

The Grand Dispatch

A brief history of Beckley Beach and the surrounding area

Postcards, depict Port Maitland

Port Maitland Postcards

One would not think you would find more than five or six postcards of Port Maitland/Beckley Beach. Once I collected ten, I knew there were no more! Then when I became the proud owner of twenty-five, there was no doubt that I had the corner on these precious and very rare relics. Now I own at least eight-five. When I combine my collection with that of a couple good friends, Earl Siddall and John Burtniak, I know there are likely more than two hundred. Now I feel postcard poor!



Sometimes there are notes on the backs that give just a tiny bit of insight into what was happening during a time long forgotten. One such card, sent home to Summit New Jersey, by Elizabeth who did not give her last name reads in part "tell Arthur, we have a fine 1916 Franklin, it goes like a bird." I wonder what a 1916 Franklin looked like! Many others show no more imagination than today's vacationers possess. One card postmarked Port Maitland 1913, Jesse Taylor's, was built by Charlie Ross and his sons Frank and Charlie. Remembered by many as

to Mrs Wm. Hardy at 217 Robinson St. Tonawanda, NY. from Anna, reads "Dear Mary, Am having a fine time." Signed Anna.

Postcards tell where visitors came from.

Old postcards often tell you much about where visitors came from by the addresses to which they originally sent the cards. Most Port Maitland cards were addressed to locations in the USA and localities around Hamilton. Buffalo New York, would likely be the most popular spot, however, Erie, Pennsylvania and Detroit, Michigan rank high on the list.

Port Maitland, which of course includes both sides of the Grand was a very popular vacation spot in the late part of the last century and the early part of the twentieth. It was dotted with a number of fine hotels, boarding house and bed and breakfasts.



"The Club house" it was owned by Jesse Taylor, for

many years and was best known as “Jesse Taylor’s” as my postcard collection shows from the many cards baring his name. It was later owned briefly by Harry Latta and lastly by Dolly (Irmine) Gray and bore her name. The hotel succumbed to fire in the late 1930's



Ed. Boyle (lot thirty-three) and Jack Curtis's (lot thirty two) cottages now occupy the lots where this interesting old Hotel once stood.

Not only do we unearth long forgotten establishments that once dotted this community, we learn some history about them. When we look across the river, we see the former Maitland Arms Hotel. We know the present building as the Port Maitland Apartments. The front of this structure houses Lindy's, a seasonal restaurant. Before this one storey block building, there was a three-storey wood-framed hotel, originally known as the “Martin's Hotel.” In a postcard dated April 18, 1912, we see a sign the length of the building proclaiming “Hotel Exchange Ed Martin Propr.” Sometime, possibly in the 1930's the name changed again to the Maitland Arms Hotel. If I could find a postcard of this building dating in the mid 1950's, we would discover only two floors remained, as the top floor was severely damaged in a fire and removed by the owner LeRoy Kramer. The present block structure was built by Frank and Eleanor Stouph and opened in the fall of 1963 after fire destroyed the former hotel in the spring of 1961.

A Personal Postcard

The Willow Dale, (lot eleven) not to be confused with the “Willow Dale Home” on the west side of the river was another establishment where many tourists chose to spend their vacations. I am particularly interested in this vacation spot as it is the house in which I grew up. It is now gone, torn down in 1969 by my father.



Built by John William and Henrietta Siddall, as a boarding house, this home became known as "Willow Dale." A 1920's advertisement, produced for the TH&B tells us that Mrs. Siddall is the proprietor of Willow Dale. The advertisement provides a passenger train schedule from Hamilton to Port Maitland. It also includes a list of hotels and boarding houses. A room at Willow Dale, can be rented for two dollars and fifty cents a day, or fourteen dollars per week. Acting as agent for the Canada Coal Company Carroll Kenney, purchased Willow Dale in approximately 1933.

My family moved into Willow Dale around 1954. My father Wm. Maurice Warnick, rented the front portion for a couple years until he purchased it from Canada Coal in 1955. I recall the property being surrounded with very large and old willow trees. They had become dangerous and dirty. Dad had Don Clark of Marshville remove them in 1958.

The other Willow Dale



I am likely going to make you sea sick as we continue to cross back and forth on the Grand. On the west side was another similarly named lodging house, the “Willow Dale Home.” On the face of the postcard it boasts meals and lodging. After selling the “Willow Dale Boarding House” to Canada Coal Henrietta Siddall then purchased this very large building, built and owned by Bill Ward. The YWCA from Hamilton had previously used this it as a summer camp before opening Camp Owaissa, just east of Beckley Beach.



Staying on the west side for a bit longer we find the Victoria House located where Joe Flatt now runs a live bait and tackle shop. On the back of this card is a simple note that leaves one pondering its meaning. It is postmarked Stromness September 2, 1909 and was sent to Mr Ernest Spellman c/o Morgan Flynn, Clay Street Lima New York. It There are postcards showing a few of the cottages on both sides of the Grand River. In one we see the view looking west from lot sixty-seven the property of Karen Redding. In it we see the former cottage of Father Jim Ford, (lot sixty-five) who shared it with his siblings Johnny and Katie. It is presently owned by Brad and Elaine Dittmer. Beyond the

reads “Well Ernest. I am still on the continent.” Signed J.M.D.

I wonder if JMD meant he really was on the continent, or if you knew him better, would you know it was just his way of saying hello?



There are probably more postcards of the pier and harbour than any other single card. You will recall from the January 1998 article in The Grand Dispatch, I wrote of the Maitland One’s maiden voyage. To save space and a story for later, I did not mention that new piers had only recently been build at Port Maitland. Over the years, there has been a series of piers. However, until researching the Maitland One I was not aware that a new pier was build in the 1913-1914 era. A postcard postmarked at Port Maitland and dated August 13, 1914 is titled “New Pier and Light House, Port Maitland Ont.” thus, opening the opportunity to do more research. You can see from the card the similarity between the present lighthouse and the one shown in the card. That is because it is the same lighthouse. Today it is closed in and looks a bit sturdier.

Cottage Postcards

Dittmer’s we see the cottage (now moved across the road) of Tom McNally (lot sixty-four). It once belonged to Robert Lavelle. Beside Lavelle’s we see Mrs Dunn’s cottage. I’ll be danged if I can figure out Mrs. Dunn’s first name!



Another view of Beckley Beach is found on a card which was photographed from the lake. We can see cottages starting on the left from lot forty-nine, formerly owned by Clarence and Betty Jean (Lovie) Schierer, and now by Phillip Tassie, to lot fifty-seven owned for years by Doctor James McGowan and his wife Anne. Presently owned by Vincent and Lora Hockton. Notice the raft, built by James Grieghtmire (lot forty-two-A) for the former Cottage Association.



Comic Postcards

My search for postcards never included comic ones but I was able to obtain a few copies of this style from John Burtniak of St. Catharines. I don't know in what time period the one shown was produced but obviously it was when there were some "big ones" left!



Financial Support

Starting with this issue, Paul Dermody of **P.X. Dermody Funeral Homes in Hamilton** has agreed to give financial support to The Grand Dispatch. This will help offset the cost of photo reproduction and other out of pocket expenses. Paul's family, as you know has had a cottage at Beckley Beach since Father Vincent Dermody and his sisters Anne and Clare purchased lot fifty-eight-A in the 1930's. Thank-you Paul.

A suggestion has been made to place a baby/child's picture of a current or former cottager in future Dispatch's and ask you to guess who it is. If you will send me some pictures with names, I would be happy to start this.

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