

The Grand Despatch



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

"This Sad and Melancholy Catastrophe!"

Port Maitland, Ontario and the Wreck of the Troopship Commerce, 6 May 1850

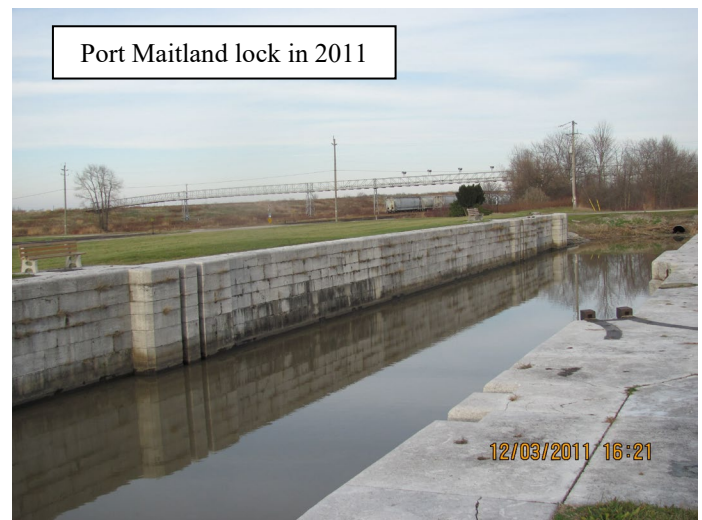
By Kyle McIntyre

The broadsheets and nautical journals of the mid-nineteenth century register shipwrecks with the same detachment that can be read in the daily traffic reports of a contemporary newspaper. The human elements in the events are downplayed and the material costs neatly summarized as insurance estimates. Yet in any tragedy it is precisely the human element, when investigated in detail that awakens the imagination. Spans of history and geography shrink when in the narration of events one can glimpse courage and endurance, desperation and calamity.

In the summer of 1842 the troopship *Abercrombie Robinson* was wrecked in Table Bay, off Cape Town, South Africa. All 700 people aboard were rescued, but only after standing on a heaving deck through the night. When it came time to evacuate, lots were drawn and the men moved off in an orderly fashion, their steadiness later commended by the Duke of Wellington himself. Ten years later, on 26 February, *Birkenhead*, en route to Port Elizabeth in the Cape Colony, with elements from six regiments on board, ran aground off Danger Point. As with *Abercrombie Robinson*, the troops remained in steady ranks while family members were loaded into the lifeboats. The commander did not allow the men to swim off for fear that they would swamp the boats. Only after the vessel broke in two was the *saive qui peut* (save yourself) given, too late for 438 people left on board. Still, as one survivor wrote, the soldiers "received and carried out their orders as if embarking for a world's port instead of Eternity."

This same spirit was shown in Canadian waters by the men of the Reserve Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers (23rd Foot), on a clear spring night in 1850. The troops were sailing on Lake Erie aboard the Canadian steamer *Commerce*, bound for Port Stanley, and thence garrison duty in London, Canada West. It was meant to be a routine trip for soldiers accustomed to shifting around the Empire.

It became a journey interrupted by tragedy off Port Maitland, an event which touches the community even today.



The village, located at the mouth of the Grand River on Lake Erie, at the time possessed the finest harbour on the north shore of the lake. Following the War of 1812, it was a Royal Navy depot and continued in this capacity for some time after the end of hostilities. The building of the Welland Canal, and its initial connection to the Grand, ensured that Port Maitland prospered as a transshipment port. Lake vessels moving through the town were a familiar sight, but the arrival of two troopships at the end of the locks would probably have caused more than usual interest. Events were to intensify this interest and ensure that one of the ships would become part of local folklore. For a moment, Empire and hinterland community were intertwined. The effect was enduring. The wreck of *Commerce* is the event which distinguishes Port Maitland along the Lake Erie shoreline.

At 5:00 on Wednesday morning, 4 May 1850, the Reserve Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers embarked from Lachine, in Canada East. Number seven and part of number twelve company were aboard the steamer *Earl Cathcart*, while number eight and the remainder of number twelve company sailed on *Commerce*. It was

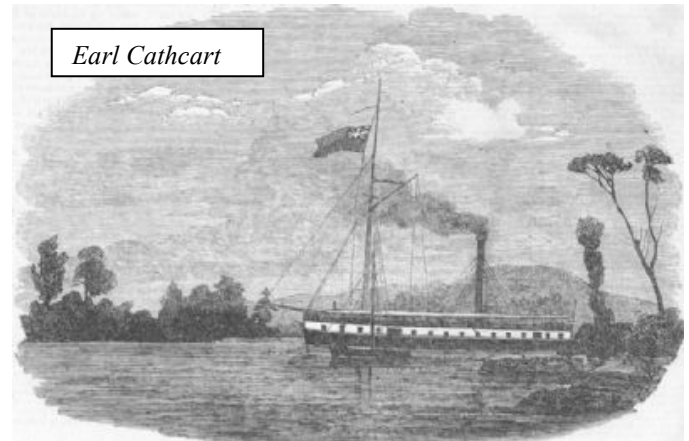
not unusual to move military supplies and personnel by civilian lake vessels. This had been going on since 1820, despite an oft-ignored Admiralty order directing all military cargoes to the Royal Navy. There was no RN presence on the Great Lakes and the *Commerce* and older *Earl Cathcart* served Army needs well.

Contemporary observers noted that the *Commerce* was “the most perfect freight boat yet launched” and “a beautifully modeled craft.” Called a “Pollywog” because of a paddle wheel being indented in the aft of the vessel, the vessel had “an abbreviated stern like that of a duck.” Built by John Quain of Portsmouth, just west of Kinston, Canada West, *Commerce* was, according to the builder’s certificate, a “Round sterned Carvel built Steamer” without quarter galleries or figurehead. With one deck and one mast (vessels of this era were still expected to carry sail in case of emergency). *Commerce* was registered as a 178-ton sloop, 134-feet in length and twenty-three across. These dimensions made it one of the smaller class of steamers specially built for the dimensions of the second Welland Canal. *Commerce* was owned by MacPherson and Crane of Kingston and Montreal, the largest freight forwarding firm on the Canadian side of the Lakes.

Commerce’s journey up the St. Lawrence and up Lake Ontario was uneventful, and the sloop entered the Welland Canal several hours ahead of the slower *Earl Cathcart*. Upon moving through the locks toward Port Maitland, sentries were posted to keep deserters from making a break for shore and thence to the nearby American border. Early on Monday, 6 May, *Commerce* arrived at Port Maitland; *Earl Cathcart* followed at 5 a.m. The latter’s paddles had been damaged, probably in the journey through the locks, and both ships waited until evening and the completion of repairs to *Earl Cathcart* before getting underway again. As afternoon passed into evening, the officers aboard *Commerce*, Captain (later Major) Frederick J. Phillott, Lieutenant Sir Henry O. R. Chamberlain, and Lieutenant Frederick P.R. Delme Radcliffe, amused themselves “picking up the fossils of Lake Erie, etc.” Around 10 p.m. the officers turned in to their cabins, and half an hour later *Earl Cathcart* began its run into the lake. Captain Cochrane of *Commerce* allowed the slower vessel the lead so that both ships would arrive at Port Stanley at about the same time.

Around 11:50 p.m., with the troops and their families asleep on the covered main deck or below in the forward hold, and the officers in their bunks, *Commerce* cleared the mouth of the Grand River at Port Maitland. Captain Cochrane placed the vessel on a southwesterly course to

avoid the shoal (now known as the Tecumseh Reef) which lay just off the village. The night was clear, with a warm breeze out of the south brushing across the water. Cochrane stood beside the helmsman as his steamer moved farther out into the lake. About two or three miles out from Port Maitland, Cochrane spotted another vessel, which was the steamer *Despatch*, carrying cargo between Port Stanley and Buffalo, New York. *Despatch* appeared to be running for Port Maitland light, so *Commerce* was turned slightly to starboard, keeping clear of the shoal and still giving *Despatch* a good berth.



Despatch did not, however, change course and continued to approach *Commerce*. Cochrane could see that *Despatch* was going to cross his bow, and so turned the ship slightly to port, the shoal again limiting his ability to move any more to starboard. (Later accounts indicated that *Commerce* had two lights mounted on the crosstree of the mast and that this sight, plus the angle of *Despatch*’s approach, made Captain McSwain aboard *Despatch* mistake *Commerce* for a schooner heading into the canal. Sailing vessels of this period usually carried a single light at the bow of the ship, not at the masthead, a practice which contradicts McSwain’s explanation of events.) With *Despatch* now approaching dangerously close *Commerce* was put over hard to port, but *Despatch* edged farther into *Commerce*’s path, instead of keeping on its previous heading. With a collision appearing unavoidable, at approximately 12:10 a.m. (6 May, 1850) Captain Cochrane ordered his engines stopped.

Soon after the engines stopped the two ships collided. *Commerce* was struck ten to fifteen feet from its stem, on the starboard bow. The officers, troops and families were jolted awake by the impact and from the cries of those on the main deck. The officers rushed to the hurricane deck, working quickly to get those below on top. Within two minutes of the collision, *Commerce* began sinking at the bow, the fo’c’sle (A superstructure at

or immediately aft of the bow of a vessel, used as a shelter for stores, machinery, etc., or as quarters for sailors.) already filled with water. It was here that the first victims of the wreck were claimed, as Captain Phillott indicated that three or four of the married men and their wives were sleeping in the forward hold and did not have enough time to escape the rush of water into the holed bow.

Meanwhile, on the top deck the women were "shrieking fearfully" and the men "groaning and praying" until Phillott and the subalterns had the troops fall in and be quiet. Once the troops were assembled, they "behaved with the greatest and most commendable steadiness," forming two ranks along the deck. Phillott assured his charges of their safety and exhorted the troops to remain steady, to which they answered, "We will, we will, Sir." An attempt to lower *Commerce's* boats failed, as some of the troops and their wives tried to get into it too soon. Instead, they fell into the water before the boat was completely lowered. The men trying to disentangle it were thrown into the water as the ship began to list to port. Phillott managed to save two of these people, but "the others [he] could not see again."

Within three minutes of the collision the lower decks were completely flooded and the incoming water drowned the engine fires. Fortunately, James Robertson, the ship's engineer, had the presence of mind, despite being injured, to release the safety valve, blow off the steam and prevent an explosion. At about 12:20 a.m. *Commerce* listed slightly to starboard, righted itself, and began to settle. It then plunged on its starboard side and rolled over, the survivors scrambling over the hull as the vessel careened. As it did so, Phillott ordered the troops to get a footing on the side and hold tight. Some of the men were unable to get a proper grip and slid into the lake. A few of the married men and their wives attempted to swim to *Despatch*, which lay some fifty yards off the starboard bow. They never made it. It was now, reported Phillott, that "the greatest loss of life which I have so much to deplore took place."

Captain Cochrane, two of his crew and Assistant Surgeon Douglas Grantham of the 23rd and George Parker, a young boy who had been travelling as a guest of the regiment (he was the son of a Montréal military officer), had climbed the mast to escape the sinking.

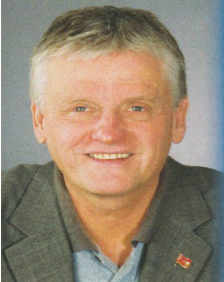
Cochrane and his crewmen climbed back down again before *Commerce* keeled over, while Rogers and Grantham were thrown far from the ship's side. Neither could swim and were lost in the tangle of rigging. The tragedy was particularly sad in Grantham's case, as he had recently married in Montréal and left behind a young wife and infant.

Those on *Commerce's* side had difficulty keeping their footing as the hull was now just barely afloat. Phillott noted that the side of the hull was about six inches under water, and this situation combined with the night swell and the ship's rolling to throw many survivors into the waves. "It was," he lamented, "utterly out of my power to help them." After ten minutes of balancing on *Commerce's* side — and thirty minutes after the collision — *Despatch* finally drew alongside *Commerce's* keel. A rope was tossed to the survivors and the slow work of moving them to safety began.

There was some controversy over why Captain McSwain waited so long to move to the rescue, but later reports indicated that he had to deal with problems on his own damaged ship before picking up survivors. The passengers aboard *Despatch* reportedly urged McSwain to make for Port Maitland, but he decided to remain on the scene "so long as a life could be saved." (In the weeks following the accident Cochrane himself praised McSwain's rescue efforts. Cochrane did this in the face of press accusations that he was to blame for the collision.)

As *Despatch* held station beside the sinking *Commerce*, the survivors climbed aboard with the aid of ropes and the arms of the ship's crew. Once on board, the troops exhibited a range of emotions as men learned about missing friends and families. Anguish and exhilaration met each enquiry. Lieutenant Radcliffe was especially taken by the troops' concern for their officers, observing that "almost every man pressed forward to shake hands with me when I appeared" safely on board. Captain Phillott was the last person to leave *Commerce*, jumping from the side of the hull just as the ship disappeared below the surface at about 12:40 a.m.




Continued on pg 6



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Continued from pg 3

On board *Despatch*, most of the survivors were in their nightclothes, soaked and exhausted. McSwain remained at the scene until everyone was plucked from the water, and then the survivors were huddled into a warm cabin where some began to slip into weary sleep."

When no more survivors could be found in the lake, *Despatch* was turned for Port Maitland. The residents of the town had already rushed to the beach to render whatever assistance they could, drawn from their beds by "the screams and shouts of those going down...reverberat[ing] through the forest." The scene which greeted them as *Despatch* was secured to the quay was desperate, and had a profound effect on both the men and the community. Upon landing at Port Maitland the troops and other survivors from the 23rd were formed up and marched about a quarter of a mile to where the gunboat HMS *Minos* was berthed." Radcliffe called the short trek "a sorrowful march...some with bare feet, most but with few clothes." Once below decks on *Minos*, a "dismal roll call" was taken. *Commerce* had set out from Montréal with 121 officers and men, twenty women and fourteen children on board; ninety-four officers and men, twelve women, and nine children now answered their names.

The caretaker in charge of *Minos*, Gunner Henry Hatch, quickly set about providing what few comforts he could for the Fusiliers. Blankets and day quarters were the best he could offer on such short notice, but these were gratefully accepted. Captain Phillott meanwhile remained active throughout the early morning of 7 May, sending telegrams to the military authorities in Kingston, London and Montréal, and buying provisions for his charges. Between four and nine o'clock he completed these duties, finally returning to *Minos* to fall asleep in exhaustion.

A relief committee was immediately established at Port Maitland, with locals bringing in blankets and clothes. Dr. John Jarrow, the Senior Magistrate at Dunnville (the nearest large community, to the north of Port Maitland) visited the survivors aboard *Minos* and noted that a "quantity of clothes had been sent to them and on the whole they [were] tolerably comfortable," although "making a strange appearance for soldiers."¹⁵ *Despatch* sailed back out into the lake but could find no trace of where *Commerce* had gone down. "A few hats and cloaks were found floating," wrote Radcliffe, "and nothing else." No bodies had yet washed ashore. (By the next day some boxes,

including those with regimental papers and money, would appear. Arrangements were made for reporting each find.) By 9 a.m. *Despatch* started for Buffalo, travelling slowly along the coast to that port, taking with her the surviving crew from *Commerce*, thereby hampering any impending investigations.

On 8 May *Earl Cathcart* steamed back for Port Maitland to pick up the survivors and take them to Port Stanley. While the vessel made its eastbound passage across Lake Erie, some of the bodies from *Commerce* were recovered. They were towed ashore in pairs by ropes, and their footwear was removed for redistribution to those on board *Minos*. Henry Imlach and W.I. Hicks, the wardens for the Port Maitland Anglican Church, later reported considerable difficulties in getting the victims buried as "the bodies came ashore at different intervals" over two months. This required hiring local workmen at a moment's notice to help perform burials. To identify the recovered bodies, Captain Phillott ordered his subalterns, Chamberlain and Radcliffe, to remain at Port Maitland. The two lieutenants were also to attend the Coroner's inquest into the sinking which was then being organized.

On 9 May, when the first division of the Fusiliers' left wing arrived at London, the remnants of the second division boarded *Earl Cathcart*, landing at Port Stanley the next day. On the 11th the survivors arrived at St. Thomas, and one week after the disaster they rejoined their colleagues at London barracks. It was testimony to the stamina of the troops and their families that they returned to their lives and duties in such a short time.

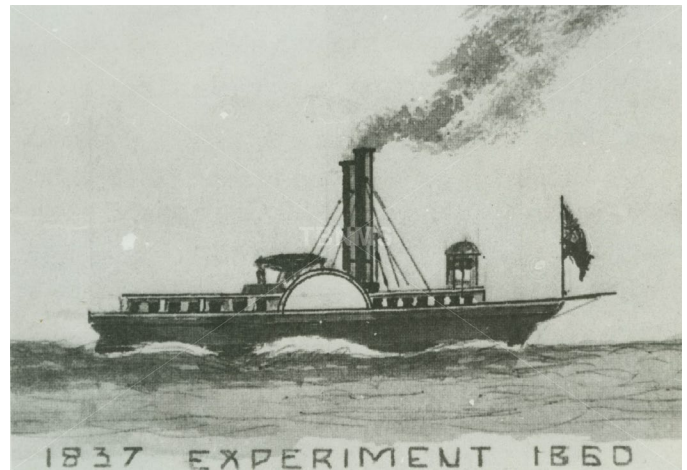
The arrival of a new regiment was always cause for excitement in the hinterland towns. The 23rd's previous visit to London in 1843 was accompanied by a fanfare in the local press and from the band of the 14th Foot (West Yorkshire Regiment), the regiment it was replacing. Their return in 1850 was markedly different. Tired and ill-clothed after the shipwreck, the *Commerce* survivors presented a pathetic comparison to the scarlet-clad files of seven years earlier. Charlotte Harris a local belle noted in her diary the arrival of Captain Phillott and his group. "They scarcely knew me," she wrote of her acquaintances among the officers, "I am so much changed. We were mutually glad to see each other." Still, the survivors seemed to be in good health, although Miss Harris noted that Phillott seemed to have "undergone great bodily fatigue from his severe exertions during and after the melancholy accident. This statement could be made of all the survivors as they entered their new barracks.

While the 23rd settled into its new station, on 17 May a judicial inquiry into *Commerce*'s sinking took place at Port Maitland. The masters of both vessels involved were kept under £500 bail, with trials being set for the Niagara Assizes in the fall. A report of the case was expected to be made to the Attorney General to satisfy both the public and Horse Guards (British Army Headquarters) that the matter had been properly investigated for a civil suit, and the Coroner, Dr. Jarrow, had little doubt that this decision would go against *Despatch* and Captain McSwain. Thus, the community maintained an intimate connection with events surrounding the wreck. Certainly, they would have been the talk of the town.



A week after the sinking only one body, a child's and a few boxes had washed ashore. *Commerce* had not been found, although the ship was only in forty feet of water. The remainder of the wreck victims were found when *Commerce* was finally raised in June. Port Maitland's church wardens, Imlach and Hicks, continued to keep a detailed list of the bodies and items which washed ashore in the months following

the incident. Theirs was a particularly difficult task, as most of the bodies floated to the surface during the work to raise *Commerce* from the lake bed. They were towed to shore "to prevent any exposure to unnecessary atmosphere," as the bodies were in advanced states of decay. This latter circumstance "rendered them dangerous to handle" and did not make it easy to get assistance with the unpleasant task of burial. Imlach and Hicks therefore petitioned the provincial government for remuneration for "parties who have performed a very disturbing and by no means pleasant task," and for payment of the cost of the burials. The problem was that there was no provincial law for repaying burial expenses. The wardens asked government to consider the serious nature of the cost being incurred "on such a small community who considers [sic] themselves called on for the honour of the Province and by every Christian sympathy to render common attention to all such unfortunate cases." They were backed in their claims by Dr. Jarrow, who emphasized that with all of those involved from the community, the work of recovering and interring the victims was "attended to in a very creditable manner."



The requests were forwarded to the provincial Executive Council for consideration, and then "put by" – that is, shelved. The Provincial Secretary's Office informed Imlach and Hicks that the government did not have funds available for the bills submitted (cost for twenty-four coffins, at 7s.6d: £9.0.0; cost for helping recover twenty-four bodies, at 5s. each: £6.0.0; cost of mass burial: £9.0.0.), and that since the bodies recovered were those of soldiers or members of their families, the military authorities

should be contacted for recompense.

As for *Commerce*, the steamer *Experiment*ⁱ, along with *Luther Wright*ⁱⁱ and *Ansler Cobb*, were commissioned to raise her, an operation that would have been clearly visible from Port Maitland. Chains were run under *Commerce* and attached to its beams and then to pontoons on the surface. Onboard jacks on the salvage vessels brought the wreck to the surface. *Experiment* then pushed *Commerce* to shallow water, where it was repaired and towed to Harbour. After being partially rebuilt at the Shickluna yards at St. Catharine, *Commerce* was completed after a year at August Cantin's yards in Montreal and renamed *Reindeer*. After being sold to Holcomb and Henderson of Montreal, *Reindeer* was placed in the grain trade to Chicago.

While *Commerce* was undergoing initial repairs, the routines of garrison administration were attended to in London. All measures to re-equip the Fusiliers were approved by Horse Guards, which also forwarded its concerns and praise for the survivors. The Duke of Wellington, Commander-in-Chief, had read Phillott's report of the tragedy and expressed "his approbation of the conduct of both the officers and men onboard *Commerce* under most trying circumstances." New greatcoats were requested to replace those lost in the sinking, and on 11 June Horse Guards ordered Assistant Surgeon Seaman to join the 23 in London to replace the late Dr. Grantham.

Paperwork was also prepared through the summer regarding Gunner Hatch's role in the aftermath of the *Commerce* episode. Hatch was praised by the commander of the Fusiliers for his assistance at the time of the wreck and for his services after the survivors had left Port Maitland. The officers of the 23rd were especially intent to see his conduct brought to the notice of the Admiralty. His kindness in tending the survivors aboard *Minos* was "materially benefitting to the Service, by preserving the health of the Soldier, when cold, wet, and nearly naked." Besides securing the belongings salvaged from the wreck, Hatch also volunteered to supervise the burial of the thirty-four bodies that eventually washed ashore. By mid-September Horse Guards confirmed receipt of these testimonials agreed with their purpose, and passed them along to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

In the autumn of 1850 Captain Phillott and Lieutenant Chamberlain travelled to Niagara to give evidence for the Crown relative to the sinking of *Commerce*. In the

district assizes the case did not go to trial, but Captain Cochran was exonerated for his role in the tragedy. Captain McSwain never appeared in court, and had a "true bill" found against him. It was understood that he had left the country. In later years was related that he rowed across the Niagara River to the US. He later re-located to Iowa.

Like some Victorian melodrama comes to life, ill-luck followed many of those associated with the wreck of *Commerce*. Even the re-named *Reindeer* could not escape further tragedy. While sailing to Chicago in 1857, it was caught in a violent autumn storm on Lake Michigan on 16 October and again wrecked, this time off Ludington, Michigan. Now, however, the destruction was more complete: *Reindeer* broke up on the shoreline, scattering debris along the beach and leaving as survivors only two firemen from a crew of twenty-one. Charlotte Harris, the young diarist who recorded the arrival of the survivors from the 23rd in London, was herself lost with her children on the night of 24 April 1854 when the steamer *Eldorado* sank in the Mediterranean after a collision.



The Royal Welch Fusiliers left behind the memories of *Commerce* and Canada when they sailed for home in 1853 aboard HMS *Vulcan*. With its passage secured from North America it might have been safe to assume that the regiment left behind the bad luck which seemed to trail it in the colony. Unfortunately, the men were returning to Britain to partake in an even greater tragedy, the Crimean War. Amalgamated with the First Battalion, the officers and men of the Reserve Battalion were in the opening battles of that conflict. Lieutenant Redcliffe, along with many others from the regiment, died at the Battle of the Alma in 1854. After living through the cholera epidemic of 1849 and the *Commerce* wreck, he was killed thirty yards from a Russian gun battery, leading his men in a charge to capture it. Major

Chester, who commanded the Reserve Battalion at London, was also a fatality in this battle, alongside 200 other ranks killed or wounded.

The wreck of *Commerce* is a distant event, and compared to similar tragedies is of lesser significance. However, some importance can be derived from its study. Because of its limited scope, a detailed examination of the sources provided a view beyond the broad issues of history. It serves as an archetype for using minor episodes to promote the human equation in historical analysis. Omitting the interaction of lives from the narrative provides only a state account of the affair. The substance of this study is the people – at the group level between the troops and the community and at the individual level in the attentions of Gunner hatch and church wardens Imlach and Hicks. Drawing out the details of the wreck and its aftermath also affords a more subtle effect: the simple commemoration of those people

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Note: *There remains some mystery about fifteen of the deceased. As only twenty-four caskets were provided by the members of Christ Church, it is likely that this was all the bodies that were found. It was commonplace in those days for bodies which drifted ashore to be buried on the shore and often no mention was ever made of them having been found. In my research of a much later date, I found an article where this was done and all hell breaking loose. Obviously, by this later time, ideas had changed!*

List of Souls lost on *Commerce* presented to Christ Church Port Maitland

At a solemn service in Christ Church at Port Maitland, PMHA presented a scroll listing the thirty-nine known souls who perished in the early morning hours of May 6, 1850. Until recently, we were not aware of the names of the deceased except for Dr. Douglas Grantham and a young lad by the name of George Parker.

The scroll was created by local artist Dan Rykse of Lowbanks.

The turnout for the occasion was, unfortunately, not well attended. The scroll was placed in the sanctuary during the service, covered by the flag of Wales.

Father Lyon reminded us of the night when these

thirty-nine lives were suddenly taken. “One’s destiny can be bright; shining like letters cut into crystal, visible its whole length until its fulfillment. Our destiny can be dark, unreadable, unexpectedly coming to an end with tragic results. Such is the destiny we remember today. As we recall the sinking of the *Commerce*, we thank God for those who survived, commend anew into God’s hands the souls of those who died and thank God for the persistence of Captain McSwain in refusing to ground or port his ship for as long as he thought he could save people from Erie’s icy water.”

After Communion, Father Duncan Lyon, the wardens of Christ Church and the executive of Port Maitland, “On the Grand” Historical Association gathered in the sanctuary as we unveiled the scroll. The scroll will remain at Christ Church as a memorial for not only the thirty-nine named persons but also for those whose names we do not know.

Envelopes were in the pews for those wishing to make a donation to Christ Church cemetery restoration fund. If you would like to make a contribution to Christ Church restoration, please send your cheque to “Christ Church Cemetery” c/o Rhonda Shepherd 113 Port Maitland Rd. Dunnville ON N1A 2W6.



L. to R. Bill Strong, Suzanne Austin, Wendy Strong, Dan Rykse, Bill Warnick, Fr. Duncan Lyon, John Swayze hiding behind Janet deVos, Barry Fraser. Sadly Fr. Lyon died on July 1, 2018.

Until this spring, while searching for the names of those lost on the *Commerce*, I had not been able to find them. Many articles about this tragedy had been researched but no one provided the names of the deceased. I took a look at archived Buffalo NY newspapers and there were the names of all the deceased. I then looked in British newspapers and found them in numerous articles. The finding of the names was the seed for our idea to present the plaque to Christ Church.

Below is a list of the men, women and children who

drowned on the *Commerce*.

Aldridge, Thomas	Private
Aldridge, Wife of Thomas Aldridge	
Beamer, John	Private
Buckton, Arthur	Private
Butler, Child	
Butler, George	Sergeant
Butler, Wife of George Butler	
Evan, James	Corporal
Flanigan, James	Private
Grantham, Dr. Douglas	Asst Surgeon
Griffin, Henry	Drummer/Civilian
Griffin, John	Private
Haberfield, Joseph	Private
Haberfield, Theodore	Corporal
Jones, Isaac	Private
Maskey, Child of Private James Maskey	
Maskey, Wife of Private James Maskey	
Mewitt, Nicholas	Private
Mewitt, Wife of Nicholas Mewitt	
Moore, Alfred	Sergeant
Moore, Wife of Alfred Moore	
Moore, John	Sergeant
Paine, Child of Corporal Daniel Paine	
Paine, Wife of Corporal Daniel Paine	
Parker, George	Civilian
Peake, Thomas	Private
Price, Edward	Private
Pritchard, Robert	Private
Rees, Thomas	Private
Ryan, John	Private
Ryan, Michael	Private
Ryan, Wife of Michael Ryan	
Sharples, Henry	Private
Shiple, Child of Edwin Shiple	
Taylor, Thomas	Private
Ward, William	Private
Warner, Wife of Thomas Warner	
Weaver, John	Private
William, Edward	Private/ Mess

A Couple of Trees Planted at Cairn

History is not all about the past; it is also about the future! Over the past couple of years the cairn property at Port Maitland has had a number of Ash trees and scrub brush removed and today looks a bit bare. Fortunately there were no old or historic trees removed. On June 5th Wes Zantingh and his crew from GrandErie Home Hardware and Garden Centre planted two trees that should outlive the youngest of us.



The trees chosen were a hard maple called Autumn Blaze and an oak called Northern White. Both were chosen for their longevity and their fall colours. It was also very important that they would survive in our climate. My inspiration for the oak tree was also personal. A number of years ago I visited Washington and while walking along the reflection pool I grew tired and told my granddaughter and sister to go on without me. I sat on a bench under a row of massive oak trees and thought how tranquil it was. I considered their history and wondered how many Presidents had walked or rested beneath these majestic trees. I wonder how many Prime Ministers will sit in the shade of our Oak tree!

Autumn Blaze: This is a hybrid between the Silver Maple and the Red Maple, which means it is a fast growing with the toughness of both trees it originates from. It grows well in our local climate. It will tolerate both wet soil and severe drought. It will live up to two hundred years and possibly longer. It has lush green foliage in the spring and throughout the summer. In the fall it changes colour to a very lush red which will give great colour to our little park.



Northern White Oak: This tree is a slow growing tree, growing only 12 to 14 inches per year. Its life span ranges from two hundred to four hundred years and will grow to over one hundred feet while spreading wide if grown in open spaces. A White Oak in New Jersey is estimated to be over six hundred years old. They will sexually mature at around age twenty, but most will not produce acorns until age fifty. Some may grow as wide as their width. This tree was also chosen for its ability to withstand drought and for its fall colours. This is the tree that I referred to in my opening sentence when I referred to history also being our future. There is an expression that goes something like this: “when an old man plants a tree, he will never get to sit beneath its shade!”



Bob Campbell beside Northern Oak



Bill Warnick beside Autumn Blaze Maple

There is one more tree to be planted. In 1915, a soldier at Vimy Ridge by the name of Leslie Miller picked up a number of acorns scattered on the ground under a forest of badly damaged English Oaks. He returned them to his home along Kennedy Road in Scarborough, Ontario. To make a long story short there is today a project at Vimy Ridge to reestablish these trees on property immediately adjacent to the Vimy Ridge Memorial. To this end a foundation was set up to plant trees there which are taken from the trees grown from Leslie’s acorns. Several hundred trees are currently being grown in a French nursery and will, when ready be planted alongside the memorial. A fund raiser was established where trees grown from Leslie’s trees are being grown and sold to us in Canada. I purchased one this spring. Unfortunately it is very small and not yet suitable to be planted at the cairn. It is now potted in my back yard. My granddaughter has promised to care for it should I not live long enough to see it planted. She will someday plant it at the cairn.

As mentioned, this tree is called an English Oak when grown in England. In Europe it is known as the European Oak. It is now grown throughout the world. They normally live to over four hundred years old and one is known to have lived two thousand years. The heartwood of these trees has been used for fine quality furniture; while during the era of wooden ships their branches, which are known to be very twisted, were used for the ribs of ships as the shipbuilder used their natural bends to fit into the hull of the ships. This meant the ship would have a stronger frame than it would have otherwise had the wood needed to be bent to fit.

Learn how to support the Vimy Oak Foundation!

To learn more about these trees and the Vimy Foundation, open this hyperlink or type [Vimy Foundation](#) in your web browser.

To purchase a Centennial Tree and support the Vimy Foundation Centennial Park and education programs, please contact Jeremy Diamond, Vimy Foundation Executive Director, at jdiamond@vimyfoundation.ca or 416.595.1917 x 1.

PMHA considering the possibility of winding down!

No, it won't happen this year or next, but we have set a possible date to end as October 2020. Three of our executive will be seventy years young by the end of 2018 and the other two are having their concerns as well. We need a new influx of blood. I have been at the helm since 2005 and it is time to let someone else take charge. Though our membership numbers are very acceptable, out volunteers are a bit like picking up hens teeth from the sand at the cairn!

We need volunteers at the cairn and for our displays. We had to turn down a display at the Dunnville Airport in July as we were short of volunteers. We also are in great need of people willing to be on and then to take over the executive. That is what will save us from closing!

You should know that we have some ideas of how to go out with a bang, but have not decided the details yet, so making that public will have to wait a bit. Your ideas are welcome.

Be assured we will continue maintaining the Cairn property until at least then and maybe we will be able to find some way to go beyond that.

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE!!

We still have a number of members who have not renewed their membership. We need your support if we are going to continue mailing out the Despatch. You may not be aware but our sponsors are interested in how many Despatches we mail. The more we mail the more likely I am to find sponsors. Membership numbers are

important! Please consider catching up and please join if you are not presently a member.

Please make payment to Port Maitland, "On the Grand" Historical Association and mail to Bill at address below.

President	Bill Warnick	Hm 1 905 531-4350 Cell 1 905549-6086 president@port-maitland.ca
Vice President	Bob Campbell	vice@port-maitland.ca
Financial Sec.	Janet deVos	1 (905) 701-5078 finance@port-maitland.ca
Recording Sec.	Vacant	
Tourism & Promotion	Wendy Strong	1 905 774-7028 promotion@port-maitland.ca
Dir. (Webmaster)	Bill Strong	1 905 774-7028 web@port-maitland.ca

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS

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No Response from Fusiliers!

Unfortunately, even after several attempts to contact the Royal Welch Fusiliers Regimental Museum in Caenarfon, Gwynedd, North Wales I have had no response from them. A couple years ago we even sent a money order requesting information and received no reply. I am sending them a copy of this Despatch. Hopefully they will respond!

ⁱ Steamer *Experiment* 1858, Jul Collided with unknown propeller near Mammy Judy Island. 1858, Dec 3 Seized Wallaceburg, ONT for violation of revenue laws. 1859, Nov 11 Sunk St. Clair Flats, MI. appeared broken in two. Declared a total wreck Mar 13, 1860.

ⁱⁱ Steamer *Luther Wright* sank at Oswego New York;