

Un-edited Version of
"Siddall Family and their Fish Tugs,"
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From time to time I run into someone who will cause the conversation to turn to Port Maitland. If they happen to be ten or more years older than myself, one of the first things they reminisce about is two well-known Port Maitland fish tugs. They say, "Do you remember the Maitland Rose, or the Earleejune?"

The Maitland Rose, was indeed a beautiful boat. For many years it belonged to John McKee and Stephen McKeown, both from old Port Maitland families. In another issue I will tell you the story of the fishing adventures of the McKee and the McKeown families. It is the John Percy Siddall family -owners of the Earleejune, - I wish to tell you about in this issue.

In all good stories there is a mystery; who was the first Siddall to begin fishing at Port Maitland! From the Dunnville Chronicle of May 18, 1900, I find a mention of two Siddall fish-boats. One is a tug named Lena, owned by "Siddall, Jones & Co." The other is a sailing boat named the Solid Comfort. It was owned by "Captain Siddall." I do not know who these Siddall's are. Clearly they are members of the Siddall family we all know from Port Maitland. I just don't know where they fit into their family tree. We know from the Dunnville Gazette that James Siddall of Port Maitland had a new thirty foot fishing yacht built by Chase Bros., of Port Colborne in September 1886. We do not know what it was named but the article tells us that it had a three foot deep hold, eight foot beam, and a capacity of six hundred tons. James Siddall, is the brother of John Wm Siddall and son of Thomas Siddall. Someday, when I least expect it I will find an article explaining just who the others are, but for now we will have to wait until that happens.

Operating a motor launch at the beginning of the twentieth century was a lucrative and fascinating business. Percy Siddall owned a beautiful river launch named the Spray, in which he carried passengers up and down the river for the purpose of tourism as well as transportation. In 1907, his cousin, George T. [F.] Little, also had a launch and catered to the same crowd. At this time Percy lived on the Beckley Beach side of the River. Percy lived with his parents John W and Henrietta. (lot 11) George was married by then, but he had grown up at Port Maitland, the son of George and Sophia Little. (lot 41) In 1907, many of the residents including John and Henrietta Siddall, owned boarding houses. There were a variety of hotels to choose from on both sides of the river. My calculations show that there were more than one hundred and twenty rooms to let to tourists who came primarily from the Buffalo NY and Erie PA area. Port Maitland, was the summer home for some very well-known American artists and serious sports fishermen as well as a regular stopping spot for the wealthy American yachtsmen of the Buffalo Yacht Club.

These early days of sailing the Grand River would steer the cousins to a fishing alliance which would lead them to ownership of a number of fish-tugs they owned jointly, as well as individually. From a book put out by the Ministry of Natural Resources called Lake Erie Fisheries Assessment Unit Report is a record which states that in 1907, Percy Siddall established the Percy Siddall Fishery with gill-nets, and a rowboat. This seems very early, as in 1907 Percy was only fifteen years of age. It was a little later that he and George went into a fishing partnership, at Port Colborne at first, jointly owning their first fishing boat. I have not been able to find out her name, but understand she was a sailing boat. During the period around 1915 they would each own their own vessels, George Little owned the Saida while Percy owned the Kaiser. In 1915, Percy was very

badly burnt in a fire on the Kaiser. George ended his ownership of the Saida in 1917, when he dismantled her. This is a bit confusing as we know that as late as 1931, James Crumb, owned a tug named Saida which sank during an ice jam just south of Earls Siddall's orange fish-house on the west side of the river. I do not know exactly when Percy Siddall and George Little began their alliance, nor do I know when they dissolved it. It is known that in December 1919, when the Maitland # One went aground off Lowes Point, George Little used the Caldera to strategically place marker buoys for the larger tugs that would eventually pull the ship free. Records indicate that in 1920, "Siddall and Little" were the owners of the Caldera. It is from this point on that records become less informative and it is believed that George sold his share of the Caldera to Percy, sometime before 1928, before Percy built the Earleejune.

The cousins had become co-owners of a wooden boat with a rather blunt bow named the Caldera. The Caldera was roughly seventy-two feet in length with a broad beam. She had been built in Erie PA in 1912, and had an engine and boiler that had once been in another boat called the Charm. Her boiler was fitted to American standards which at first caused a number of concerns. Her valves would not match up properly with Canadian equipment so her steam pressure needed to be reduced to 60 pounds before the Canadian boiler inspector would permit her to run in Canada. Percy wanted more speed and found away around this. Once he got outside the harbour, he placed a wood plank over the safety valve permitting the pressure to rise to possibly a 100 or more pounds. Shortly before arriving back in Port, he would remove the plank and return to 60 pounds. An interesting tidbit about the Charm from which the Caldera got her first engine and boiler, is that Earl Siddall had photos of many of the tugs on Lake Erie, yet he fruitlessly looked long and hard for a photo of the Charm. He had pictures of various boats by that name but was never completely satisfied he had the correct boat.

The Port Maitland Fish Co. which was located on the north side of the Feeder Canal was owned by a consortium of fishing partnerships. They were Percy Siddall & George F. Little, John McKee & Steve McKeown, Charles Crumb & John Fraser Crawford. One of the tugs that fished for this consortium was the Caldera, now owned solely by Percy Siddall. On May 8, 1931, some work had been done on the Caldera during the afternoon and a fire resulted from some unknown cause due to that work. The fire spread to the company's fish houses, destroying them. Either cut loose, or burnt free from the dock the Caldera floated into the river where it burned to the water line and sank a few feet from shore between the former ferry dock and the mouth of the feeder.

The Earleejune had an interesting, if not confusing history. She had originally been built with a composite hull using iron ribbing with wood planking bolted to the ribs. She was once a passenger-freight boat on the lakes in the Muskoka's. There is some confusion about when the Earleejune was built. We know from records of gill-net licenses issued, that Percy Siddall had a license for both her and the Caldera in 1925. Yet Carroll Kenney, who worked for the Canada Coal Company when it came to Port Maitland in 1927, says it was the Canada Coal crane that removed her from a railway car at Port Maitland. We know from the Bluebook, a record of ownership and registration of commercial craft that the eight-five foot long Earleejune was registered as new in 1931. Percy Siddall purchased the Earleejune at a very reasonable price and shipped the boiler, engine, propellor, and iron ribs to Port Maitland by train. The parts were removed from the freight car and placed across the tracks from the Port Maitland fish-house. I have an aero photograph taken in either 1928 or 1929, showing what looks like this pile of parts sitting exactly where Carroll describes. They sat there for a couple years as Percy mulled over the possibility of reconstructing her himself. Due to inquiries from my grandfather W. J. Warnick, (lot 39, 41 43) Superintendent for the TH&B, Percy was regularly being questioned by Carroll Kenney's father Tom, the station agent at Port Maitland. "What are your intentions regarding all this equipment you had shipped as scrap metal and is now being stored on railway property?" After much hemming and hawing he decided what should be done and signed a contract with Canadian Mead-Morrison Co. in Welland to rebuild the tug. He loaded the ribs on some trucks and shipped them to Welland. Percy kept a close eye on the construction of the hull of the Earleejune, visiting

United Steel every day during this phase. Once the hull was complete, it was towed to Port Maitland to have the original boiler and engine put in it. With the engine and boiler installed, she was towed back to Welland to be fitted, decked, and have her bulwarks and pilothouse built. The Earleejune would become the first Port Maitland commercial fish tub built completely of steel. The bulwarks and pilothouse made of one-quarter inch steel were much heavier than most tugs would be built normally used no more than one-eighth inch steel. This would in the end cause some problems as it made her top heavy and susceptible to rolling and pitching. To reduce some of this, it was necessary to lower the boiler and set it directly on the boat's frame. There had been a drip pan installed under the boiler creating a high centre of gravity due to the height of the boiler. With the boiler lowered, this reduced the rolling and pitching, but still the Earleejune was a bit of a bouncy boat. A fellow by the name of Artie Wolf whom had been the engineer on the Caldera, would become her engineer during her trial period. As he did not have the required certificate to handle a two-cylinder ten/twenty/four steam engine, he was unable to continue as engineer. Earl Siddall would learn the trade and for a brief time would be her engineer. For a period during the Second World War Earl was employed in shipbuilding at Toronto and Percy went to Manitoulin Island and found a fellow by the name of Carl Woods to run her. Carl would remain with the Earleejune until she was sold.

What the Earleejune, lacked in stability, she compensated for in appearance. She was a streamlined and impressive looking figure, one that caught the eye of all who saw her. This remains evident even today. As mentioned earlier she is still remembered as one of the most beautiful boats early visitors to Port Maitland remember. The name Earleejune is a composition of Percy's three children's names. They were Earl, Leo and June, thus the Earl-Lee-June or Earleejune.

The Earleejune was sold to the T. A. Ivy Greenhouses of Port Dover who removed the bulwarks and converted her into a tow tug. Ivy's had her shaft dropped to keep her stern in the water when towing as she had a tendency of riding on top of the waves. She was to be used to tow a coal barge named the TA Ivy, from Erie PA for their greenhouses in Port Dover and would be renamed the Ivy Rose. She continued as a tug for Ivy's Greenhouses for a number of years before she was purchased by Harry Gamble Ship Yard of Port Dover. At that time she was renamed Dover and use her for among other things as an icebreaker, breaking ice from Kingston to Wolfe Island in the St. Lawrence River. She was then sold to a cousin of Percy's by the name of Eddie Siddall, of Goderich. In 1997, Captain Ian MacAdam of MacDonald Marine in Goderich purchased her from Eddie Siddall. She joined the fleet of two other tugs used in Goderich for various uses, one of which is to guide the large lakers into their berth in the small harbour. The Dover is still a vibrant vessel, recently competing in "The International Freedom Festival's 24th Annual Tugboat Race" in the Detroit river at Windsor Ontario. She has like many other early steam tugs been updated as new methods of propulsion became available. Today she is powered by a V twelve Caterpillar engine. She remains a bouncy boat and of some concern to Captain MacAdams. Captain MacAdams, tells me that he is contemplating adding a keel to her in hopes of stabilizing her a bit more.

Another boat would join the Percy Siddall fleet. It was the Our Colleen and was licensed to Percy's eldest son Leo. Wally Clark would operate the Our Colleen for a number of years and would have at least one hair-raising experience on her. On December 6, 1955, while washing nets in the river, they ventured too close to some excited hunters and were shot at. A crew member, Sid Ross was struck in the arm and side. Wally was also shot but sustained no injury as the pellets did not penetrate his heavy parka. The Our Colleen was purchased from Earl, by Eddie Siddall of Goderich who fished with her for some time. Eddie sold her and she has since been sold again. I have been told that the Our Colleen is renamed, rebuilt and is presently a tour boat on Georgian Bay. If anyone knows anything more about her, I would appreciate hearing from you.

In March 1940, the Percy Siddall Fishery, now located on the west side of the river, would become the Earleejune Fisheries. By 1946 it was time to modernize the fleet, so Percy decided to have Northern Marine

of Bronte build him a new boat. Only a year before, second cousin, Maitland McKeown had a sixty-two-foot boat built by the same builder. Percy liked the new and sleek James B, and decided to contract Northern Marine to build his newest boat. The new boat would also be sixty-two feet in length and was named the J P Siddall, after himself. Interestingly enough, John Percy Siddall has been known as Percy John and Peter I, by many of his friends.

My memories of the Earleejune fisheries take me back only to the J. P. Siddall and the Our Colleen. I barely recall the Our Colleen. It is the J P Siddall I remember most fondly. I never sailed on her but often saw her at dockside. Earl, was meticulous about her care and did not like noisy boats. She was powered by a General Motors 671 diesel engine. Although she has had other engines, she still has the same type and size today. Earl built a special muffler for her -which is still on her- that rendered her almost silent. I recently wrote in my column in the Dunnville Chronicle that I could tell by the sound of its engine which boat was entering the harbour long before it arrived at the river's mouth. Not so, with the J. P. Siddall! If I happened to be fishing on the rocks or otherwise occupied near the river, she could pull up to the dock and I would not have heard her pasting me. She was always spotless and seemingly painted the whitest white of all the tugs in Port.

While owned by the Earleejune Fisheries, she was always captained by Leo Siddall, and had an interesting history. On March 21, 1953, she was seized by the U. S. government for allegedly poaching in US waters near Buffalo. After some reconsideration it was determined that she may have been in Canadian waters and was released the same evening. However the US government issued a fine of \$1,000 and insisted on receiving payment before they would return the nets. To make things more complicated and thus more interesting, the Canadian fishermen arranged a meeting with New York State officials to resolve some problems related to the seizure of the nets. Roy Muma, the Conservation Officer in Ontario, forbade the fishermen from attending this meeting without him and he was not available to attend. This led to all levels of both governments getting into the free-for-all, but eventually matters were resolved.

Less than a month later, on April 13, 1953, the J. P. Siddall was once again in trouble. The J P Siddall, the Earleejune and the Playfair all had their gill-nets seized, this time by the OPP, and William Kellar the Conservation Officer from St. Williams. It seems that a salesman for John S. Brooks Co. complained that these boats were using undersize nets. I have not reviewed any court records but Earl always suggested to me "there may have been some bad blood with certain people." Earl was the only supplier of nylon nets on the north shore of Lake Erie and these nets were being supplied directly from Du Pont and Brownell in the USA. The seized nets were subsequently lost by the Ministry and a lawsuit resulted. That is yet another story! Eventually payment for the nets was awarded to the Earleejune Fisheries.

Earl Siddall would disband the Earleejune Fisheries in March 1980, and reorganize as Earl M. Siddall. Earl sold the J. P. Siddall, to Alvin (Vinny) Scott, who would in turn sell her again to Omstead Foods Ltd. of Port Dover in June 1988. In 1991, she was sold once more to Steven Vary of Kingsville and can often be seen in either Kingsville or Port Stanley.

The last fishing member of this branch of the Siddall family is gone. He died at McMaster University Medical Centre in Hamilton on the evening of May 17, 2000. Earl was a good friend and he supplied much of the information you read in The Dispatch. He was always there to answer any question I had, and to set me straight when he knew I was heading in the wrong direction. It is for these qualities and many more yet unsaid that I dedicate this issue of "The Grand Dispatch" to my good friend Earl Milford Siddall.

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