

**Submitted to The Dunnville Chronicle**  
**Via E-mail; May 3, 2004**  
**For Publishing; May 5, 2004**  
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**(Word count 1073)**  
Special to the Chronicle

### **Port Maitland Lock Receives a Spring cleanup!**

**The term "Lock 27" is not correct. It is Port Maitland Lock**

On Saturday May 1<sup>st</sup> twenty-two volunteers gathered at Lock 27, in Port Maitland to cleanup the lock. There remains some question as to when this lock was last used, but recently I have been told of a use as late as 1931. Sixty-six year old Wayne Siddall, recalls, when the gates remained, and how he and his friends, as youngsters walked across the tops of them. The lock had for many years been used as a garbage dump by some of the local residents filling it to the top sill with debris. Wayne somewhat jokingly mentions that garbage with a sense of appreciation. He tells the story of how at about ten years of age he was riding his bicycle along the south apron and went head over front-wheel into the lock, landing on the garbage pile. He says, had it not been for that pile of garbage and rescuers Bert and Ted McAlonan, he might have drowned!

I became interested in Lock 27, after writing an article about it in my historyletter *The Grand Dispatch*. Up to that point, my knowledge was very limited about this relic of our past maritime history. It seems the more I learn, the more I realize how little I still know. This combination of a little bit of knowledge and the realization I really knew very little inspired me to begin a cleanup with the hope of someday putting up an information kiosk. Here we will all be able to read about the history of the Feeder Canal and of the considerable contribution Sherbrooke Township made to the development of Haldimand County.

The lock is owned by Haldimand County, making the project easier, as County officials have been helpful from the start. It may be a bit presumptuous of me to say that until my letter to former Mayor Bergstrand, the County was not aware of this historic lock, but I think it is safe to say the lock was not on their radar! I am pleased to tell you today it is flashing bright and strong on the centre of their screen!

This spring the Port Maitland Festival of History donated a table top sign and placed it on the south apron. This sign has a number of photos of the Mohawk Island lighthouse, Lock 27, Senator McCullum's former home in Stromness, and some pictures of how the Grand River Naval Depot might have looked in its heyday. Along with the photos, are articles from earlier *Grand Dispatch* publications giving the history of these structures and the people who built them. The sign is only intended to be temporary and can be easily modified as needed. The sign also contains the original text of the letter sent to Mayor Bergstrand outlining my ideas. Go take a look! Give my ideas some

thought, then let your councilors and Mayor Marie Trainer know your own views.

My original suggestions have caught on and grown. Others now suggest we replace the gates, and at the least make the lock look as if it is working. A maritime museum has been suggested, as has putting a period correct canal barge in the lock for display!

On Saturday, I met with a couple gentlemen who are in the construction and engineering field who came to see our project. It occurred to me recently we needed to know what was the most important resource we required to get the job done. I thought of money, construction equipment, stones to replace missing and damaged ones, lumber to rebuild the floor and the gates, and much more! I now believe, other than the many dedicated volunteers, it will also take people with connections to companies willing to take on one or more aspects of the job as a corporate contribution. We have already experienced this through the Company of George Barnes and Sons Excavating of Stromness, who have given us two days work with heavy equipment and manpower. We need people such as Jamie Dickens of Brrr Manufacturers, and Mike Walker of Mohawk Marine, who not only constructed the sign, but are always there with the loan of a truck, or a helping hand as needed. Fred's Work Wear provided and delivered two loads of topsoil at no cost to us, and Brenda Topp of the Donut Dinner made life more comfortable for us on cleanup day by providing coffee and donuts. John Brunskill who at his own expense BBQed hotdogs for us on Saturday and the Sherbrooke Baptist Church women took care of our other lunchtime needs. Last summer Georg Madsen of I.M.C., at Port Maitland, began the process when he cut down the heavy brush along both aprons, giving us our first look at the lock in years. Once that brush was down, it became clear this lock was worth saving.

We need friends like Art Ellis of Artell Development Ltd. in St. Catharines who has agreed to provide and deliver replacement stones. And of course we need stone masons to do the cutting. We need people like the volunteers who turned up on Saturday even though it was raining and cold. Each volunteer should be mentioned here but the list is too long. At the risk of being a bit unfair to all the volunteers who helped out, I would be remiss if I did not tell you your Mayor, and Ward 2, councilor Buck Sloat, each put on their work boots and spent the entire morning picking up garbage and becoming soaked and cold with the rest of us.

We need contacts in the lumber industry to help obtain lumber at a reasonable price or even free. We need contractors who work with locks on the St. Lawrence Seaway who can advise us and who can provide repairs, again at a reasonable rate, or as a corporate contribution toward saving this lock, which I believe is the oldest remaining visible lock from the Welland Canal system. The talent and manpower is out there. Even the desire to help is there. What we need now is to put out the call for help, and watch the talent roll in!

The weather on Saturday, worked against us and we needed to call it a day when only half finished, so if there is anyone willing to spend a few more hours on dry land raking and trimming, please let me know. Call Bill at 905 549-6086 or email me at [wwarnick@cogeco.ca](mailto:wwarnick@cogeco.ca) .