

The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area

Car Carrier, "Maitland One;" is catalyst, creating Beckley Beach

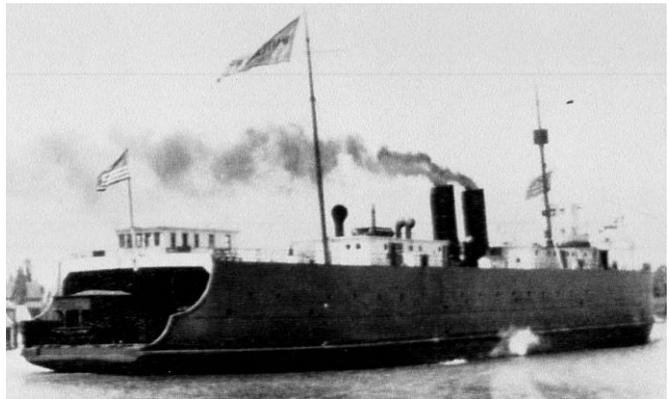
Maitland One, makes maiden voyage

The Maitland No. One, began service from Ashtabula Ohio to Port Maitland on Saturday, October 21, 1916, one year and ten months after the TH&B Railway began rail service to Dunnville.

The three hundred and fifty foot steel railway car ferry, which often sported the name "SS Maitland No. One", was better known as "Maitland One." It would on this day, become the largest ship to have entered the mouth of Grand River, [sic] a record it would hold for many years.

On the Friday before this historic day, when she was about to berth at the dock built especially for her, Lake Erie, with gale forced winds feeding it, was whipped into a frenzy. This night was to be known as "Black Friday," the worse Lake Erie It was 7 A.M. Saturday, and though she had a

mariners had experienced in over thirty years. The violent storm which raged across the lake took the lives of sixty-nine sailors and sent several boats to the shallow depths of the angry lake. Newspaper stories of the day describe rescues such as you might easily expect to take place on the high seas. They describe horror stories of



men clinging to life rafts for as many as three days and then slipping into the depths of the lake as the rescue ships come into sight.

draft of eighteen feet and a beam of sixty feet she was forced to seek shelter. Her Captain headed for Long Point Bay in the lee of Long Point. The ship was most seaworthy, as she rode the heavy seas like an ocean liner. She was equipped, with the latest in electrical lighting throughout, with locking devices for each car, separately secured and enclosed under the hurricane

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deck. Captain P. T. Haagenson, had never entered the recently dredged harbour at Port Maitland. He was nervous about bringing his new ship through the narrow channel afforded him by the wooden piers on either side of the Grand. Having just crossed the lake, where they were in site of Port Maitland, the order was given to seek shelter.

Captain Haagenson, instructed his wireless operator to send a message to the Government wireless station at Port Burwell, notifying the TH&B officials at Port Maitland that he was laying in calm water and had a full cargo of thirty-two standard freight cars for the Canadian Port. By 2 P.M. the great ship was again headed for her new port. To the rousing reception of whistles from the fleet in port, she entered the harbour under her own steam. On her first trip, as if she had done so a thousand times before, she turned around in the basin and slipped into her berth, to within inches of the place where the rails on the boat and those on the dock connect, without a line being cast or any assistance given by the crew.

This was the Maiden voyage for the new TH&B Navigation Company, a subsidiary of the TH&B Railway. Port Maitland hosted several railway officials, among them being John Newton Beckley of Rochester NY, President of the railway.

Only ship owned by TH&B

The ship would make a round trip from Port Maitland to Ashtabula every fourteen hours for the next sixteen years. The Maitland One, would be the only ship the railway ever owned. She was built in 1916 by the Great Lakes Engineering Works at Ecorse, Michigan and launched that spring. She

spent that summer working on Lake Michigan for the Ann Arbor Railway before being assigned to Port Maitland.



Not everyone was amused by the adventure of this great ship entering their "pond." She would run at least ten months of the year and all year, weather permitting. In a recent letter, Mary Mullner, the daughter of Dolly Gray, reminisces with Betty Phillips, (formerly Betty Jenkins) about skating on the smooth ice of the Grand River before the arrival of the car ferry. Until the arrival of the Maitland One the river had long been used by the children on both banks as their private skating pond.

Maitland, runs aground

On December 23, 1919, the ship was grounded for five days on Lowes Point. Her sister ferry, the Marquette-Bessemer No. 2, pulled her safely off the reef after she shed her load of thirty railway cars of coal, wire and one of oil, into Lake Erie. They were to be recovered the following spring. The issue as to the existence of the oil car remains in dispute as those who remember, and should know, say there was no oil car on board. Newspaper accounts immediately following the incident however, state there was an oil car. Isn't history fun! The author has searched newspaper articles following this accident and has found no record of the cars being

recovered.

On March 25, 1927, she ran aground on Tecumseh Shoal damaging her hull. Mait McKeown, a wheel man onboard, recalls volunteering to go ashore for provisions with a number of other crewmen. They walked to shore on the ice and returned pulling sleighs loaded with provisions. It was only the year before that she had been involved in a thrilling rescue of sixteen men from the sand sucker, Howard S. Gerkin, that sank during an August storm in 1926, with the loss of four crew members.

The Maitland One is important to mention, not only for her capacity as an early twentieth century freighter, but for what she meant to Beckley Beach. Only two, or maybe three, of the current cottagers recall seeing this ship. The Maitland One, was small by today's standards. Most who recall any ships entering Port Maitland, remember the much larger coal carriers, such as the Midland Prince and the R.O. Petman, formerly known as the E.B. Osler.

Had the TH&B not purchased and used the Maitland One, it is unlikely they would have developed a port facility at Port Maitland. It is also fair to suggest that the land on the east side of the Grand River from Dunnville to Port Maitland was purchased by the railway as a means of blocking access to the Grand River by its competitors. If the railway had not determined one week could be cut from the delivery time of rail cars to cities in Ohio and Pennsylvania by shipping them via Port Maitland, there would have been no need to build the tracks from Dunnville to Port Maitland. Had there not been tracks and a station at Port Maitland, William J. Warnick, Camp Teetonkah, was located roughly where lots seventy through seventy-eight are today and included the field to the north of the present day sand hills at the Siddall Side Road end of the beach. Camp Teetonkah was opened as the Official Hamilton District

who was the first to cottage at Beckley Beach, would not have had any reason to choose this location to spend his summers.

It was through him that Mr. Beckley first consented to rent tenting lots. Eventually these lots were used for many of the cottages which exist there today. Joe Warnick, says the railway was not very interested in the cottages, nor in anything on the south side of the feeder. Their only interested was that the car ferry carry her freight back and forth across Lake Erie on schedule. He suggested, "It might have been a dream of his father's to make Beckley Beach a nice resort place on Lake Erie."

If ever there was one event that changed the course of time at Port Maitland, it was the Maitland One, introducing railway management and workers to the sand and water of Beckley Beach.

Camp Teetonkah



Scout Camp. It was used by the Big Brothers of Hamilton, who shared their time with the Samaritan Club. We know the Big Brothers used the camp from the early 1920s until about 1935, when the boys moved to Ancaster Ontario. The first

record found was from the May 5, 1930 minutes of Big Brothers. It read, "Mr. Stott, on behalf of the Camp Committee, reported that arrangements had been made with the Boy Scout Association to take eighty to one hundred boys from the Big Brother Association for the period July 3rd to July 16th."

Before the boys could leave for camp, a medical was required. The boys would gather on the grounds of the Hamilton General Hospital where Dr. J.W. Tice and Dr. M.J.V. Brown volunteered their services and pronounced the boys O.K. They would board the TH&B train on Wednesday morning and head off to Port Maitland.

Under the direction of Reg. D. Stott, the boys participated in swimming, baseball, volley ball, cowboys and Indians, overnight hikes, camp-fire entertainment and treasure hunts.

A number of years ago, in commemoration of the "27th Hamilton Scout Groups" 60th anniversary, a book was published which mentioned a story about Camp Teetonkah. In a future newsletter, I will reprint this article and give credit to its' authors. If you have any stories to share regarding this camp, please get in touch with me.

Authors notes of appreciations

This is the first of hopefully many articles about Beckley Beach. Janice Hickey and Jack Curtis began gathering information many years ago from former and current occupants of Beckley Beach, with the purpose of writing a book. I joined them in 1994, with the aim of combining our efforts.

For a number of reasons, a book is not possible at this time.

Firstly, I must thank both Janice and Jack for the considerable help they have been to me in gathering information and for their guidance. Others have also contributed to my archival record about these few acres on Lake Erie's north shore. They will be mentioned in future articles. Four people must be acknowledged here and now. Special thanks to Ed Boyle, Carroll Kenney, Earl Siddall and Joe Warnick for their many hours of oral information, their photographs, and the documentation they provided regarding numerous events.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help you and I, better understand the place we affectionately call Beckley's Beach. These articles are not designed to stand the test of documented accuracy. The information comes mostly from peoples' memories and different people remember the same thing in a different way.

Thanks must also be extended to the Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation for providing a method of delivering this newsletter to the Corporation's members.

Future articles will deal with historical events, people, land ownership, the TH&B and many other subjects.

To be able to do this I need your help. If you have items you wish written about or pictures you can loan, or better yet donate, please drop me a note. Let me know how you feel about this newsletter. Please inform former cottagers about it. I will attempt to work something out so they can get copies.

The only current event that will be printed, will be a memoriam for present and former cottagers or inhabitants. Please let me know if you are aware of the passing of anyone connected with this area.

Mailing Address

E-mail wwarnick@netinc.ca
Phone 905 549-6086
Fax 905 549-6086 You must call first.

William Arthur Warnick
180 Rosslyn Ave. South
HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5