

Toronto Telegram, January 15, 1938
Schooner Days CCCXXVII (327)
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ANOTHER SHOT FROM THE OLD GUN

IT IS so much much easier to start things than to finish them. But we have got some distance towards the history of the old cannon half sunken in the sod and half broken off, looks towards Lake Huron from the park at Port Elgin. We began asking about it last October.

Incidentally, Port Elgin's present harbor may not have received justice in the accounts hitherto published of this intriguing old gun-barrel. In writing to Schooner Days Mr. J. J. Chapman, the clerk-treasurer of the Municipality of Port Elgin, says that the local council expects to have the gun cleaned up; and mounted on a proper base during 1938, which is all to the good. During the past two years, he points out, Port Elgin has had more activity and business in its harbor than during the preceding fifteen years. The reason for this is that the Dominion Government has spent approximately \$20,000 in dredging the gap through the breakwater, thereby enabling boats to enter a harbor considered one of the best on the east side of Lake Huron for protection and scenery. This winter, Mr. Chapman adds, the fishing tugs from Southampton are sheltering there. Last summer twenty-five or more of the finest American yachts called at the port, and fifteen newcomers arrived in one fleet and were delighted. They were surprised to find such good accommodation and said that their visits had only commenced. There has also been increased commercial activity in the port during the past two seasons.

But to get back to the gun – a Drummond Island origin of it seems to be out. The British had a post on Drummond Island, and it was abandoned in 1828, its garrison and stores being removed to Penetang; but so far there is no proof that Drummond Island had a battery of 24-pounders, which is what this old gun seems to have been. The opinion was hazarded that it might have been recovered from the wreck of the *Alice Hackett*, which came to grief on Fitzwilliam Island in the Georgian Bay, while engaged in the removal of Drummond Island stores. Mr. Roy F. Fleming of Ottawa, who has conducted historical research at considerable length, writes:

“I can say this, that this gun is not the one from the schooner *Alice Hackett*, wrecked at Fitzwilliam Island the fall of 1828. The tradition carried by the Bellmore family, Frank and Joe, of Southampton, is very definite that the Hackett cannon was brass, weighing about 300 pounds, and was handled by two men. These were Sandy Monroe and George McCauley of Southampton, who according to the story, salvaged the cannon and two army muskets from the Hackett wreck about 1860; but on making the turn into Southampton Harbor, opposite Chantry Island, their sailboat upset, dropping the gun and one of the muskets overboard, where at the bottom, it is presumed, they still lie. The musket which was saved has been in the possession of the Bellmores for nearly sixty years, at intervals. It was originally flint locked, but has been repaired and rebuilt more than once, and now is with percussion cap mechanism. Joe Bellmore

said that the weapon was originally had a silver plate on it, with the name of the officer who had owned it engraved; the mortise of this remains.”

Refusing to be deflected by tempting speculation as to the history of the Hackett gun – that is, before it was taken from Drummond Island – let us get on with Port Elgin’s mystery.

The venerable Gus Smith – eighty-two, a former lieutenant of the 32nd Regiment, who has spent most of his life in the Port Elgin district and went to England once on a rifle team, was interviewed by the Port Elgin Times after The Telegram asked about the ancient gun, and this is a summary of what the Times got from him:

“About fifty years ago,” which would be in the late 1880’s, Mr. Smith, then a lake sailor, was at Cove Island, about six miles out from Tobermory. Capt. Currie was then the light-keeper on the island. Mr. Smith saw the Port Elgin gun then lying in the wreckage of an old wooden vessel, which had been on the shore for many years. About that time the cannon was brought to Port Elgin by the local blacksmith, Bob McLachlan, long since dead. He intended to use the metal in his foundry, situated then where the present United Church manse stands. The metal was found too hard to break up by sledges, so the gun, or the remains of it – it looks to have been broken in two – was installed beside the late Henry Raymond’s house near the railroad tracks. It was fired several times there for Dominion Day celebrations, as our Toronto friend Mr. Albert Leeder has testified. Later it was moved to the location of the present Keystone brush factory, near what is now the C.N.R. depot, to welcome arriving excursion trains. About 1887 it was moved to the lake shore and fired to assist in raising the body of a drowned man, as Mr. Leeder has also mentioned. It was moved to its present position on the bank in 1890.

“In 1891,” says the interview, “when General Lord Aylmer was in Port Elgin at the time of Col. Boyd’s funeral he inspected the ancient cannon and stated that it was identical with those used on lake raiders during the War of 1812, and thought the ship carrying it had foundered in a storm on its way up the lake and had been run in on the beach at Cove Island before it sank.”

This completes the ride on the merry-go-round without any of us yet catching the brass ring. When the gun was first mentioned in Schooner Days last year it was suggested that the wreck from which it was taken might be that of the gunboat captured by Commodore Arthur Sinclair’s expedition against Mackinac, which destroyed the *Nancy* at Nottawasaga in 1814. At that place there were some British 24-pounders, and one of these may have been mounted in the captured gunboat. Sinclair does not say so specifically, but mentions losing the gunboat while trying to tow her home through a gale of wind in his flagship the *Niagara*. Sinclair’s expedition, which failed to recapture Mackinac from the British, was the only naval raid into Georgian Bay during the war. There is no record of any American vessels having been lost or captured on the Upper Lakes, with the exception of several taken at Mackinac in 1812 and the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* captured by boarding in 1814.

Mr. Leeder says he saw this old gun at Port Elgin when he was six years old, which would place it there as early as 1868, and indicate that it left Cove Island seventy years ago.

Here is a discrepancy of twenty years in the chronology of “about fifty years ago,” if Mr. Smith was correctly reported by his local interviewer. It does not, of course, impugn anyone’s veracity. It is so easy to slip in the computation of past time.

The Clerk-Treasurer of Port Elgin says, “Our local editor has had some interesting letters, claiming actual ownership of this piece of artillery.” They have not come the way of Schooner Days. Perhaps they contain a clue. As said last year to one and all, “Those who know more about the Port Elgin gun and the brass gun have the floor.”

(Caption) WHO KNOWS THIS OLD “BARQUE”? This picture was taken in Parry Sound sixty years ago, but the name of the old barquentine has been lost. It may be the Cavalier, Craftsman, Fellowcraft or Sarah Ann Marsh. What do you say, old-timers? It will be noted that her jibboom has been shortened and her mizzen topmast taken out.