

The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area.

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Memories of Visitors Past!

Pat and John put fingers to keyboard and remembers Port Maitland!

Once each year I ask someone to write a story for The Grand Dispatch. This year Patrick J. Hayes formerly of lot 19 & 21 and John Hurst formerly of lot 46 have agreed to share their memories. Both men's grandparents were original cottagers at Beckley Beach. Pat has over the years provided me with many photographs and slides of Beckley Beach. Pat lives in Getzville NY, near Buffalo. Only recently have I found John. His name came up on *Classmates* a webpage to help old-timers hook up with former classmates. However it was only through his aunt Kay Blair formerly Hurst that I found John. John lived with his parents and siblings for a short time in his grandparents cottage. John now lives in Langley B.C.

You can write an article for the Dispatch! You won't get paid for it and I only wish to have stories with a positive point of view. I may have failed from time to time in my goal not to embarrass anyone, but at least I endeavor to avoid that folly.

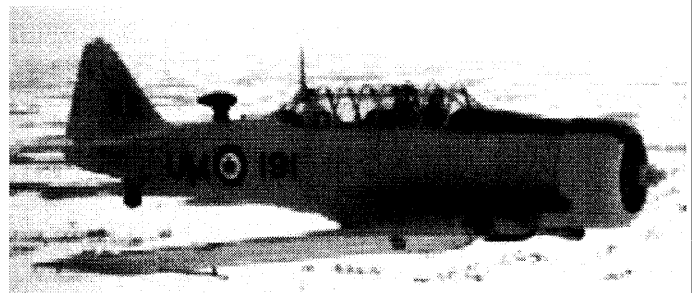
Sounds at Port Maitland

by Patrick J. Hayes

As a kid, I was preoccupied with sound. Perhaps, in a peculiar way, I tried to make up for the lack of my parents hearing by conjuring ways to describe what I heard in a way they would better understand. Lil and Frank had been normal children, as was my brother and I, but because of scarlet fever and other

childhood diseases, without antibiotics in those days, Mom and Dad and their deafness made it to parenthood with a handicap they easily overcame with sign language and determined savvy about the hearing world.

Mother often asked me about how things sounded. She was amazed when I told her different birds had peculiar noise patterns. She insisted I explain what a next-door neighbor, the milkman, butcher or baker said. She even wondered why airplanes vibrated her coffee cup on the kitchen table every morning.



During World War II, two-seater Harvard's used for training pilots roared over our cottage and out past the apple trees in Reid's back yard (lot 23) with putt-putt throttle sounds, which always made me think they were about to crash. They took off from the RCAF field a mile from Port on their morning sortie and most of them made a bee line toward that orchard or the big hill above O'Reilly's compound (lots 26A and 28A) and behind Spray's store (lot 27). It was a sight and sound extravaganza I would never forget. I still dream about the goggled pilots looking down menacingly like so

many scenes from war-movies I'd seen in those years.

The growl of the foghorn on the lighthouse at the far end of the western pier on hazy mornings was awesome. Usually in the early morning, before the hot summer sun burned through, its unique moan woke me from my slumber on many a misty morning. But not Frank & Lil, they'd sleep on until the planes rattled the kitchen pots and pans.



Pat Hayes - The Summer of 1938. If you look hard you will see the ferry tenders building, just over the pump handle.

Photo courtesy of Pat J. Hayes

On less foggy days, birds at first light twittered and screeched around my grandfather's black willow tree just inches from my pillow. The view from my verandah bunk window was fascinating. Us boys got plenty of fresh air through the screened in porch but my parents were oblivious to all the noise. Even the whine of the fish boats Maitland Rose and the Earleejune never made a dent in their unconsciousness. Only I, it seems, would sit up in my bed and peer out across the road. The smell of coal burning while heating their boilers and it's black clouds of puffing smoke made for an exciting spectacle. I couldn't put my head back down until the whining engines faded and disappeared out through the twin piers on their way to a new days catch.

Thunderstorms came down the river at break-neck speed in late August. They crackled, boomed and licked at the river shore before heading straight out

into the lake. They always got our full attention, striking so close. I never knew of any actual strikes at trees or cottages. The river saved us by drawing all the bolts into it's placid water. Mom and Dad knew what this sound was all about from the flashes of lightning and the shuddering rooftops. I didn't have to describe anything when these storms hit. Wind and rain intensified the show and in this experience, we were all ears.

I'll always remember VJ day in August 1945. Father John O'Reilly oiled up his accordion and started a conga line that threaded it's way through every cottage. In the front doors, out the back, dragging its occupants, kicking and singing all the way down the road. When we all got to the beach, a tremendous bonfire was built from dried shore wood and everyone sang songs until late into the night. I spelled the lyrics for Mom and Dad and they sang along with gusto. This was probably the first community bonfire that was the prototype of the original August field days.



The Siddall Fish tug EARLEEJUNE circa 1931; before the turtle was built on her bow. Look at that black smoke!

Photo courtesy of the late Earl M. Siddall

But most of all, it was the buzz of speedboat engines and the on-board music from the coal boats that passed before our view that was the most enjoyable for all who lived along the river shore. It was these sounds that I miss the most. I feel sorry for our beachfront neighbors who missed the best of this summertime parade.

The photo of UM 191 was loaned to The Grand Dispatch by Len Sunday, whom I found on the internet. Len has a web-page devoted to various military aircraft. You can find him at

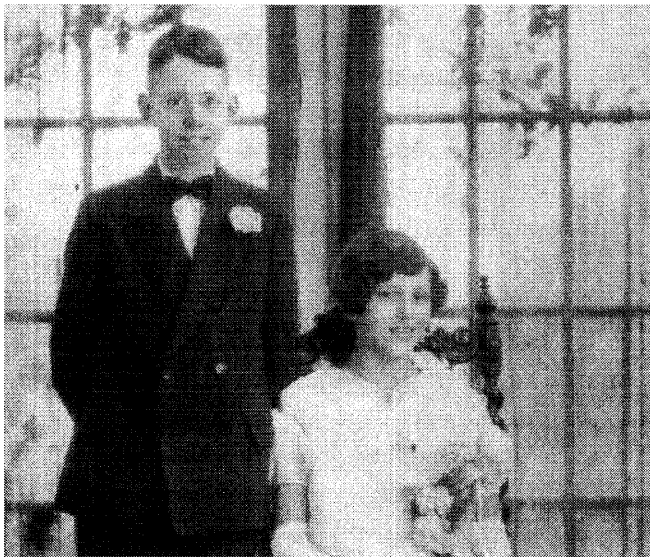
<http://www.hangarline.com/> . The photo of this plane came to Len via the pilot who now lives in France. His name is Maurice Leglise.

While Pat was writing this article he mentioned that he had a dream the night before; "I had a dream last night about frogs and crickets making their awful nighttime racket. I always imagined them in the big pond (*Sarah's Pond*) doing their thing as soon as the sun went down. After a while, those sounds could lull a insomniac to lala land." How could I have forgotten that sound? I guess there's more I've forgotten - maybe your readers can add more to the list.

Mornings with Murray

By John Hurst

My father's name was Murray, and a big part of his identity was fishing. Of course he was many other things to me - dad, a good country fiddler, the newspaperman who taught me how to write, and so on - but it was hard to tell where the fisherman began and Murray left off.



My Dad, Murray Hurst and his sister Dorothy on their Confirmation Day in the 1920s.

Photo courtesy of John Hurst

When we were poor, my brothers and I would gather as a small huddle of denim and cotton at one end of a long pier at Beckley Beach, Ont., and watch in silence as Dad trolled for fish. In those lean years when reporters didn't earn much, we used to eat his fish for supper. It was the closest we ever came to re-enacting the Great Depression, but it was poverty sure enough and there wasn't much glamor to it. But we were living at the family cottage at Port Maitland and that added a festive air to life.

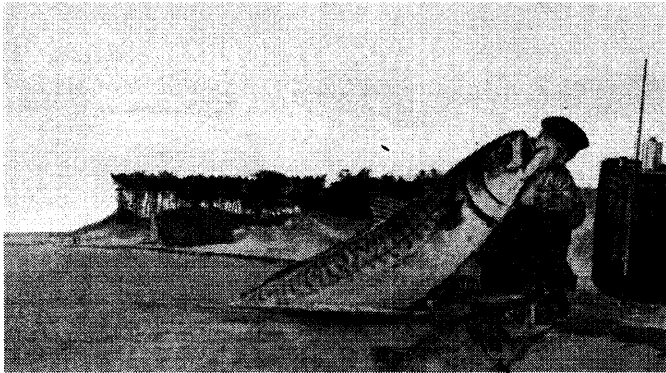
We were allowed to watch Dad fish as long as we were quiet. That was the thing. Dad rarely spoke when he was fishing and for years, I just couldn't get the hang of the silence. I tried walking alongside him as he paced the pier, but I knew that conversation didn't count here. Dad fished and the sun rose. We talked and the wind blew. There was no comparing the two.

He broke this silence rarely. Once, a Roman Catholic priest from Dunnville asked Dad to teach him how to fish and they did talk. Dad's Lutheran upbringing naturally brought out all sorts of good churchly sentiment. Men speak in rounded vowels when they seek to be profound, but even that dropped away after a while, when the religious father got the hang of fishing. They both became silent as smelt.

Fishing was an unspeakable act. You talked, you tooted; it was the most profane of interruptions. Dad's own father once advised, "If you've got nothing to say, don't say it." But this mute, meditative meandering was more than mere silence. It was mourning the loss of childhood perhaps and it was marching to the drum of Huckleberry Finn. It was another way of being.

Dad was a big man and to see him fishing from a rowboat was something. He was like a huge hump on a small whale. Motionless for hours, he was a brooding patriarch in a great pool of shifting sunlight, whirling insects, hopeful gulls and

watchful sons. We knew he could suddenly spring to life, and use his oars faster and stronger than all of us together. When you approached him, tugged at his sleeve, spoke a cautious word, you knew you were breaking through a membrane, a caul which kept him in a preferred world.



Murray always caught the biggest fish in the river as seen here on the banks of Warnick's Hill!

Photo courtesy Wm. A. Warnick Collection

Fishing was Dad's antidote to the world he entered after high school. Wartime meant doing things smartly and marriage was like wartime. Kids were good, but they weren't like being a kid yourself. Fishing was best when there was no money. When we were rich, he played golf. Actually, Dad was so fanatical, he used colored balls for 18 holes in the snow.

People from the city came in the good weather. Some of them lined the banks of our little river looking for coarse fish. Richer men came in special boats seeking bass and trout. Dad stayed on the pier and he would wave at them, but that was all. New industries came to the river, and one of them emitted so much from its smokestacks, it turned the entire landscape a chalky white. Dad stayed on the pier and for a long time, he was the only moving thing. Ice packs in January heaved up against the pier and broke it in places. Dad turned to ice fishing. Then came the long periods of important events: our growing up and graduating; getting engaged and dumped; Vietnam and Pierre Trudeau; Dad losing his job. When you measure it all together,

end to end, it didn't take much time at all. Dad died, younger than he should have, a long way from the pier. It was all real enough, but in the end, none of it amounted to even half a day's worth of fishing.

Fishing allowed my Dad to be his real self. He really was Murray on that pier, much more so than Dad, or Dear, or Dear Sir. Fishing gave him his name and saved it for him.

Thank you to both Pat and John for sharing your memories of Beckley Beach with us. I hope others will accept my offer to write a memory or two.

Funerals are Alright!

You get to reminisce with old friends.

Mrs. Anne McGowan (lot 57) passed away in May. I saw her obituary in the paper and forwarded it via e-mail to any of you who's address I have. On Sunday afternoon, I went to P. X. Dermody's to pay my respects. For the first time in more than thirty-five years I met an old chum. Gerry is Anne's youngest child and we had many good times together at Beckley. Quickly we began with *Do you remember when?* or *What ever happened to...?* What a walk down memory lane we took that day. Gerry reminded me of some of the awful things we did and some of the very funny but childish pranks we pulled. We laughed at the times that Doug Kearney and I took various chums including Gerry (more than once) to the nudist camp and how we strolled in and took a peak, trying to act as if we held membership. When spotted we could run like deer and hop the gate, get onto our motor scooters and be gone before you could say *Jack Robinson*. Gerry would go back to the cottage and her mother would ask her where she had been. Gerry not being a girl to tell fibs told her, "at the nudist camp." Mother would just give a look and go on with her business. Later in the summer Gerry foolishly showed her father where the place was and he was to say the least not impressed with her trips to Rattle Snake Road.

Gerry and her husband Robert Hicks are both vets dealing with small animals. Robert was not able to make the trip up to Anne's funeral as he was in the middle of opening a new clinic at Rocky Mount North Carolina. Gerry tells me it is on the Interstate 95. She also tells me that she and Robert will be in the area again in the next few months. I look forward to seeing them.

Singing about Mohawk Island!

As many of you may know, I have a history column in the Dunnville Chronicle. This opens a ton of doors for me. One door that was opened, came via the local dog catcher Benny Ricker. He found what he thought was a song about his grandfather and his boat. After some research on the internet I discovered it was common place in days past for many of the seamen to use the words and music from someone else's work and substitute common names into the songs making them more personal. The fellow I learnt this from is Lee Murdock of Kaneville Illinois. Lee is a singer of traditional songs from the Great Lakes, and a Song-writer of ballads and folk music relating to Great Lakes heritage, from the days of sail to the present day. He is going to be performing at Port Dover on Saturday July 20th. I asked Lee to meet with myself and Mike Walker who is working to preserve the Mohawk Island Lighthouse. We will take a tour of the Island and I will turn over notes to Lee in hope that he can compose a song about our little island. Hopefully it will be a number one hit on the Folk-song chart and bring much needed positive attention to the cause of restoring the lighthouse.

Port Maitland History Display to take place a Stromness on August 17th.

I will hold my second Port Maitland history display on Saturday August 17th from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. This year it will take place in my former elementary school, S. S. # 3 Sherbrooke located at Stromness. Participants will display subject matters

ranging from the local genealogy, Grand River post cards, land surveying equipment, Mohawk Island, R.C. A. F. # 6 Association, Stromness school photos, and Stromness post cards. There will be a number of heritage school photos from Haldimand County as well as numerous Haldimand and Norfolk historical periodicals and books available for viewing. Many of the participants will have books or newsletters they have written available for you to purchase.



If you want to know more about this picture you will have to attend the Port Maitland History Display. But, wait a minute, isn't that John Hurst sitting - legs crossed in the centre of the first row - and his brother Jeff to his left?

Photo courtesy Wm. A. Warnick Collection

There is no admission, but there will be a donation jar with proceeds going to the Dunnville District Historical Association, RCAF # 6 Association and my pet project for 2002; the restoration fund for the Mohawk Island Lighthouse. The event will also be used to survey the possibility of forming reunion committees for both former Sherbrooke Township schools.

Email Addresses!

I would be delighted to place you in my Beckley Beach group folder. From time to time I send out group notices such as an obituary found in a local paper, or articles and information I have found. I don't pester you! I also hope you will send me

articles of interest, especially obituaries of Beckley Beach (current or former) people who have passed away in areas where I do not have access to the local paper. Please send me your e-mail address.

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

The Dunnville Gazette; 114 years ago (1888)
Dunnville, On Monday last, at the Feeder Bridge, Mr. Charles Tweed shot a Muskellunge which weighed 45-3/4 pounds and measured four foot one inch in length, with a circumference of 2 feet. It was shot in the canal, and Mr. J. J. Lawson Sr. purchased it at 6 cents per pound.

The Reform Press; 114 years ago (1888)
Dunnville, A Muskellunge weighting 31 lbs. Was caught on Saturday by Freeman Green's boys, the oldest of whom is only 11 years old, and the fish was as big apparently as the youngest boy.

The Dunnville Chronicle; 113 years ago (1889)
Dunnville, Elia Nie caught a 137 pound sturgeon in the lower river by drag net. The fish was 6 foot 3 inches.

The Reform Press 102 years ago (1890) Port Maitland, With the advent of the Americans at the lake shore, we may expect a number of picnics this summer. Mr McArthur of Buffalo, trolling up the river to take a train for home, caught a 28-lb Muskellunge. Mr McArthur is to spend the summer at our lake resort.

**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.

Mailing Address

William Arthur Warnick
180 Rosslyn Ave. South
HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5
E-mail: wwarnick@interlynx.net
Phone: (905) 549-6086

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