

# The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area

## Beckley Beach, Port Maitland Cottager's Association is formed

### We get a name!

A meeting of the Summer Cottagers residing on the east side of the Grand River at Port Maitland was held on Sunday afternoon July 25, 1937 in the Sacred Heart Church at 2:00 p.m. Mr. William J. Warnick (lot forty-three) occupied the chair and opened the meeting.

The following were present:

Warnick, W.J.	Shorer, Mr. _
Hayes, M.J. _	Kelly, J.E. _
Kenney T.J. _	Kelly, Jos. _
Grightmire, J.L. _	George, Albert _
Jones, Steve _	Ferguson, W. _
Ford, John _	McNally, Ed _
Ford, James, Rev.	Springstead, Mr. _
Wilson, H. D. _	McGowan, J. Dr. _
Carr, Frank _	Johnson, Norval _
Misener, J.W. _	Sinnott, J. J. _
McDonald, F. Miss _	Farrell, Ed. _
Pettman, H.F. _	McDonnell, Mr. _
Angle, M.W. _	Spray, Mr. Tom _
Hurford, W.H. _	Hall, Mr. _
Lavell, R.J. _	Sullivan, B.G. _
Strachan, A.R. _	Boyle, Ed. F. _
Culp Mr. Milan _	Warnick, Paul _
Young; Ed. M. Boyle	_ = Photo Needed

On motion by Mr. Marvin W. Angle (lot thirty-six), seconded by Mr. Val Springstead (lot thirty-eight A), it was voted that those present at the meeting and all cottagers at Port Maitland form an improvement association. The Sacred Heart Chapel had been built only recently,

association.

On motion by M.W. Angle, Seconded by Edward F. Boyle (lot fifty-four), it was voted that in future the community be known as "Beckley Beach, Port Maitland," as a tribute to the late John Newton Beckley who for many years was president of the TH&B Railway and who was largely instrumental in opening the section to summer residents.

With the above motions passed and its first president, James L. Grightmire (lot forty-two A), in place, two defining moments occurred in the history of Beckley Beach. First, the formal establishment of an improvement association took place. It was to be known as the "Beckley Beach - Port Maitland - Cottager's Association", and secondly the naming of our favourite vacation place at the mouth of the Grand River transpired.

answering a need of the Roman Catholic community

and providing a covered location to hold public meetings and fund raising events. The early Chapel consisted of a roof supported by open pillars. With no sides people would gather in front of the sanctuary, some under the roof and others outside enjoying the early Sunday sunshine. Of course on wet mornings all would tightly squeeze under the roof, standing tightly against each other. Though no seats were provided on the sand floor, all came appropriately dressed for Sunday Mass. The men with their shoes all shiny and in well pressed suits; the ladies in their best Sunday dresses. Even the children had to take a walk to the lake on Saturday night with a bar of soap in hand and have a bath.

At the front of the chapel abutting Warnick's Hill (lot forty-three) was the sanctuary. It was the only part of the chapel that was closed in for the first few years. Modelled after traditional churches, the sanctuary was situated between two sacristies, one for the priest and the other for altar boys. Very large doors were hinged to the left and right of the sanctuary and when open, wrapped around and in front of the sacristies. It is said that on one of many visits to the Sacred Heart Chapel Bishop Joseph F. Ryan commented that God should not have a sand floor for his people to worship him on. By the Bishop's next visit a solid tongue and grove wood floor and walls with large screened windows were in place. Pews were located or built giving the chapel a more sacred and comfortable atmosphere in which Eucharist could be celebrated.

This is not what I started to write about is it? In another newsletter I must tell you all I know about the chapel and the events which took place there. For now I must attempt to keep to the subjects at hand.

## **The big Purchase**

To-day Beckley Beach has the Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation to look after the needs of those who call this their summer home. The TH&B Railway, owned the seventy-five acres of land we call Beckley Beach and would not sell it to a group as loosely organized (in the railways opinion) as the Association. Until the sale of this property by the TH&B on October 29, 1990 to the Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation, it was the Association who

went to bat with all levels of government to obtain rights and security for them. The new corporation, formed to complete this purchase was incorporated on April 23, 1990 and would thereafter be known as the "Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation".

## **The Good Times**

The Association will long be remembered for sponsoring a number of housie parties and card games at the Boy Scout Camp. They held their first field day on Saturday August 5, 1939 and continued with the annual event until the mid 1950's. The field days recollect many special memories for those of us who were there to challenge our peers at three legged races and many other sporting events. It was not only about races and games but those "bon fires" on the beach in front of the present day cottage of Bud and Diane Eckert (lot fifty-three). Oh those bon fires effect me even to-day! I can't have a family gathering at Beckley Beach or anywhere else for that matter, and have a summer day turn to night without wanting to gather around a fire. In another newsletter, I will feature the field days and write about the contest and games which took place, like the baseball games, the race to Kenney's Bridge and back, the fishing contest, the horseshoes tournaments, and the many other happenings.

Saturday night Bingo was regularly held at the Sacred Heart Chapel/Community hall. This was a major fund raiser supplementing membership dues of \$1.00 per year and helping to meet the financial obligations of the association.

## **Now down to Business**

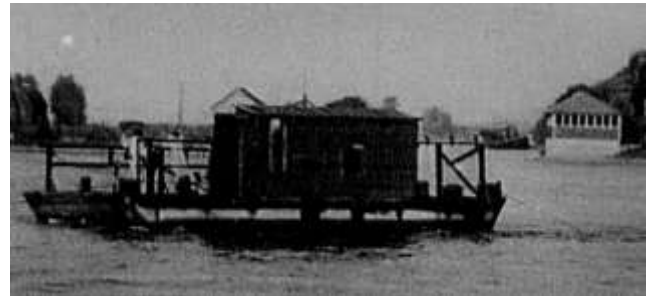


The first matter taken on by the association was the condition of the Lake Shore Road (now Erie Line). In a letter to the Township of Sherbrooke, John (Jack) Joseph Sinnott (lot thirty-nine), writes that “this road is generally in good condition except that it was badly choked with sand in several spots and in the spring and early summer it was impassible from this cause. We believe that this difficulty could be easily overcome by setting sections of sand or snow fence at several points along the lake side of the road.” Does this sound familiar?



In another letter only eleven days after the forming of the Association, Mr. Sinnott writes the Honourable C.D. Howe, Minister of Transport in Ottawa. In this letter he points out a number of concerns regarding the eight foot wide road which connects Dunnville to Stromness. A note of interest here is that Mr. Sinnott states the pavement is eight feet wide. The Department of Railways and Canals built the road in 1922 with a pavement width of nine feet. I guess it shrunk! Mr. Sinnott goes on to express the associations concern about the clay shoulders during wet times and especially at night. He states “there is quite a large settlement at Beckley Beach of both permanent and summer residents . . . In the spring, late fall and winter months they have no choice but to use this road.” What the letter failed to say was the reason for being forced to use this road during these seasons. It was because the passenger ferry which crossed the Grand River at Beckley Beach to the west side of Port Maitland was ice locked or simply out of service during these seasons. Until the nine foot road was built and in good repair cottagers from the Hamilton area would cross the river at Dunnville, then drive to Port Maitland and recross the river to Beckley Beach using the ferry.

Mr. Howe, was not the only Government Official to receive a letter from Mr. Sinnott on August 5, 1937. The Postmaster General also heard from the cottage association in their pursuit of rural mail delivery. Mr. Sinnott informed the Postmaster General that there were forty-two summer cottager and five winter homes with a population of two hundred at Beckley Beach. In an effort to support his request he stated that these residence must cross the river and go to Tom McKee’s store to get their mail. He concedes the Government maintains a ferry which he states crossed the river at irregular intervals, and only during the summer. He concludes his request, asking the Postmaster General to extend free rural mail delivery from the Lowbanks Post Office. Rural mail service began on June 1, 1938 from R. R. #2 Lowbanks and extended into Beckley Beach to the summer residence of Fr. James (Nim) Ford at (lot sixty-five)



As with most memories we have of Beckley Beach, the ferry is another story that needs to be told. It will, but as with all my recollections, I need your help.

## Electricity comes to Beckley

Another letter was sent in 1937, to E.G. Bennett, Superintendent of Ontario Hydro Electric System, in Cayuga, Ontario. In this letter, Mr. Sinnott, on behalf of the cottagers asks that information regarding the possibility of securing hydro electric service be provided. Much effort was put into this project and electric power was hoped for by the summer of 1938. In the summer of 1938 only a few cottages applied to have electricity installed. Some of the cottages to have electricity were Boyle’s (lot fifty-four), McGowan’s (lot fifty-seven), Johnson’s (lot sixty) who by the way, Mr. Johnson was an electrician and possibly the Warnick’s (lot forty-three). In September, 1939, war broke out in

Europe and anyone not hooked up was forced to wait until after 1945.

The Cottage Association did much more than the few items listed above. It took the lead in matters regarding law enforcement after a number of cottages were broken into in 1937. It petitioned the County Clerk to have a special constable engaged to act the year round. For many years various men, most notably Tom Spray (lot twenty-seven), held the position of special constable and fulfilled the needs of the association.

Erosion was always a problem, especially along the river. Many letters and petitions sponsored by the association were sent to various agencies to remedy this situation, most fell on deaf ears. The rocks had been placed on the river's edge from the pier to approximately in front of the present day cottage of Jim and Sandra Gill, (lot nineteen). For many years the association fought with one level of government and then another to have this project extended to the mouth of the feeder canal at Brown's Point. At the urging of Robert J. Lavelle, (lot sixty-four) a letter writing campaign was lunched in 1948, with what would seem an obvious result. Finally in October 1949, this project was completed. An indication of the need for this second project can be easily seen if you stand on the point at the rivers edge in front of Gill's cottage and draw a line toward the mouth of the feeder canal. Most of the open water in the inlet to the right of your line is due to erosion between 1933 and 1949. Prior to 1933, this area was a beautiful sand beach where many a handsome young lad and his fair lady bathed in relative protection from the swells of the lake.

An arch was erected in 1937, on Grand River Line just north of the present day signs informing visitors they were entering private property known as Beckley Beach. The original arch was located approximately between (lot seven), leased by Earl Barnes \_ and (lot eight), leased by the Scanlon family.

## Community Spirit gets Gas!

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 cottage. The work began somewhere on Grand River Line, possibly near the present entrance of Beckley Beach and continued to the end of Erie Line at Karen Redding's cottage (lot sixty-seven) and to John and Bev. Zon's (pier property) on Grand River Line. Natural Gas was removed from Beckley in the late 1960's and many have changed over to propane, or electricity.

Many projects have been undertaken by the Association and its successor the Corporation, in the sixty-one years since thirty-three young men and one women, now regrettably all deceased met to bequeath unity and a sense of responsibility to those who shared in their summer community. We owe them and their families a debt of gratitude for the many hours and even days of relaxation given up for the pleasure and security of their fellow vacationers.

## I need your help

When ever you see those ugly ( ) beside an item or persons name, I need to borrow a photo. Will you help? Please contact me and we can get together. I will go to you. Buffalo is not too far, nor is Toronto, so give me a call, or drop me a note.

Special thanks to Ed Boyle for much of the information used in this article.

## In Memoriam

Sandy Scheublein, died December 15, 1997, wife of Jim Scheublein, formerly lot 66.

**Hugh Russell Hockton**, died March 11, 1998, husband of Felicitas (Nee Dermody), lot 58A.

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