



The History of Minor Fisheries

Commercial fishing in this area dates back to the early 1820s establishing its importance as a major industry for Dunnville and Port Maitland. The natural harbour created by the Grand River along with the completion of the Feeder Canal which opened a passage way to the rest of the Great Lakes and beyond was an ideal location for the fledgling industry. With the abundance of a variety of fresh water fish species, the Grand River fishing business was the precursor to the modern Lake Erie commercial fishing industry and by the first half of the 1900s there were more than 50 fish tugs and fishing boats operating from Port Maitland. Since the 1950s, however, one family has been synonymous with fishing in this area...The Minor Family!

It was 1948 when a very young Wray Minor decided not to follow in the family butchering business but to try his hand at fishing. His brother Bob joined him and they soon purchased a commercial fishery from Harry Siddall. Younger brothers Dan and Pete soon followed in their older siblings footsteps with Dan joining Wray on one boat and Pete working with Bob on the other.



Wray's boat Lincoln R

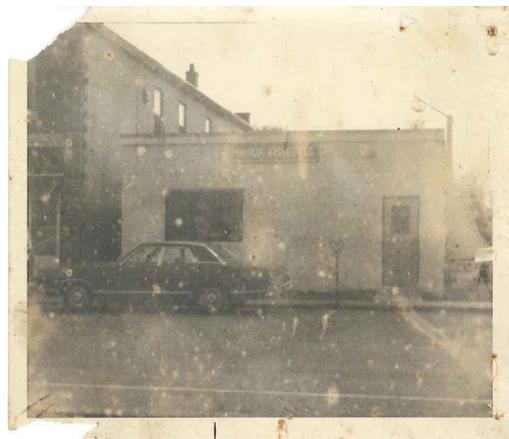


Dan's boat Judy M

Both Bob and Pete eventually left the business but Wray and Dan continued on with Dan eventually purchasing his own commercial fishing licence and boat and going out on his own. Wray and Dan operated their own vessels selling their catches to local packers or shipping their harvests to the U.S. market.

There was also local demand for fresh fish and both Wray and Dan set up small fish stores at their homes where they would fillet their own fish and sell it to the public and to local restaurants and bars.

After many successful years of operation, Wray and Dan decided to join forces once again and in 1974 they built



Minor Fisheries Ltd. on West Street in Port Colborne.

The location was chosen because it was located across the street from the Welland Canal, which allowed for easy access to the fish tugs and for its close proximity to the local market and U.S. border. The plant was designed and built to pass federal regulations so that products processed from Minor Fisheries could be shipped internationally. Minors still hold this designation today.

Minor Fisheries has always been a family affair concentrating mostly on the wholesale market. Wray and Dan not only fished their boats,



Wray Minor picking out perch nets



Dan Minor picking out perch nets

But they often cut, packed and shipped the fish themselves.



Wray and Dan Minor filleting pickerel in 1975

Dan's wife Jeanette ran the small retail outlet and the sons and daughters worked on the boats, in the plant or in the store after school and on weekends. Many extended family members also worked at the plant. Their number one goal was always to provide fresh high quality fish.

While Wray concentrated solely on fishing, Dan branched out into other areas in which he could use his fish tugs. In the late 1960s Dan started using his fish tug in the natural gas exploration business and in 1972 had a new fish tug designed and built to service the drilling rigs on Lake Erie. The decision to diversify has worked well for Dan and his family. Over the last 30 years Dan has built two commercial dive boats used exclusively in the natural gas business and purchased a number of other boats to meet the various demands of the natural gas exploration and servicing industry.

Over the last 30 years the commercial fishing industry on Lake Erie has seen many changes. Arguably the most controversial being the introduction of the individual transferable quota system in 1984. Although the system had many flaws, most fishermen would agree it was necessary for the management of the fresh water fishery.

The most trying times for the industry and the Minor Family were in the 1990s. Many small independent commercial fishermen were forced to sell out because of drastic quota reductions and severe fishing restrictions and regulations. Quotas were cut so drastically that Wray and Dan's combined quotas were no longer enough to supply the demand of the local markets or sustain their processing plant on West Street. It was during these very difficult times that Dan and his sons had to make the choice between selling their commercial fishery or investing significant capital to buy out a fellow fisherman in the same situation. They knew if they wanted to stay in the commercial fishing business, they needed to obtain more quota and the only way that was possible was to buy out another commercial fishermen.

Dan Minor & Sons Fish Tugs



Lynsey Lenore



Mr. Minor



Maclin

Quota increases did not happen as fast as the reductions occurred and it soon became apparent that buying out one fisherman was not enough to recover from those earlier drastic cuts or satisfy the local demand for fresh Lake Erie fish. Dan and his sons once again came to the conclusion that they would need to buy out another commercial fisherman in order to make their fishing business viable. It was only after buying out a third commercial fisherman a few years later that Dan was finally back to the quota levels he had prior to the drastic cuts. The investment was significant but the local demand was very strong and his sons were eager to continue in the family business. Fortunately, since these times, as fish populations have strengthened, quotas have once again increased and the Minors are once again able to supply the ever growing local demand for fresh water fish.

Both Wray and Dan's sons have grown up working in the commercial fishing industry and have gradually taken over for their fathers on the boats, as well as at the plant.



Paul Minor picking perch nets



Rod Minor filleting perch



Tom Minor picking perch nets

With a new and younger perspective, the Minor boys also saw the huge potential that the location of the plant on West Street offered. There had been many changes to West Street since Wray and Dan first built their plant and their sons decided to start focusing on some of the retail possibilities that were now apparent there. So, in the early 1990s, Minor Fisheries opened up its Take-Out Fish & Chips Restaurant from the front of the plant.



Minor Fisheries with summer patio

With the success of the restaurant, the introduction of new processing equipment and the demands of regulatory requirements the Minors decided Minor Fisheries had finally outgrown its West Street location and a new modern processing plant was built on Elm St. in 2008.



Minor Fisheries processing facility

While there have been many changes in the Minor Family fisheries, it is exciting to see that the third generation of Minors are taking an interest in the family fishery.

What challenges will they face? What ideas will they have? Stay tuned!!



Dan Jr. picking perch nets



Dan Jr. packing tubs



Grandpa & Carson picking perch nets



Dad showing Carson how to rope



Carson & Landon dressing whitefish



Tom Roping