have only used one story in both publications; the story about the car carrier, Maitland No. One. I enjoyed the story about the fish and the spider so much that I felt it needed to be published for those of you who sinfully do not get the Dunnville Chronicle! This story ran in the Chronicle on December 13, 2000.

The left Handed Tool Set.

I was born at night, but not last night! Growing up at Port Maitland you had to learn early when someone was leading you on with a tall tale or giving it to you straight. When I was very young there was a fellow by the name of Archie MacDonald who lived near the lock at the Feeder Canal. *Note; Archie's family have prefixed their last name Mc and Mac.* Archie had been the County Warden in 1929, the youngest warden in all of Canada at the time. If Archie had only one fault it was his friendship with Jack Daniels, Tom Collins, and Johnny Walker. Most everybody loved Archie and many old-timers have told me he would have gone far in politics if only he had kept more distance between himself, and his friends in the bottle. I remember my father and my uncles telling stories about Archie and the whoppers he

would play on them when they were children while visiting their cottage at Beckley Beach. Among the many stories Archie told was that he had a lollipop tree in a back field where he picked his annual supply of lollipops. The kids always wanted to see the tree but Archie would always have an excuse for not being able to show it to them.



Archie MacDonald sitting near the Maitland Clipper.

Photo courtesy Arthur Clark

Just up the road from Archie lived Harry (Skin) Siddall, whom I am sure tried to continue where Archie left off after Archie's death in 1954. Harry and my father kept me going in a circle for a couple of years looking for a left-handed tool kit. While helping my father one day I was trying to hit a nail and couldn't hit it to save my life. Dad

had the answer! I being left-handed was using the wrong hammer, he said, "you need a left-handed one and I know just where you can put your hands on not only a hammer, but an entire set of left-handed tools." He told me Harry Siddall had once been left-handed and changed over. If I asked

Harry, he would sell me his old tools at a good price. Harry, like Archie came up with every excuse to avoid finding that tool kit. It was either in the shed and the shed was locked or if we were in the shed, he would tell me that he had loaned it to someone else for a couple of days.

Then there was Don Clark of Marshville. I must have been a stupid kid! He got me on the easiest city-slickers mistake of them all. The chocolate milk cow! Again my father acted as the instigator and Don took the reins and took them well. I guess it must be about five to six miles from Port Maitland to where Don and his family lived on the Feeder Canal just east of Hutchinson Road. I rode my bicycle from Port Maitland to Don's farm at least three or four times hoping to see his chocolate milk cow. One time I recalled detouring on my way home from school at Stromness to Don's farm - a considerable distance out of my way, to see that confounded cow. What is so embarrassing today is that his kids knew enough to keep the story going. "It was out in the back field or in the bush" they would tell me.

In my November 2000, column in the Chronicle I told the readers of a story found in the Dunnville Reform Press. It was about a spider catching a rock bass. Quote. "A rock bass was seen swimming beneath the bridge behind Haney & Middaugh's Mill. As it rose to the surface, a large black spider suddenly dropped upon the fish, clinging to its back fin."

This is how a Spider Catches Fish!

I have grown wiser since I let Archie, Harry, Don and my Father fool me with stories so poorly contrived that anyone with a half a brain knew them for what they were. What I wonder is did the reporter for the Reform Press ever meet my dad and his story telling chums? In a competing Dunnville paper The Dunnville Gazette, only four months before the spider and the bass story; the following

account had been given.

The physical powers of the Lycosidae, the popular running, ground, or wolf spider, are well illustrated by an instance recorded in the proceedings of the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia. The result, as reported, was achieved by pure strength and activity, without any of the mechanical advantages of snare.

Mr. Spring, while walking with a friend in the swampy wood, was attracted by the extraordinary movement of a large black spider in the middle of a ditch. Closer examination showed that the creature had caught a fish. She had fastened upon it with a deadly grip just on the forward side of the dorsal fin, and the poor fish was swimming round and round slowly, or twisting its body as if in pain.



Haney and Middaugh's Mill approximately where the new condominiums are today.

Photo courtesy of Edwin J McKee collection

The head of its black enemy was sometimes almost pulled under water, but the strength of the fish would not permit an entire submersion. It moved its fins as if exhausted, and often rested. Finally it swam under a floating leaf near the shore, and made a vain effort to dislodge the spider by scraping against the under side of the leaf.

The two had now closely approached the bank. Suddenly the long black legs of the spider emerged from the water, and the hinder ones reached out and fastened upon the irregularities of the sides of

the ditch. The spider commenced tugging at his prize in order to land it. During an interval of six or eight minutes' the spider had drawn the fish out of the water: then both creatures had fallen in again, the banks being nearly perpendicular. There followed a great struggle, and the fish was hoisted head first more than half its length upon the land. It was very much exhausted, hardly making any movement, and was being slowly and steadily drawn up by the spider, who had evidently gained the victory.

It sounds very much like someone Mr. Haney, and his buddies had a good laugh at the expense of the Gazette reporter who failed to read the competitors paper.

Yes Virginia, there really is an Academy of Natural Science in Phila PA!

I decided to contact the Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia to see if they could add anything to this story. I looked them up on the internet and sure enough they are there with a excellent web-page, but no e-mail address available. Even though I am retired from Canada Post, I admit that placing a stamp on a letter seems like too much trouble now that I have been spoiled by cyber-mail. It is likely a good thing that there was no e-mail address, after all what was I going to ask them? Could this be a true story? Duh! Have I once more been fished in! Archie, Harry, Don and my Father would be laughing their sides off at my foolishness. But wait a minute, what if it were true, and I am destined to spend the rest of my life not knowing the truth because I am too vain to ask!

From Old Newspapers and Books Etc., Etc.

With the recently announced reconstruction of the piers at Port Maitland I thought you may be

interested in reading excerpts from a number of articles I have found regarding the piers. My research concerning the piers is ongoing and many items still elude me.

National Arihives of Canada; 136 years ago (1866) In a report of S. D. Woodruff he states that the late severe storms on Lake Erie have washed away some of the planking of the pier upon which [word unreadable] the lighthouse and that he has undertaken the repairs of the breach, the cost of which will be about \$150.00.

National Arihives of Canada; 133 years ago (1869) There is a report of the sinking of a portion of the East-pier at Port Maitland which now lays two or three feet below the water surface.

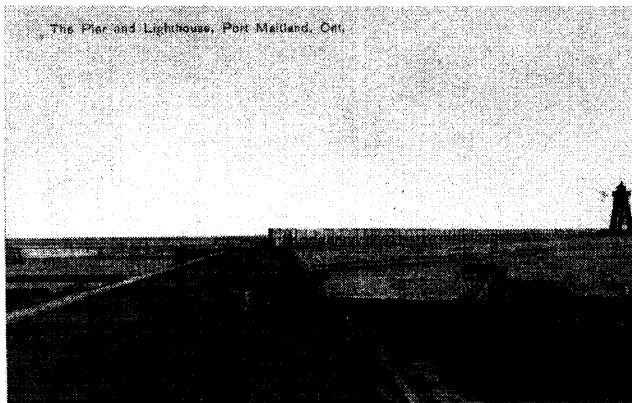
The Reform Press; 120 years ago (1881) Five hundred thousand feet of very find pine timber was towed down the Grand River within the past week. It is to be used for the new piers at Port Maitland. Mr. F. R. Lattimore has the contract. **Another article -Reform;** The tug HUMMING BIRD has a contract of towing the stone scow for the new pier at Port Maitland this summer.

The Reform Press; 116 years ago (1886) The storm carried away the covering of the west pier. The walk leading to the lighthouse is also gone and large quantities of the stone work have been carried out by the heavy sea. The planking and stringers are scattered along the beach over two miles. Lighthouse keeper Fergus Scholfield estimates the damage done at \$8,000.

The Reform Press; 98 years ago (1904) The dredge is clearing away the bar out from Port Maitland piers. **Another article -Reform Press;** Work on the construction of the new east breakwater was commenced on Tuesday when the first crib was sunk at the eastern extremity for placing a target thereon to be used as a guide. This crib will not be a part of the breakwater, but eight

cribs are completed for the structure and will be sunk at once. [This article does not say that this is Port Maitland, but I assume that it is.] **Another article -Reform Press;** The tug ELEANOR of Port Maitland ran to Port Colborne the other day and took aboard the upright irons that had been used on the elevated walk leading along the pier to the old light house. The elevated walk is not needed since the construction of the breakwater.

The Dunnville Chronicle 97 years ago (1905)
The east pier is being rebuilt. **Another article - Chronicle;** In the estimate brought down at Ottawa was an item of \$30,000 for the renewal of entrance piers at Port Maitland.



Wood pier with cat walk over last half of pier.

Note; There is no range light at bend of pier.

Photo courtesy Wm. A. Warnick Collection

The Dunnville Chronicle 96 years ago (1906)
Superintendent Weller of the Welland Canal was in Port Maitland and Dunnville on Thursday, making preparations for rebuilding the east pier at Port Maitland which was partly washed away last fall. **Another article -Chronicle;** Ten cars of square pine timber were shipped here from Peterboro, for the Port Maitland pier. Fifteen more will come next week.

The Dunnville Chronicle 95 years ago (1907)
Samuel Brand, government inspector of the work on the Port Maitland, pier is at Peterboro inspecting timber intended for that work. **Another article -**

Chronicle; Mr. Big Dipper and Mr. Redskin have completed the Port Maitland pier and left Wednesday for their haunts around Thorold.

The Dunnville Chronicle 94 years ago (1908)
"Notice to Contractors" Sealed tenders for repair to west pier at Port Maitland will be received. . . Until August 14th. . . signed by L. K. Jones Secretary Department of Railways & Canals.

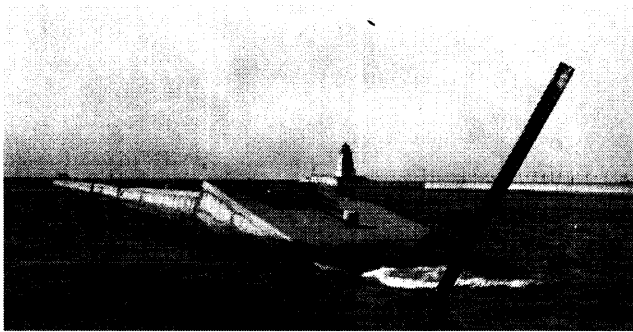
The Dunnville Chronicle 83 years ago (1919)
Government engineers completed plans for the building of a new pier at Port Maitland.

The Dunnville Gazette 82 years ago (1920)
Recent improvements at Port Maitland pier include the enlargement of the fog horn house and the installation of more powerful machinery. A Sixty-foot tower for an electric range light is being erected at the elbow of the west pier.

The Dunnville Chronicle 74 years ago (1928) In a rather lengthy article about the history of Dunn Township the piers are mentioned Two British men of war were stationed there some time after the war of 1812. At that time the piers were even with the water and all moss covered. **Another article - Chronicle;** Ivan Ostroski, a Ukrainian employed by the Dominion Construction Company (constructing piers at Port Maitland and Port Colborne) on the TH&B dock at Port Maitland was drowned in the basin at the mouth of the Grand River. Thursday evening. Boats dragged with seine nets for hours but failed to recover the body. Finally Howard Jones County Constable, in the bow of a boat with James McQuhae superintendent of the construction gang rowing: and Fred Clay in the bow of the other with James Crumb rowing tried a new stunt. They used an iron bar 20 feet long on which was fastened sturgeon hooks and eventually after trolling through a dense darkness and fog, the body was recovered by Howard Jones, Frank (Pep) Leadley, the well known rugby player, now engineer in charge of the work at Port

Maitland assisted in bringing Ostroski to land. . .

The Dunnville Gazette; 73 years ago (1929) A small appropriation appears in estimates for further repairs to the piers at Port Maitland. **Another article -Chronicle;** Port Maitland, The contract for the reconstruction of the West pier at Port Maitland was awarded to "Cameron and Phinn" of Welland for \$99,221.13.



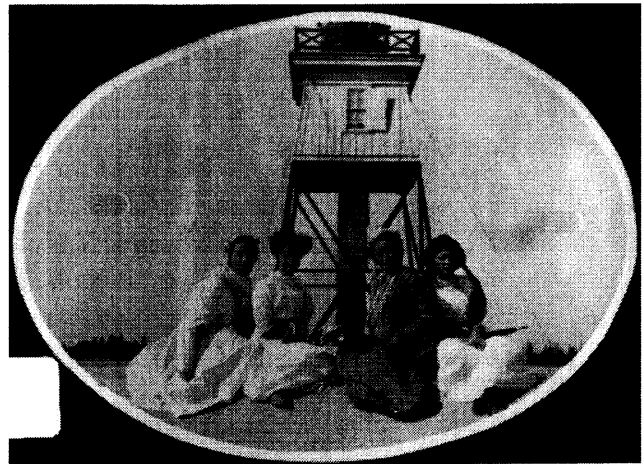
Break in pier after ice jammed river and forced water under new pier causing it to collapse on Feb. 25th 1930.

Photo courtesy Wm. A. Warnick collection

The Dunnville Gazette 72 years ago (1930) Port Dunnville would experience the worst flood damage in the town in many years . . . The lower river had practically cleared and under ordinary circumstances the small amount of ice remaining would have gone out with out further trouble. The rising waters jammed the ice between the two piers, however and it commenced to rise rapidly. The break came on Tuesday morning Feb. 25th and the piers were damaged considerably one having a hole torn through it. **Another article - Gazette;** Port Maitland, The damage, in the main was to the government piers, which were badly battered by the ice jam. The water rose to an unusually high level in the village and several of the buildings were undermined. The ice jamming between the piers, caused the trouble all through, and when it persistently refused to break away it looked as though Port Maitland would be wiped out. The steady rush of water under the ice however, was washing away the foundation of the piers, and

during Tuesday morning, Feb. 25th the east pier collapsed in one place, leaving a gaping hole through which the ice was driven . . .

The Dunnville Chronicle; 5 years ago (1986) The federal government is expected to take action on a long range planning study of the lower Grand River. Dr. Bradley, MP said the federal government is considering funding to do some work at Port Maitland. Discussions are continuing with various government departments on the costs. Some monies have already been allocated to repair the piers at Port Maitland.



Lighthouse on west pier before it was inclosed. Left to Right are Unknown, Nell Thrush, Ella Stephens, Unknown.

Photo dated; August, 1911

Photo courtesy Edwin J. McKee collection

The Dunnville Chronicle 3 years ago (1999) The west pier at Port Maitland considered by many to be one of the area's biggest tourism drawing cards, is in poor shape. Unless the federal government decides to repair the structure, it may eventually be closed to the public. The major area of concern is a 10-foot section of steel retaining barrier on the eastern wall which has separated from the concrete wall . . . **Another article -Chronicle.** Port Maitland, Mayor Lorraine Bergstrand gave Dunnville council a cost estimate for repairs to the west pier at Port Maitland last week. . . . "It will cost \$275,000 for a rough patch job," said

Bergstrand. "Two million dollars could be spent to demolish the east and west pier while 3 million will do a complete repair on the west pier." . .

The Dunnville Chronicle 3 months ago The federal government has agreed to enter into negotiations to transfer ownership of the Port Maitland pier to Haldimand County. The county will only accept ownership of the pier under several conditions, said Mayor Lorraine Bergstrand at Monday night's meeting of council. If the county gets its wish, the federal government will pay the cost of all repairs to the pier which are expected to run between \$250,000 and \$300,000. Under the terms of the deal which is still being negotiated, the federal government will also provide up to \$4.5 million to restore the Port Maitland Lighthouse and relocate the boat launch currently located at the site

Heritage Day 16, 2002

Once again, I will have a display at the Dunnville District Heritage Association's Heritage Day at the Dunnville Library on Saturday February 16th. God has been good to me this past year and I have added many new photographs to my collection. Come out and see Port Maitland in photos as you have never

see it before. It is free, admission, but a donation to the Heritage Association is never turned down.

In Memoriam

I am pleased to say that no one associated with Beckley Beach has passed on since our last Dispatch.

Do you know anyone who wants a Dispatch?

If you know anyone who wants "The Grand Dispatch," send me a book of stamps. I will mail the Dispatch out for double the price of postage.

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