

The Grand Dispatch



A brief social history of Port Maitland Ontario, and the surrounding area
Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association (PMHA) - Free to PMHA members

Artists Preserve Our History!



Art is found in Many Forms

My emphasis in the first part of this issue is about how young artists learn and preserve our history. You will see photos of projects created by young people depicting how they interpret our history. In the second part of this issue you will read about the not-so-young artists who have contributed to preserving our local history. Art is extremely important to the preservation of history, yet it

What's in the Dispatch?

All articles by <i>Bill Warnick</i>	
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is easy to forget just what art is and where it affects how we remember our past.

Timing is everything!

The photo beside was taken by Emmett Flatt of Port Maitland in the winter of 2015. Emmett entered it into a photo contest with Haldimand County where it appears on the 2016 County Calendar. We thank the County for permitting us to use it in The Grand Dispatch.

It is a photo of one of the lamps on the west pier with both the west lighthouse and the east marker light bordering the photo. It was taken in the morning looking south over Lake Erie. Emmett captured the sunrise at the perfect moment which highlights the cloud cover giving a wonderful burgundy hue under the stormy clouds. And the ice covered lamp! I understand within hours the ice was gone as was a chance to catch this photo again!

Grand Erie Regional Heritage Fair

Held at Dunnville Christian School (DCS)

It was Friday March 4, 2016 when I finally got around to talking with Joyce Koornneef the principal at Dunnville Christian School for an interview I had hoped for in June 2015. I wanted to know more about the details of a competition where I had been a judge for the past few years. Oh, I knew the obvious; the competitors are students from various schools in the Grand Erie School system including public, private, separate and home schooling. The young people represent students from grades four through eight.



Their displays are all about historical Canadian events. Some events are not obviously historical. For instance, a project can be done about the history of a breed of Canadian dogs or cats, or about the history of money or even a family history. One student from DCS did a rather unique project. He found famous Canadians who shared his birthday and put together a project on them!

Joyce told me she has attended funerals where a student had done a project on a family member, such as a grandfather, then displayed that project at their funeral.

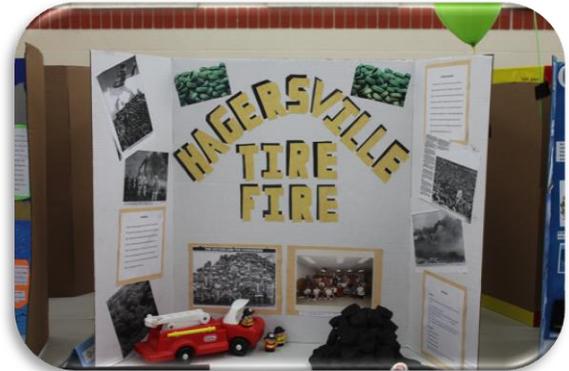
To be a judge you do not have to be an authority on any of the subjects you judge; you only have to follow a preset criteria set out on score sheets. The score sheet instructs you to look for a number of attributes. Does the student or students working in teams understand their subject? How well do the displays demonstrate the subject matter? How does the student demonstrate his or her knowledge?

Generally, there are three judges to a team. One of the judges, the one who has judged once or twice previously, would be a quasi team leader. All collaborate to determine to what extent their subject team earns points for the items mentioned above.

Each school who participates has a local fair where five projects may move up to the fair held in April each year at the Dunnville Christian School where there can be from 40 to 50 projects. This fair is a public event. The night before and immediately following the judging the displays are open for the public to view. Generally between three to four hundred visitors view the project. Two projects are selected at the Dunnville fair to represent Grand Erie at a showcase at the University of Toronto in New College Residence where groups from all

over the province attend the two day event. No judging takes place at this event.

Locally, prizes are given out ranging from two \$50.00 prizes given out by the Retired Women's Teachers of Ontario to gift certificates of pizza's from Boston Pizza and a gift basket from Sweet Retro-spec, as well as many other contributors.

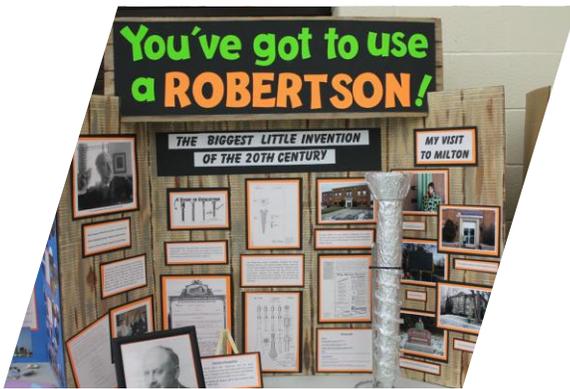


With the dry part now explained and out of the way it is time to tell you about the fun that I believe each and every judge experiences. I know I do and hopefully will continue to for years to come. Right off the bat, you can tell which kids have the "speaker" thing and which ones are still developing it. But before being so judgemental I must mention I believe for any child to be willing to put themselves out-there for old-people (and strangers to boot) to judge them, takes a tonne of inner strength. Oh, some of them show that they are scared to death, but isn't that what bravery is: "to do something that scares you in the face of that fear?" One of the best questions to ask is "why did you pick this subject?" The answers can be as varied as the subjects them self. Sometimes it may be the first time they were asked that question and may have to come up with a quickie answer, while other times it is on the tip of their tongues.

Let's not dwell on this. Let's instead tell you that each and every student takes ownership for their presentation. You can see from the project and their presentation that they work hard to get a hold of their subject, to know it, to figure out how to exhibit it and to be the **artist** needed to demonstrate it. By the way, 2016 will mark the tenth year of this event with eleven schools participating.

Schools involved for 2016 Regional Heritage Fair

1. Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elem School
2. Dunnville Christian School
3. Jarvis Community Christian School
4. John Knox Christian School (Fruitland/St Crk)
5. Credo Christian School
6. Home schoolers
7. Covenant Christian School (Smithville)
8. Haldimand Enrichment Centre via JL Mitchener Public School (Cayuga)
9. Hagersville Elementary School
10. King George Elementary School (Brantford)
11. Greenbrier Elementary School (Brantford)



Some Schools in Grand Erie do not Participate!

When questioned about the involvement of other schools in Grand Erie, Joyce told me that there are still a number of schools who have not participated. All are welcome and she would love to see more school partake. She understands the constraints put on many schools that have difficulty finding the time it takes and to put this into their curriculum. It is time consuming!

In 2014, a black speaker, Michael Toby gave the opening remarks when he spoke about the Underground Railway. I am a great fan of the Afro American spiritual and its history. Michael told of the roots of the words for this song and how a white captain of a slave ship, John Newton, found himself foundering in the sea. As many of us might do, he made a promise to God that should he survive he would change his ways. Well, he survived and for some time changed nothing. But eventually, he

found the Lord and became a minister. He eventually wrote a poem that we now know as the spiritual *Amazing Grace*. For more information on John Newton see webpage below.

http://www.anointedlinks.com/amazing_grace.html



For more information on Michael Toby see webpage below.

<http://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/2013/02/13/tenor-shares-secret-meaning-of-spirituals>

When I asked Joyce “what have I not asked that she would add?” her reply was “the excitement the students give out on Canadian history.” She continued, “they can see most of us immigrated at one time or another; there is reason their forefathers came to this country. I think if we knew our history better we would appreciate our country better.”

In closing Joyce expresses considerable appreciation to the many volunteers and donors it takes to put on this annual event. “People do a lot of things for free. We run on a really tight budget.” That being said, judges and students are treated well. I personally look forward to the light lunch served to the judges after we have done our deed. Homemade soup and sandwiches are served and good conversations take place. If you have about five hours to give on **Wednesday April 20th this year**, you too can be a judge and experience the satisfaction we judges enjoy each year as we see the students faces while they show their displays. **Just call (905) 774-5142 and ask for Marjorie Hoekstra!**



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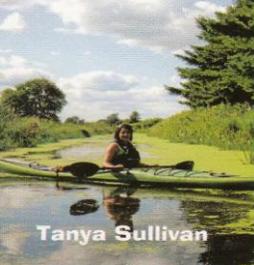
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Adult Artists contributions to the preservation of our History

We have had some interesting and talented artists who lived or live in our midst, some born here!

Most recently, I think of William Biddle who has an art gallery and art school in Dunnville. Bill is well known at the Dundas Valley School of Art. This is where I first became aware of him. I am not an art critic and don't feel confident critiquing him. I know he is good and I know he often paints from the perspective of a historical background. Recently, I asked Bill if he would paint and donate a painting of circa 1910 to 1920s Port Maitland.

Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association has commissioned a painting by William Biddle for our upcoming lottery. He is a very patient man! After he agreed I being me, told him what I wanted. He had shown me a painting he did with a ship, a pier and a small boat. I then said, let's put the ship here, the pier there and of course the small boat here. Oh, by the way I want you to put these names on the boat and the ship. A couple weeks later he called me into his studio and showed me his early sketches asking me if this was what I meant. I can think of other artists who might have called me into their studio to shoot me! Thanks for sparing my life Bill and thanks for donating the painting.



This is the beginning of what will become a beautiful oil painting of Port Maitland. You will have to wait a bit longer to learn the names given to the ship and the boat! SEE LOTTERY INFORMATION ON PG 8

William Arthur Johnson was a local painter as was his sister and father. Wm A. Johnson has a number of paintings archived in the Toronto Library art collection.



Johnson, William Arthur (1816-1880)



DALTON, JOHN JOSEPH (1854-1935)

The top painting by William Arthur Johnson is titled "Showing mouth of Grand River". The bottom painting by John Joseph Dalton is titled "The Woodcutters (Dunn Township near Port Maitland, Ontario)". Wm. A. Johnson and John Joseph Dalton are related through Col John Johnson whom I have written about (Grand Dispatch Summer, 2015) and will be writing much more about in further Dispatches. In short, Col Johnson settled in Dunn Township in 1836.

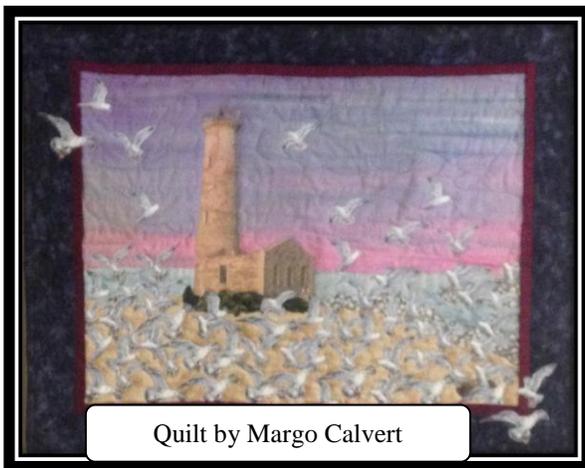
Those of you who have the right software to hear the music we play on our webpage will hear the music of Lee Murdock. Though Lee is not from our area, all you have to do to hear like music (Artists) is attend at Flyer's Café on a music night. These people sing our history. Often when you look at the words in print there is little resemblance to history, but if the right person puts those words to music the history gushes out of their lips! Here is how others describe Lee Murdock's art.

"Lee Murdock has uncovered a boundless body of music and stories in the Great Lakes. Taking snapshots from history, his songs summon the listener to take a front-row seat, to look through the eyes and into the hearts of individuals who have shaped our heritage on and around the Great Lakes. His concerts invoke a sense of place, but it is a universal place, and a timeless repertoire that celebrates the North American people, their triumphs and tragedies, work songs and pastimes."

Check out Lee's webpage to hear the artful sound of history! <http://leemurdock.com/about-lee/>

If you would like to hear Lee's music cut and paste this website and listen to some great music. "[Videos of lee murdock](#)". Or if you receive The Grand Dispatch digitally, just click on the Video link.

Then there is my sister Margo who quilts. She knew I was interested in Mohawk Island. I cannot recall asking her to do a hanging quilt of the island or maybe she is just a lot more observant of others likes than I am and did it for me without my asking.



Quilt by Margo Calvert

What got me thinking about Art?

In February, Susan Walker with some friends organized a history display at the Lowbanks Community Centre. It was a great day for flogging local history and I met a lady (Nancy Cameron) who told me about an artist who was born in the Port Maitland. His name was William Townley Benson.

A number of websites suggest Townley Benson was born in Port Maitland Nova Scotia. One even says Port Maitland, New Brunswick. I assure you, he was born on April 23, 1848 in Ontario. Actually, I am going to suggest that he was born in Stromness, not Port Maitland. I find him in the 1850 census of Stromness at age four, only ten homes from Albert Benson the Postmaster. Townley's father William was the toll collector for the Welland Feeder Canal. I am not sure of this fact, but I believe the toll station was at the Port Maitland Lock. I am unable to confirm a relationship between Wm senior and Albert Benson, but I have found conflicting

information on Ancestry suggesting a connection. I really doubt that information. By 1861, he is found in Cobourg Northumberland County without any family. By 1872 he was now living in St. Catharines. There is some possibility his first job was that of a logger. We know he worked as a banker. He married Augusta Jane Neelon. It seems that for a short period they lived in Quebec. This marriage produced three children Muriel, Eileen born in Quebec and Karl in St. Catharine's Ontario. We do not know when Townley abandoned Augusta and moved to California. There and later in Mexico, he was seen as an itinerate artist, but apparently a good one.

In 1904 his son Karl accidentally killed his sister Muriel while playing with a loaded gun. To add to the tragedy their younger sister Eileen had died only a few months earlier. Wm. T had moved to California and then Mexico many years earlier. While in Mexico he produced many paintings, mostly of the Mexican countryside. Between 1902 and 1904 he lost his estranged wife and all three of his children. Some say "he was shot by revolutionaries who mistook him for establishment in Saltillo, Mexico on July 15, 1907¹". The Police in Saltillo, Mexico suggested he committed suicide while others disagreed.



Today Townley Benson's works can still be found on various auction websites with prices ranging from 21,000 Mexican pesos (\$1,600 cdn) to 650 English pounds sterling (\$13,300 cdn) and finally \$10,300 US dollars (\$13,000 cdn).

Why so much genealogical information on Townsley Benson? Writing and research are also a form of art, though my style of art will win few awards; what I do is also an art! Some stories and this is one; are like jigsaw puzzles for a person without fingers. All the pieces are there, laid out on the table. Many with the image side up, while others with the blank side up. The problem is that

the blank pieces may fill in the missing information but you can't turn them over with your fingerless hands!

One last painting! I really owe this artist a proper apology for not featuring him and his art with more prominence. Peter Rindlisbacher generously gave me permission to use his work as I felt appropriate. Peter has never been to Port Maitland. The painting below came from a model based on a site plan prepared for the Admiralty in 1829. By this time the building had been damaged and the Depot was generally in ruins. Peter used the art of visualization and of course his artistic hand to put together this beautiful historic painting of East Port Maitland.



I have not come close to mentioning all the many varied types of art that preserve our history. Maybe in future issues I will return to the subject to tell more.

Gord McLeod of Riverside Marina looking for Gas Pump Photo.

Gord McLeod is looking for another form of art. This art takes the form of a Supertest gas pump. He is looking for a picture of a specific pump; the one that sat on the dock of the Port Maitland Fishermen's Co-op. As Gord and his partners are closing their marina for good, I do not yet have a new contact address. If you have a photo for Gord, please let me know and I will put you in touch with him.

Port Maitland "On the Grand" Launches Lottery!

On January 8th PMHA launched its first ever lottery. We are offering \$6,500 in prizes. We have a cruise on a Great Lakes ship, a week at a holiday resort, a pass for two at MarineLand, an original painting of Port Maitland circa 1920s by Wm. Biddle, a weed trimmer and two \$1,000 prizes. Stay tuned for more information and please check out our website. We also need your assistance in selling tickets. **Please let me know if you are willing to sell tickets at a mall near you or to friends and colleagues.**

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ⁱ Source: Edan Hughes, author of the book "Artists in California, 1786-1940"