

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

Disappointing Result at Port Maitland Lock!

**County of Haldimand shows little interest in Port Maitland Lock!
When will mission be completed?**



The Port Maitland Lock before being cleaned up by citizen group. Photo by Georg Madsen

It has been ten plus years since we first began the mission to clean up the Port Maitland Lock! It was hoped, at least by me that it would become part of the Haldimand County Park system. We knew from the beginning that this hope was a long shot and to the County's credit I was often reminded of that by former Mayor Trainer and other councillors. Still we had hoped that the County would at least come on board to permit Port Maitland "On the Grand" Historical Association (PMHA) to create a park be it public or semi-private. Former Mayor Trainer and former councillor Buck Sloat gave a number of Saturdays over the years to assist in our annual cleanup and support our cause. Despite this early interest, it seems the needed support by the County just is not there.

Without any visible progress towards obtaining a lease, I met with the County's CAO Don Boyle on June 14, 2012 in what looked like a last ditch effort. Leaving that meeting I was very encouraged that our major hurdle was doable. From day one the executive of PMHA insisted we would not accept a lease or any type of guardianship agreement without having Directors liability insurance. The annual cost for insurance was well beyond any desire we had to raise funds. We are a small group in a small community. We had no desire to raise funds when most of money would be paying for insurance rather than caring for the lock.



The Port Maitland Lock after being cleaned up by citizen group. Photo by Wm. A. Warnick

My meeting with Mr. Boyle last June seemed to have answered those concerns. He suggested the County could lease the land from the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) under a maintenance agreement the railway sent me. The County

could then turn the property over to what they could refer to as 'Friends of the Lock' and the county would include this group into their insurance. Mr. Boyle assured me that the required paperwork could be completed by Christmas of 2012, some six months away. Yours truly was not so optimistic! I suggested and we agreed that I would not only wait until Christmas but would give the County one year from that meeting; during which time I would not bother any county official elected or appointed. I would not write any articles or lobby in any way to move the project along. We agreed that after one



2009 Spring cleanup - Former Innophos Plant Manager John Drewett
Photo Wm. A. Warnick

year I was free to do as I felt fair and productive to encourage the County to move on this project.

The year has come and gone and I have never been advised of any progress on the issue.

Recently Councillor Rob Shirton told me he had a phone conversation with Mr. Boyle (at my urging) about June 17th to remind him of this possible arrangement. Mr. Shirton also wanted to find out how things were moving along. It is now July 30th and still the County has not contacted me nor to my knowledge made any efforts to acquire the lock. I'm beginning to doubt that Mr. Shirton's intercessions will have any effect on the outcome.

Those who know me know that I usually do what I do with some passion and the Port Maitland lock is no exception. You may also know that my health

has not been great for some time which leads me to the conclusion that I am just not willing to continue the struggle with the County. This may be a struggle that the County wishes it had avoided in the first place.



Information Kiosk was placed at Port Maitland lock. It is now removed awaiting the County's response and hoped for support.
Lock Photo by Wm A. Warnick

PMHA correctly or incorrectly felt that the County would benefit more than it invested if it would work with us. However, it seems the County is not of the same opinion.

If a miracle occurs, and PMHA can reach an agreement with Mr. Boyle that works well for PMHA, we will surely consider it favourably.

My wife Carole and I have recently returned from shopping vacation to Niagara Falls, NY. We included a boat trip on the Erie Canal at Lockport. The history was amazing; the little items of historical interest that lay alongside the canal are the jewels that made the tour rich in history. There is no doubt in my mind that with some proper research we too have as much interesting history at Port Maitland as Lockport displays.

Port Maitland bi-centennial

In the last *Grand Dispatch* the focus was about the bi-centennial of Port Maitland. At what is known

as the four corners (Kings Row and Airport Rd) is a sign stating that Port Maitland was established in 1820. It has been long agreed by the locals this date was accurate and until it was put to the test no one has ever expressed questions about it. It was mentioned in the spring 2013 issue of *The Grand Dispatch* that we were unable to find any reference to the incorporation of Port Maitland at any of the normal depositories for this type of information. This matter will be pursued further.



Sign at 4 corners being placed in position in June 1996 Photo source unknown

At any rate, there is plenty of information that there were settlers here by that time as the Grand River Naval Depot was built starting in 1814 on the east bank of the Grand River at what is now

known as Beckley Beach.

Beckley Beach is a name cottagers gave this cottage area on July 25, 1937 after the late John Newton Beckley former President of the TH&B. This brings up a good question! What is the proper name for the east side of the Grand River at what many refer to as Beckley Beach and what it the area outside their fence called? Is it also called Port Maitland? My answer to that is YES! The entire area at the mouth of the Grand River on both sides is Port Maitland. When I grew up on the east side of the river in what was formerly the township of Sherbrooke we gave out our address as R. R. # 2 Lowbanks, which is what is still used.

Let's review; Port Maitland, Sherbrooke, Lowbanks and Beckley Beach are all names used currently for identifying the east side of the Grand River near its mouth. When I review John Docker's book *Grand River Naval Depot* I find no 1820 reference to any part of the mouth of the Grand River being called "Port Maitland". However there are references to the Feeder Canal and then Port Maitland as being situated at the mouth of the Grand River. There is no mention of which side or sides are being referred to. Below are some references from John Docker book which he sent to me for this article.

- 1815 Grand River Naval Depot (GRND) established.*
- 1827 Captain Basil Hall visited GRND, stayed at "inn across the river" -- no mention that site named Port Maitland.*
- 1828 Merritt's map of proposed canal first that names area at mouth of river Port Maitland.*
- 1829 Merritt's wife, Catherine spent night at inn probably at the mouth of the Grand River--no mention that it was named Port Maitland.*
- 1832 Dunn Township (which is on the west side of river) surrendered to Government and thrown open to settlement.*
- 1833 Agnew P. Farrell was the first Permanent settler on Lakeshore in Dunn Township near mouth of River. Dunn history states that he had no neighbours except squatters.*



Even the old Postcards simply say Port Maitland. I would like to know where this was taken! Wm. A. Warnick collection

The year 1828, is the first "text" reference to the name "Port Maitland" that will be used in this article. Since the Feeder Canal is on the east side of the Grand River, it seem likely that the east side

was considered as Port Maitland as early as 1828. I have an 1815 and 1818 map of the mouth of the Grand River which shows a ferry at its mouth, but has no reference to Port Maitland.

We should not forget the local press. Clearly the local press has always referred to both sides of the river as Port Maitland, and seldom using any of the other titles. The lock which I incorrectly named Lock 27 was actually named the Port Maitland Lock. The T.H.&B. Railway came along in the early 1900's and named their Lake Erie terminus "Port Maitland." Canada Coal did the same. The factories which were established in the 1960's all referred to their location as Port Maitland and named their facilities "Port Maitland." There is a sign at the corner of Taylor Rd and North Shore Drive showing the way to east Port Maitland, but the sign reads "Port Maitland" only with no reference to east P.M. or Beckley Beach.

So where does the Sherbrooke and Lowbanks confusion come from? Sherbrooke is simple. The former township on the east side of the Grand River was called Sherbrooke, while the township on the west side was known as Dunn Township.

The name Lowbanks gets a bit more confusing for our non rural residents. However, it is quite simple. It is where the post office is located that delivers their mail; or it use to be! In the past few years some changes have been made by Canada Post and the Lowbanks rural delivery mail is now delivered from the Dunnville office. However, there is still a Lowbanks Post Office located at Mohawk Marina.

If I was asked to put a line on a map describing where Port Maitland is it would begin at the lake from Johnson Road. I would then draw a line south on Johnson Road to Kings Row, then easterly to Port Maitland Rd. It might include all those homes on Port Maitland Road starting at the

airport. From the airport it would extend to the Port Maitland Lock on the east side of the river then jog over to the Siddall Side Rd. From there the line would go south to the lake, then back west to where it began. Since *The Grand Dispatch* is the largest publication in Port Maitland it presumes the right to define "Port Maitland" and this is our decision! However, if anyone lives outside these boundaries and wishes to inform us of their desire to be included, please let us know!
☺

What is it and where did it come from?

Recently, Father Ron Cote gave me an aluminum coin-like item his brother Peter found while clearing some brush at his cottage at Beckley Beach. Embossed on it are the words "In Memory of Port Maitland and Gamebridge Camps 1926 Made in U.S.A." I believe it is a cream or milk bottle cap. My guess is that this as yet unknown organization had a deal with a local dairy to purchase exclusively from them if the dairy would make up a memorial bottle cap.



Oldtimers - Any ideas?

My research so far has revealed no information. It should not be assumed that this camp was located on the east side of the river.

In fact there is a Port Maitland in Nova Scotia which I visited in 1995. It has a remarkably similar history to our Port Maitland. A photo of the cap was send to a local historian from that

village who is also attempting to resolve this mystery. Minimal research has also been done on the internet. One very experienced bottle cap collector advised that it is NOT a milk bottle cap. My instinct is to question that for just a bit longer. Hey, you older folks; put on your thinking caps and let's see if we can come up with an answer to the questions. What is it and what is Gamebridge?

It happened; When?

- 1815 The Royal Navy begins building the Grand River Naval Depot at the mouth of the Grand River.
- 1837 A storm washes away wharf and four buildings at the Grand River Naval Depot.
- June 16, 1841 Records of Christ Church Port Maitland, titled "Township of Dunn Register of Burials - In Christ Church Ground, Lake Shore" are found; the record on the first line tells us that Wm. Smith age 3 years died of Whooping Cough. This record indicates that he was the first person to have been buried at Christ Church Port Maitland. This may have been during the time when the parish used a log house as their church.
- June 20, 1841 Records found of Christ Church Port Maitland; it appears that Henry James Carter, son of James and Sarah Carter who was born on April 17, 1841 was the first to be baptized at Christ Church Port Maitland. This may have been during the time when the parish used a log house as their church.

I Goofed!

Peter, at Freedom Oaks Golf Club on Sandy Bay Rd gave PMHA two great golf shirts for us to raffle off at the airport in July. I forgot! Peter, we will put your donation to good use. My apology and thanks.

Please support our Sponsors!

We have procured ten sponsors who have made it possible for us to distribute The Grand Dispatch free to you. It is out of generosity and support of PMHA that they are offering this sponsorship. Please support them whenever you are in need of their product or services. In the event that you are unlikely to need their assistance, please send them a note or email telling them of your appreciation for their support. We hope these sponsors will remain with us into 2014 and beyond, when we will no longer be distributing this history letter free. We have a number of projects on the go and hope to use their sponsorship in supporting these goals.

I was unable to get Robert Rowe's email address on his card rrowemotors@hotmail.com

If you or anyone you know would like to sponsor THE GRAND DISPATCH, please have them contact us at the address given at the end of this history letter. In the event that we have too many sponsors for a particular history letter, we can rotate them so some sponsors will not feel obliged to sponsor every Grand Dispatch.

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

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39 Norfolk Street North
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