

# Port Maitland, “On the Grand” Historical Association (PMHA)

The purpose of the Association is bring together those people interested in the diverse heritage of the former townships whose borders touched the Grand River between Port Maitland and its source

## Accomplishments and Recognitions since 2005

### What you should know!

By Bill Warnick

#### Port Maitland Lock

The Port Maitland, “On the Grand” Historical Association formed in 2005 to provide an avenue for local adults and youth to learn the history of the townships along the Grand River.

We are in need of financial sponsorships and volunteers for us to continue with the aggressive agenda we have followed since our incorporation in 2005. Below you will read of the many projects we have completed in these short numbers of years.

We began our venture at the former Port Maitland Lock where for a number of years we maintained the property until the Canadian Pacific Railway raised our annual rent beyond our means.

contribution to the Grand River watershed for the cleaning up of the lock.



PMHA receiving Watershed Award on October, 30, 2008 Betsy Smith, President of The Lower Grand River Land Trust Inc. Mayor Marie Trainer, Bill Warnick, Councilor Lorne Boyko



West Wind being repaired in Port Maitland Lock in 1901

In our newsletter the Grand Dispatch we told many stories of the lock and surrounding area. Pictured above is a sailboat called *West Wind* from Buffalo being repaired after a collision it had on Lake Erie.

The lock had become overgrown and used as a garbage dump for years. In 2008 the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) recognized our

Lots of activities took place around the Lock as we took it from an overgrown garbage pit to a place where you would love to sit on one of the four benches provided by PMHA's supporters.

#### Cairn at Port Maitland

In 2012, PMHA conducted an archeological assessment at Beckley Beach in an effort to find graves of the soldiers based at the Grand River Naval Depot from 1815 to 1853. No graves were found but this led to the construction of an informational cairn at the Port Maitland East Park. This is a lovely place to sit on a bench under the large maple tree and listen to the soft rustling of the willow leaves. Benches were provided by donations

obtained through PMHA. The view of the mouth of the Grand River is to my judgment the most beautiful on the Grand aside from possibly the Elora Gorge.



With financial assistance from the County PMHA went on to raise approximately forty thousand dollars to build the cairn.

The Cairn commemorates four subjects which include the Grand River Naval Depot, the Fishing Industry, the Feeder Canal and Port Maitland Lock, and finally the Naval Depot Cemetery Archeological Assessment completed in 2012.

## Commissioned Paintings

### Sir Frederick Haldimand

After a very unofficial survey by yours truly it was discovered that few people, especially those of European decent know where Haldimand County got its name. To my surprise our indigenous friends from the Six Nations almost to a person knew where the name came from. No, it was not a town in Europe. It was named after Sir Frederick Haldimand who is best known for being the person responsible for moving the Six Nations people to the Grand River after their courageous support of the British during the American Revolution.

It was decided that one method of promoting Sir Frederick Haldimand was to approach the county asking for their involvement. In 2018 a presentation was made before the Haldimand County

Council petitioning them to permit a portrait of Sir Frederick Haldimand to be hung prominently in the new administration building. If approved PMHA would commission William Biddle to paint this portrait. Approval was given and the portrait was commissioned. It was ready by 2019 but we wanted it to be unveiled during the opening of the new building or at a separated date. We were ready and along came COVID. The portrait was unveiled in July of 2022.



### Trilogy – Three Decades at Port Maitland



The first painting is what I call a trilogy as it depicts there decades of Port Maitland's early 1900s century history. First there is the wood framed west pier



(circa 1900). Then you will see the pleasure steamer *Olcott* (circa 1910) which made regular round trips from ports on Lake Erie's south shore and back. Finally, we see the *Silver Spray* (1920's into the 30's) owned by Percy Siddall giving a tour which honestly would more likely have been in the river, but I asked the artist to take some liberties.

### Sinking of the Commerce Plaque installed at Christ Church.

On Sunday May 6, 2018 we attended a service at Christ Church in Port Maitland where we presented the congregation with a memorial scroll naming the thirty-nine souls who lost their lives when the ship *Despatch* struck the *Commerce*. You can read the full story in our [Grand Despatch](#) of Spring 2018.



Scroll with the names of the 39 who died on the night of May 5/6 1850 when the *Despatch* struck the *Commerce*. All are buried in Christ Church Cemetery

### Sinking of the Commerce painting being commissioned

On a dark foggy night of May 5/6 1850 a ship by the name of *Commerce* left the Port Maitland Lock and headed out on the lake. She was not to go much further than several hundred metres before a collision occurred between her and another ship called the *Despatch*. Thirty-nine soldiers and family members would be lost from the *Commerce*. They would be buried at Christ Church Anglican Cemetery in the days following. Peter Rindlisbacher has been commissioned to paint what this horrific scene might have looked like. PMHA

will be framing and donating a three foot by two foot print of this to Haldimand County.

### Grand River Naval Depot

Our next painting is of the Grand River Naval Depot as it might have looked in 1817. This painting was painted for John Docker to be placed in his book "*Grand River Naval Depot*" It was painted by Peter Rindlisbacher a world renowned painter of sailing ships and military scenes. I had been doing considerable research on this area and discovered that for several decades in the late 1900's and even into the 1950's sand was removed from this area for various reasons including the piers in Cleveland as well as for sanding railway tracks. After a lot of consideration and review of records I asked Peter if he would revise the painting to show the depot up more on a hill. This was done in 2022. Prints have been donated to Haldimand County; all its libraries in the southern part of the county and to the Dunnville Legion.



### Memorial - Vimy Tree

During the battle of Vimy Ridge a Canadian soldier Leslie Miller from Scarborough saw that the oak forest at Vimy was being destroyed by the ensuing battle and he gathered up a number of acorns found on the ground. After the war he took them home and planted them on his family's farm. In 2015 cuttings were taken from Miller's trees to be repatriated to Vimy Ridge where today all the original oaks are absent. Additionally acorns were

planted and the resulting trees were made available to responsible organizations in Canada as a fund raiser toward the replanting around the Vimy Memorial in France.

PMHA purchased one of these trees and planted it in Thompson Creek Park in the fall of 2021. With a grant from the County and funds collected by PMHA a memorial will be dedicated on April 15, 2023 so we will never forget the sacrifice our soldiers made on those April days in 1915.



### Books for School to Dunnville High School

This year between PMHA and the Dunnville and District Historical Society the Dunnville High School received 72 local history books and a cash donation from PMHA to create a local history section in their library. More funding will be made available as time goes on.

### New Sign for Port Maitland

We do not know when the original sign was placed at the corner of Port Maitland Road and King Row Road, and Dover Rd., but we know it was replaced in 1996 by the late Fred Moyer along with the help of some unknown friends. Fred's sign had grown old and years of weather have taken its toll. With this in mind PMHA replaced it with a new one on October 15, 2022 updating and revising some of the information.



### Awards

#### GRCA - Mentioned on page one

#### County of Haldimand Heritage Award 2015

This Award aims to promote an appreciation for the value of heritage within Haldimand County.

#### Ontario Historical Society – Dorothy Duncan Award 2015

In 1967, The Ontario Historical Society established an awards program to honour individuals and organizations who have contributed significantly to the preservation and promotion of Ontario's heritage. The Awards program is intended both to acknowledge the work of outstanding individuals and organizations, and to raise public awareness of Ontario's history and the people who work to preserve and interpret it.