

# 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

## PMHA taking Grand Despatch Digital!

### Printed Grand Despatch to cease

Effective January 2020 the Grand Despatch will be a digital version only! As I have hinted in the past Despatches, your active membership has grown older and we have had no success finding younger people to take over. We need to reduce our workload if we wish to continue. It is our intention to maintain the cairn at Port Maitland and hopefully develop an interest in Mohawk Island. Sponsorship is getting harder to find which means money also has become a bit of a problem. We will be making a proposal to all our sponsors for 2020 and beyond; which will reduce their cost while providing us with more funds. Obviously, not printing and mailing the Despatch will save us considerably.

I have not decided what any new publication will look like. It may be a simple newsheet or it may continue in a newsletter format similar to the Despatch. There will continue to be something!

The last printed copy of the Grand Despatch will come out this fall and with a bit of luck and our finding some special funding will be a very special and higher class issue than we have ever produced in the past.

A motion was passed at our executive meeting on July 26<sup>th</sup> to reduce your membership fees to \$15.00 for two years which is half of what you pay now, but you only pay once every two years. All renewed membership will run until Sept 30, 2021. This will also reduce our cost and work. We hope all will continue to support our great cause.

These matters will be voted on at our AGM on October 29<sup>th</sup> in the Garfield Disher Room at the Dunnville Library. For those of you who do not have a computer to receive a digital issue, we will work with you to see what can be done.

The good news this month is we have an interesting article written by Cathy Blott where she tells us . . . Well just read it! See pg 2.

### Is the work at the Cairn Worth it?



Paul Brittain and grandson Dane Brittain of St. Catharines enjoy some special time fishing at the Cairn in Port Maitland. Great hair on Dane!



Chris didn't tell me his last name. Here he is with a Bowfin otherwise known as a Dogfish.

## Painting of Sir Frederick Haldimand is Completed

Sometime in 2020 PMHA will present the painting to the County of Haldimand to be hung prominently in the new County Administration building in Cayuga. I am hoping the County will agree to have a great shindig with lots of press and dignitaries present for the event. I trust the County is listening, Hint, Hint!

It is my wish that we can convince all the schools in Haldimand including; Catholic, Public and Christian Schools as well as the libraries to purchase a print of Sir Frederick and hang them prominently in their buildings. Another Hint!

Why did we put ©2019 William Biddle on the painting of Sir Frederick? Just watch "Google Images" in about a month. You will find this photo. That's why☺!

Thanks to Bill Biddle for doing such a great job of painting our namesake.



## Scratching the Surface of Port Maitland, Dunn Township History

by C. Blott, July 2019



This painting of Port Maitland © 1952 by Sue Raney was a wedding gift to my parents and depicts of a section of the raised wooden dock / boardwalk running along the west river edge showing fish shanty, net drying reels, fishing buoy, outhouse and a light stand among other items from the river industry.

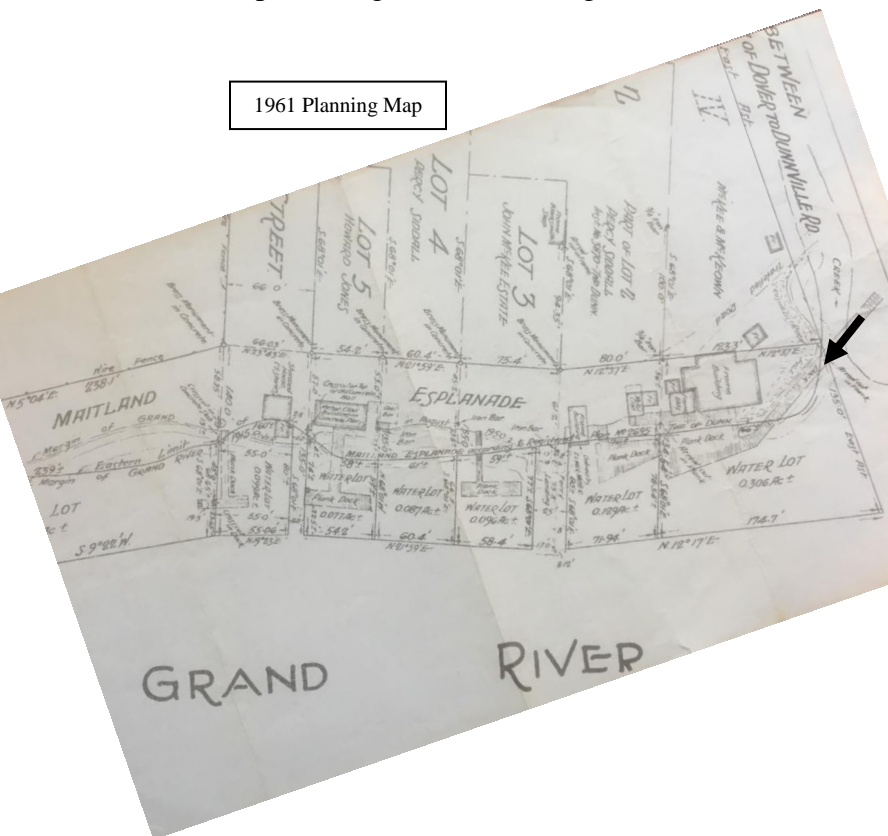
When I was a kid biking in Port, business on this side of the river had passed its heyday but I have always thought of Port Maitland as Sue painted it in 1952 and thought of the bustle of the fishing industry, ship building and repair, net drying and repairing, fish drying and processing.... this is my dream of Port Maitland and for the industry that remains today.

Thank you to Bill Moyer, Allan Asher, Terry Powell, Joe Flatt, Pete & Anne Marie Flatt & Sylvia Weaver for providing context for Sue's painting. The light shown in the background is thought to be the light at the Co-op, as recalled by Bill Moyer, which led me to estimate Sue Raney stood on the docks somewhere by the creek. Air photos from other times show less continuous boardwalk and as Bill Moyer recalls it was an annual effort to rebuild piers and docks after winter and ice jam damage.



The 1961 planning map of property ownership and buildings along the west shore of the Grand River from Kings Row to the first tributary upstream is from the era of Sue Raney's painting, and shows the most extensive boardwalk. An arrow marks the possible vantage point of the painting upstream of the Co-op buildings (North is to right).

1961 Planning Map



Map & air photo courtesy of T. Powell. Publisher's – Note; The 1929 photo comes from a very large photo taken by Jack V. Elliott, circa 1929.

The 1929 Jack Elliott air photo left to right: rental boats at Fred Clays, Siddall's metal clad Fish Shanty, the old ferry dock, Moyer/Featherstone Fish Shanty and the Port Maitland Fisherman's Co-op (T. Powell Shipyard). Air photo from today (2018) left to right: Siddall Fish Shanty, old ferry landing, Moyer/Featherstone Shanty, T. Powell Shipyard.

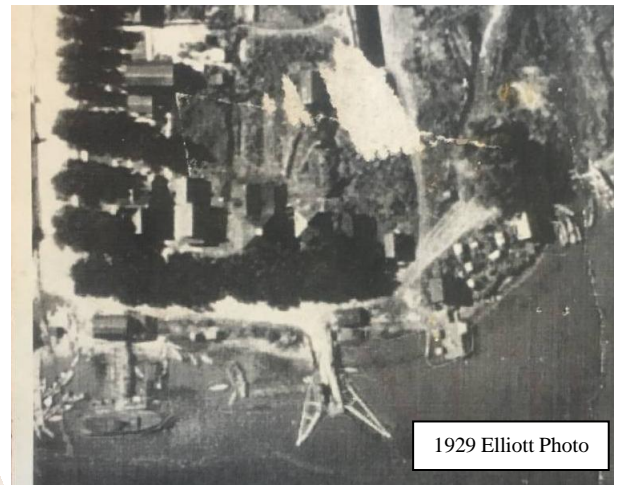



Photo below ©1970s showing homes and shops of Port Maitland. From left to right: Jones home, Siddall home, Grant home, a cluster of 3 Fisherman's Co-op buildings and the Moyer /Featherston Fish Shanty.



Photo Courtesy of T. Powell

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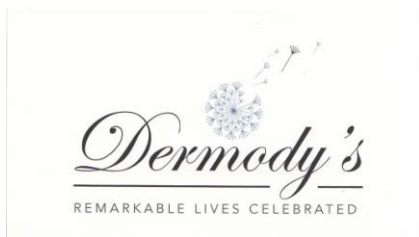
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Continued from pg 3

The Fisherman's Co-op in Port Maitland, Dunn Township was built by the fisherman on the property adjacent to the north end of the Port Maitland Esplanade, present day location of T. Powell Shipyard. Carts and Movers (right) were kept at the Co-op and used by the fisherman to transport Squares of fish to the Co-op for processing.

Commemorative wood plaques to the commercial fishermen, businesses and fish tugs out of Port Maitland, Dunn Township on side of old Moyer/Featherstone Shanty, which remains today (below).



Boat rental, blacksmithing, bait & tackle supply, salvage and diving, McKees general store, the hotel and bed n' breakfasts were some of the businesses in Port Maitland that supported the fishing industry and tourism.



Bill Moyer's Father Cleaver and Grandfather Wm. Elmer Moyer were commercial fisherman out of Port Maitland. They made their own nets at home including using scrap lead to make the net weights. Most fishermen identified their nets with the inscriptions stamped into the lead weights as well as by customized net buoys. Pictured below are fish net lead weight stamped E. Moyer and the mold that molten lead was poured into to make the weights



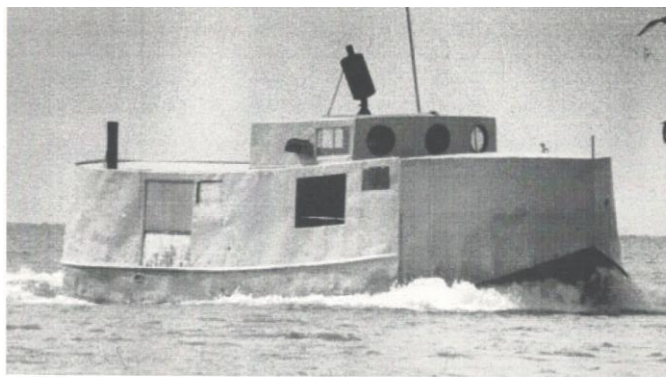


Bill Moyer's grandfather's boat the *Maitland Clipper*: full nets were unloaded off the port side into Squares (fish boxes) and carted along the dock for packing at the Co-op and sent off to market.



Fish tug MAITLAND CLIPPER, owned by Elmer Moyer. Her hull now sits threadbare near Sault Saint Marie Ontario.

The *Dollar Boat*: as relayed by T. Powell, the *Dollar Boat* was so named because Fuzzy only had a dollar when they started building the boat. He spent some years paying it off fishing.



Fish Tug *THE DOLLAR BOAT*, built by Steve Powell & Lorne (Fuzzy) Featherstone, in 1949 for Fuzzy. She was later sold to Abram and Alton Hoover, then to Dave Mathew of Port Dover. She is presently (1999) at Pointe au Baril Station Ont., Georgian Bay. Current owner is unknown.

Postscript by C. Blott:

Before the First World War, when grandpa, Robert Blott, was a young teenager, the Blotts sold the farm at the end of the Aitkens Road and moved in to Dunnville. As dad, Wm. R. Blott, speculated it was a hard life farming the clay and at the time there were 2 Blott brothers, Tom and John, working the original farm so it would have been difficult to make a living. Meanwhile in town and across the country there were great opportunities opening up in business, infrastructure development, utilities and farming. Grandpa and his brother William (1892-1917) eventually started into banking in Dunnville, other siblings moved west where there was business and larger farmlands to work.

With the coming of the First World War and injuries received during service, grandpa was offered training and became a medical doctor and practiced in Dunnville. Dad said his father always regretted the selling of the farm... he loved farm life.... and had always wanted to buy it back. The old farm was not available to re-buy, but in the 1930's grandpa arranged to buy another family farm at the lake from aunt and uncle Emi & Sack Cotter. Part of the arrangement was that he would take care them in their old age.

Grandpa and dad both farmed the land until it was eventually planted in the late 1980's to become a managed tree farm. This is the farm on eastern half of Lot 22, where the family continues to live now, about a mile west of Port Maitland.

Dad grew up in Dunnville and spent a lot of time at the lake. The gang of boys often rode their bikes into Port and dad recalled there being about a dozen fishing boats tied up at the docks when he was a kid in the 30's and early 40's.

*Thank you Cathy for this great story.*



*THE DOLLAR BOAT* at Pointe au Baril Station ON.  
May 15, 1999

### I meet up with Rick Wilkins!



Carolyn & Rick Wilkins and yours truly at Fieldcote Museum

Rick Wilkins is a Hamilton boy who told me he was fortunate enough to summer at Beckley Beach as an infant and remained there until his teens. He is the son of Dorothy Hurst; famed Tiger Cat Majorette leader. His grandfather Manny Hurst was an early Beckley pioneer; lot 46. Rick added that he is proud of his jazz associations with the likes of The Boss Brass, Oscar Peterson, and Ed Bickert. On Sunday Aug. 11<sup>th</sup> the Fieldcote Museum "Music at Fieldcote Summer Series" in Ancaster hosted a tribute to Rick by Toronto's *Ensemble Vivant*.

I found out about this from Don Denman a former longtime cottager at Beckley who directed my wife to an article in the [Hamilton Spectator \(Aug 1<sup>st</sup>\)](#) about the upcoming event. Thanks Don!

My day was overloaded with things to do but after delivering a number of Despatches along the lake with the assistance of Betty Siddall, then a small family get together at my sister Margo's I headed off to Ancaster to meet a man who I had not seen for nearly sixty years. We have had some email correspondence but no visual contact. I had little idea what Rick looked like but he found me by looking for the "bushy white bearded man."

Of course I wanted a photo with him and his wife Carolyn so I asked a young lady if she would take our photo which she did. At the end of the evening Catherine Wilson the Ensemble Vivant's spokesperson introduced Rick who went to the stage. As we were leaving the concert the young lady came to me all excited saying "I had no idea that was Rick Wilkins!"

For more information on Rick check out [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).

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