

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

History letter is Relunched!

In 1998 and for five years I published a quarterly history letter called *The Grand Dispatch*. It was first intended to be for the summer residents of Beckley Beach. To my delight it was well received; not only within Beckley Beach but others began requesting them. Eventually, I was sending out about 200 copies. By 2002, I was writing regularly for the Dunnville Chronicle. I was running out of original ideas and finding that the fun was waning. This caused me to lose sufficient interest to continue. I am back, as is *The Grand Dispatch*!

which I paid attention to. He continues to help with this publication. Thanks to R.J.C.



Coal Carrier *Coal Haven* leaving Port Maitland circa 1932

It was a struggle to find a name! I had intentions of changing the spelling of Dispatch to Despatch. Draft copies were sent to a number of people and it became clear changing the spelling would be confusing. Though my name may be attached to this publication, I have learned to ask for and appreciate the help of others. I am particularly grateful to Fr. Ron Cote who not only proofed *The Grand Dispatch*; he added numerous comments



Feeder Canal, winter of 2012

FINALLY A NAME!

In the end, I returned to the original name deciding to distinguish the difference by the use of the volume number found at the top of the first page. The publication will be numbered Vol 1-A for the first year and then Vol 2-A and so on each succeeding year. The A signifying that this is the second time the Dispatch has been published. Clear as mud eh! The new Grand Dispatch is now going to be published under the auspices of the Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association. (PMHA) It will be free to PMHA members - \$2.00 to others. If I am able to find sufficient sponsorship it will be free to Beckley Beach inhabitants as well. I will be working on resolving that problem before the next issue. In the end, the \$2.00 dollars is needed to cover cost, but it is also an underhanded way to get membership for PMHA! Yah, Underhanded!

INTERESTING DISCOVERY AT BECKLEY BEACH!

In January, 2012, Sylvia Weaver and I were in the company of two dowsers at Beckley Beach; Don Weaver and Ross Makey. Sylvia had asked Don and Ross if they could find the foundations of her ancestral home. I had suggested to Sylvia that this would be unlikely as I had come to the belief that Beckley Beach is today some ten and maybe even twenty feet lower due to quarrying, than it was when her ancestor lived there. To make a very long story short, what was found was not her ancestral home but what is believed to have been a number of graves. Father Ron Cote, and Sylvia Weaver put together the following article after an archeological assessment was conducted at the site in October.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT at the NAVAL DEPOT at PORT MAITLAND 2012 By Fr. Ron Cote and Sylvia Weaver

On October 15 and 16, 2012, an archaeological assessment was held at Beckley Beach, the site of the Grand River Naval Depot of 1815. The objective was to find the old military cemetery.

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

For almost two hundred years a cemetery at the mouth of the Grand River lay undisturbed. We were hoping to find the old cemetery which contains the remains of our military and possibly some of the first pioneers who were protecting Upper Canada from the Americans.

In 1918 Father Donovan, pastor of St. Michael's Church in Dunnville, wrote about the naval depot and the cemetery. "Up on the east side of the river there stood the old military cemetery which, as the years lengthened was sadly wrecked by the work of the wind on the sand and many graves were laid bare. The children of a later generation, while playing about this graveyard found strange

looking buttons, which proved to be some of those that had been on the uniforms of the soldiers buried here long ago".

An article appeared in 1880 in the Dunnville Weekly Chronicle called THE MOUTH of the GRAND written by W. J. Imlach. He writes, "A place of much interest is the military graveyard, which the drifting nature of the sand, and the inroads made by the lake on the bank...the remains of the old veterans are often brought to light; an old coffin was turned up with what was left of an old soldier and a few pieces of red cloth were found".



Sylvia and Don Weaver with Fr. Ron Cote

There is a map of 1820 showing two small crosses, which normally indicate burial sites. There are also several references in John Dockers' book "Grand River Naval Depot" indicating that the dead were buried on the naval reserve.

THE 1812-1814 WAR

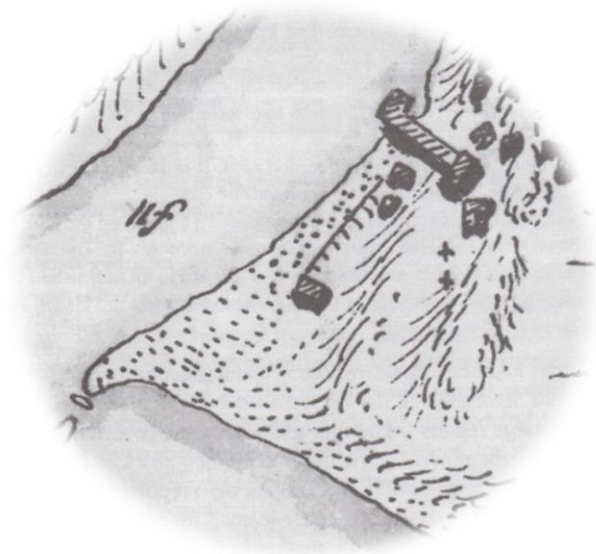
On June 18, 1812 the United States declared war on Great Britain.

American forces had invaded Upper Canada and several battles took place on land and on Lake Erie. The British were involved in brutal warfare from Detroit to Niagara under the direction of General Brock, with the assistance of local militia and the Six Nations. This was followed by years of

rebuilding the ruined livelihoods of all involved.

The Treaty of Peace and Amity between his Majesty and the United States was signed by British and American representatives at Ghent, Belgium, on December 24th 1814, ending the War of 1812. By terms of the treaty, all conquered territory was to be returned, and commissions were planned to settle the boundary of the United States and Canada.

In 1815, after the treaty had been signed, Upper Canada was still concerned about the possibility of another invasion from the United States. The Grand River Naval Depot was developed on both sides at the mouth of Grand River, with the larger portion being on the east side in Sherbrooke Township.



1820 Map of Grand River Naval Depot - Note the 2 crosses

In 1816 there were 187 enlisted men at the Grand River Naval Depot. Various types of gunboats were stationed at the mouth of the river. Lake Erie and the Grand River were the main routes of transportation and it was said that on occasion hundreds of ships and boats were anchored in the mouth of the Grand River to seek refuge from the violent storms. Many of the sick were brought to Port Maitland to recover.

By 1821 the officers and seamen had dwindled to 27. Some of their wives and children were also living at the reserve. In 1834 the Port Maitland Naval Depot was decommissioned. Although no battles had been fought at Port Maitland, there are detailed records of the various challenges to the health and survival of those at the reserve.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT...OCT. 2012

In January, 2012 Sylvia Weaver asked Port Maitland historian Bill Warnick to tour the Beckley Beach area where her 4th generation grandfather Henry Ross once lived. Ross was one of the first commercial fishermen on Lake Erie. Sylvia's husband, Don Weaver and Ross Makey came along since they are both burial dowzers and had heard of the old military cemetery. Dowsing is more an art than a science. As a rule, people who can "water witch" with practice can "burial dowse". Dowsing is used as a tool or indicator only. An archaeological assessment is necessary to confirm if a burial is present. They felt that there were areas worth investigating. So began a nine month venture: a most interesting and challenging journey.



It seemed like all we did was look into a hole!

In the spring and summer, meetings were held with Father Ron Cote, a retired priest who is chair of the board of the Beckley Beach Cottagers

Corporation. His Board of Directors, held an information meeting for cottagers in May. Permission was granted in August 2012 by the Beckley Beach Cottagers Association for an archeological assessment. The goal was to confirm that a cemetery exists and if so, to have it registered with the province of Ontario for protection. Sylvia Weaver was asked to serve as liaison with the BBCC. Gratitude is due to the Beckley Beach Cottagers' Corporation and its chairman, for allowing an archeological assessment on this very important historical site.

The generosity of our community and others was overwhelming. Many have shown interest in this project, and have offered gratis their time and service.

Dr. Dean Knight of Archaeological Research Associates Ltd. and his crew did the archeological assessment pro bono.

Jim Barnes, of George Barnes & Sons Ltd., excavator provided the necessary equipment and operator gratis. Des Raush, a local surveyor has offered his services free of charge if any additional details need to be added to the last survey done on this area.

Greg Hedley, a local lawyer has offered legal services gratis.

John Burtniak, a retired librarian from Brock University helped research the early history on the settlers and who might be buried there.

Other volunteers donated their time to identify endangered tree species, and to clear brush. Other dowsers have visited to confirm findings.

The Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association has set aside \$1,000.00 to assist with the archeological assessment. Bill Warnick also sought and received many offers for the week of research.

Donations from Father Edward Jackman of the Jackman Foundation, The Dunnville District Heritage Association.

Dr. Dean Knight, archaeologist is the President of the Canadian Archaeological Association. He was made aware of the fact that for the last 100 years it is historically known that sand was stripped from the dunes and shipped by the carload and boatload

to Cleveland to build their pier and other locations for harbor installations.

Perhaps the remains were in this sand. The influence of the many storms no doubt also had a serious impact. Due to years of drifting sand any remains that are left may be too deep for excavation.



Dr. Dean Knight watches carefully for any sign of a burial as soil is removed. Gentleman with hands in pocket facing the camera is a representative of the New Credit and Six Nations, a witness to the project.

It was disappointing that we could not find any human remains so that we could register this cemetery with the Province. It was a valiant and well intentioned effort by all who tried finding these very important historical/archeological remains. Whether the deceased were soldiers or the early pioneers we should respect their last resting place. Historically, there are references that military cemetery existed at the Naval Reserve. Perhaps on another day and at another time in future, clear evidence may be found of the final resting place of these important citizens of long ago.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Several perplexing questions remain concerning the cemetery. John Dockers' book contains the paylists of those at the Naval Depot for several years between 1815 and 1834. On some of these, added information is given regarding their place of

origin, their rank, etc. In two or three cases individuals are listed as “drowned”. In one case a man is listed as “died”. Presumably they were buried nearby.

The experienced burial dowzers prior to the assessment of Oct. 15 and 16 found indications of burials, oriented east/west (the prevailing Christian custom). At this point, no graves can be scientifically confirmed at the Naval Reserve. However the people who dowse for graves are quite clear that when human remains are exhumed, a lingering energy or footprint can be detected through dowsing. (In a similar way, surveyors who can dowse sometimes find the footprint of buried foundations or buried fence lines, even though nothing visible is found.)

This old cemetery could possibly include soldiers and their families, other civilians and workers on the Feeder canal. There were injuries, illnesses, drownings, shipwrecks, bad water from the river and the cholera plague that hit Haldimand in 1828, 32, 33, 34. Any or all of these historical events could account for the burials at Port Maitland.

The archaeological assessment of October, 2012 clearly indicated many burials, assuming that the experienced dowzers are to be believed.

Is this the ‘military cemetery’ referred to in the historical records or is it located elsewhere in the general area? Did the cemetery which was assessed exist for years before the Naval Reserve? Did it continue to be used for years long after the Reserve was decommissioned? Who were the people buried there? What eventually happened to their remains? All these questions will challenge historians for years to come.

MY MOST ENJOYABLE LAUGH OF 2012!

By Bill Warnick

Do you want to buy some swamp land in Florida? My wife returned home from Michele’s

craft store a day or two before our assessment at Beckley Beach with three wooden coffin-like boxes about six inches in length. In order to give one an appearance of being weather beaten I scrubbed it with soil, and then added a mailing label which read “Bartholomew McInnis 1795-1842 Canal Worker”

I asked Dr Dean Knight, our archaeologist if he would bury it in the brush, then have one of his volunteers find it. He soon called out, “We have something.” About twenty feet into the brush, one of his volunteers was standing over a hole with the box lying at the bottom. Sylvia Weaver and Father Ron could hardly contain themselves. I have them, but can I keep them? I suspected this may last 10 or maybe 15 seconds. After the required photos I reached into the hole and removed the item. What is it? Look at the writing! Wow, we have something! (There was plenty of time for me to lean over to one of the volunteers and ask if we had any swamp land we could sell Fr. Ron.)



After a couple of attempts to open the box, Sylvia was getting more and more fretful that I would destroy an ancient relic. Try as I might; and to the considerable protest of Sylvia I could not open it. Father Ron was asking all kinds of questions (and wondering aloud his thoughts of our historic find.) He clearly was taken up (or should I say *taken in*) by the information on the label. After a number of attempts to pry the box open I dropped it to the ground and without allowing time for anyone to

protest I stomped on it! For a couple very long seconds the air went icy cold and thick! Inside was a plastic toy man wrapped in tissue. If only I had taken a photo of Sylvia's face. What a murderous stare! I think she and Father removed themselves from the area shortly after so Sylvia could receive absolution for her desire to break the commandment which reads "*Thou shalt not kill.*" As for Father Ron, I knew for that moment, if I only had some swamp land in Florida that was the day to sell it to him!

THIS HAS BEEN OUR RELAUNCHED HISTORY LETTER.

I hope you enjoyed the new Grand Dispatch as much as I enjoyed bringing it to you. With any luck we will publish a history letter every three months with stories about the Port Maitland and Dunnville area. PMHA has many projects on the go and we need the support of volunteers and financial donors to complete most of them. To mention just one for now, we have begun a fund raising to repair and/or replace the monument at Christ Church in Port Maitland dedicated to the Reserve Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers (23rd Foot) who drowned off our shore in May of 1850 on route to London Ontario to assist in bolstering our defenses against possible attacks from the United States. It should be remembered that for many years following the war of 1812, there remained a considerable distrust between our two nations.

We are at a very early stage in dealing with this project; still struggling to decide just how big it should be, or how much money we should spend on a monument. What is a proper and fitting memorial to the sacrifice made by these men, women and even children? We hope you will take a drive to Christ Church cemetery on Lighthouse Drive in west Port Maitland to visit this grave. My hope is that you will come to the same conclusion we have. That is to say, it needs

help and you want to be part of that help. Any suggestions will be appreciated as will any financial contributions you see fit to offer.

While you are there, take some time to look at the other stones and discover the rich history this little cemetery on the lake holds for the former townships of Sherbrooke and Dunn.



Current memorial stone for the Reserve Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers in Christ Church Port Maitland

If you have any suggestions for themes, or type of article or topics you would like to see in The Grand Dispatch, please let me know.

If you know anyone who might like a copy of The Grand Dispatch, please let them know we are back in business and can be reached at the addresses below.

Mailing Address

William A. Warnick
180 Rosslyn Ave. South
HAMILTON, ON L8M 3J5
Phone 905 549-6086 Skype williamawarnick
Email wwarnick@cogeco.ca
Web-page www.portmaitland.info