



Announcements

Geoff Peach Memorial Scholarship

Two grants per year of up to \$1,500 are available to students interested in conducting research along the Lake Huron coast.



The Geoff Peach Memorial Scholarship Fund was created to continue Geoff's work and that of Lake Huron Coastal Centre. It is available to university graduate students (Masters and PhD) with conservation and environmental research interests. Applications for Great Lakes research will be considered, however preference is given to Lake Huron research projects. Applicable research topics

include: Biodiversity, Coastal Processes, Dune Conservation, Water Quality, or Plastic Pollution. To learn more about this great scholarship opportunity click the link below.

The deadline to apply for 2024 is February 28th.
The successful applicant will be chosen by mid March.

[Application](#)

Celebrate Lake Huron Coastal Centre's 25th Anniversary by joining our 'IS THE COAST CLEAR?' conference!



Date: This is a one-day event on Friday, May 5th, 2023

Location: Oakwood Resort in Grand Bend, Ontario

This conference is an opportunity for people to come together to share their knowledge, experience, and expertise about how to better care for Lake Huron. We are looking forward to hearing from professionals that are doing exciting and impactful work on Lake Huron. Click below to apply to give a 20 minute presentation.

If you're interested in becoming a sponsor for the 25th anniversary 'Is the Coast Clear?' conference please express your interest through email by clicking the button below.

Speaker
Application

Become a Sponsor

STAY TUNED!

Conference details including how to buy tickets will be posted on our website www.lakehuron.ca and social media (@coastalcentre on Facebook Twitter and Instagram) later this month.

What is Buried in Your Beach?

“Why was there a Government Wharf at St. Joseph?”



During low water levels, the piers of historic wharfs can re-appear, like the former pier near the Lake Huron Water Supply Plant north of Grand Bend (and the topic of our previous May 2022 e-newsletter article that included the photo of my dog Hailey. Most Lake Huron docks and wharfs are located at river mouths or next to marinas. But not at St. Joseph which had its very own 'government wharf'



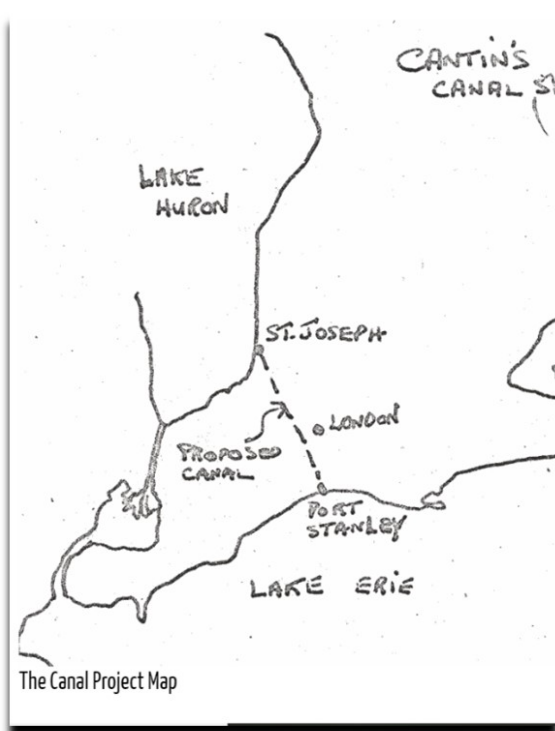
that existed for several decades in the early 1900's. St. Joseph, by the way, is located halfway between Grand Bend and Bayfield and is nowhere near a river mouth or marina.

So why a wharf at this location and why funded by the federal government? You may find it hard to believe it was to help promote the digging of a harbour and a canal southeast to Lake Erie? Yup, you heard correctly! A proposed shipping canal that would provide a 'shortcut' to Lake Erie. If built, it would avoid 241 kilometres of travelling through the Lake St. Clair corridor, consisting of the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. The Lake Erie terminus was planned to be 5 km west of Port Stanley.

The French-Canadian Connection

According to the St. Joseph Historical Society website, the developer of the St. Joseph townsite and the architect of this audacious 'canal idea' was Narcisse Cantin, a French-Canadian entrepreneur who imagined the construction of a substantial 'city' along the shores of Lake Huron at St. Joseph with rail lines and shipping canals. He and other local supporters travelled to Ottawa to lobby the Public Works Department of the Dominion of Canada to assist with funding to construct a government wharf which would in turn, aid in attracting investors from Ottawa, Buffalo, and New York to fund the eventual creation of a harbour and canal as part of the St. Lawrence Seaway System. The stated intent of building the wharf was to help in the commerce of lumber and grain for shipping to ports such as Chicago plus an additional side benefit of attracting immigration of more settlers, especially French-Canadians to the area.

Canal Building



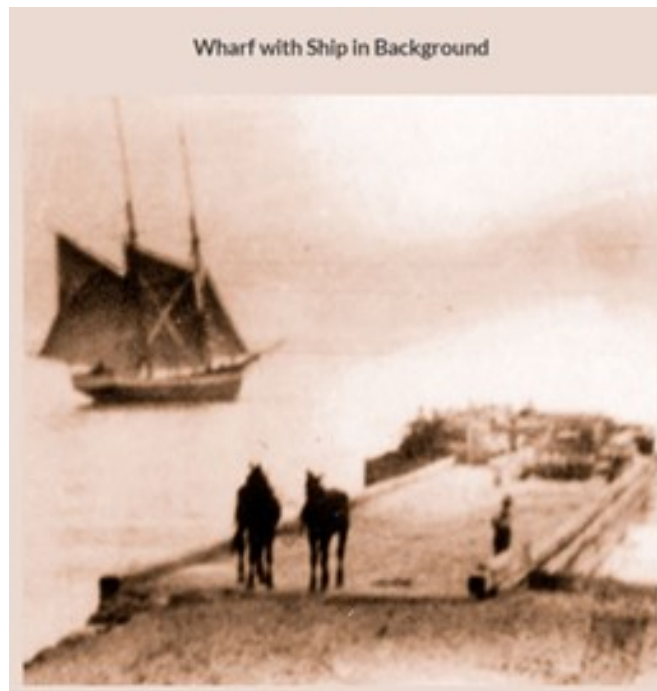
During this timeframe, the St. Lawrence Seaway had not yet been created. Canal work had started in the Montreal - Cornwall area but a seaway remained a dream. In 1895 the Canadian Deepwater Commission was formed to study the feasibility of a seaway. Therefore, the time was 'ripe' for grand schemes and proposals. Also, nearby at Port Franks, the linear channel, known locally as "The Cut" had been completed in 1875 by horse and drag line to redirect the Ausable River to outlet directly into Lake Huron. This was done to bypass the large river 'bend' at 'Grand Bend' (thus, the name) and to reduce flooding in the area. 'The Cut' was therefore in essence, a drainage channel and the

first "municipal drain" constructed under the Drainage Act of 1859. With this large lakeshore drainage project and associated construction equipment happening nearby, it seems logical to assume that this helped crystalize the idea by Mr. Cantin of digging a harbour and canal at St. Joseph to provide a short cut to Lake Erie.

Skeptics

The federal government approved \$5,000 to build the government wharf but the skeptics were many, both on the feasibility of the wharf AND of the harbour and canal plans. The wharf was debated in the House of Commons at length on March 14, 1902, requiring 14 pages of Hansard Transcripts (being the official record of the federal government). One such skeptic was the North Middlesex MP who is quoted in the Hansard as saying that: "*St. Joseph needs a harbour as badly as a goose needs side pockets*".

The wharf was built in 1907 (see photos below) overbudget at a price of \$15,000 and remained at St. Joseph until 1955 when the Governor-in-Council "was pleased to declare that the Crown ceased to be in control or occupation of the wharf at St. Joseph, Huron County". Lake Huron's storms, waves, ice and wind had ensured maintaining the wharf was troublesome. The wharf does not appear on a 1954 air photograph so the condition of it is unknown to this writer but expected to be largely in disrepair and had disappeared by that time. The breakout of the 1st World War scuppered the canal plans.



Wharf Remnants

During low water levels, only remnants of the piers of the historic wharf at St. Joseph can still be seen. Given the clay lake bottom at this location with minimal sand supply and rocks, the wharf pier “stumps” are occasionally visible and may still be seen underwater by the curious swimmer. It is also noteworthy that most small Government Wharfs in the Great Lakes have been divested by the federal government and the ownership absorbed by the local municipality.

References:

<https://greatlakes-seaway.com/en/the-seaway/300-years-history/>

<https://stjosephmuseum.ca/st-joseph-story/city-of-st-joseph/st-joseph-wharf-harbour/>

<https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/air-photos/1954-air-photos-southern-ontario/index>

Article scribed by:

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The Lake Huron Coastal Centre is a registered charity founded in 1998 with the goals of protecting and restoring Lake Huron's coastal environment. We are the voice for Lake Huron.

Donate



www.lakehuron.ca

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