

Prince Edward County, Mariners' Memorial Service 8 August 1999

A traditional memorial tribute honours fishermen and sailors



Maritime memories: Prince Edward County Museum Board chairman, Robert Townsend addresses the congregation in South Bay, Sunday, while Rev, Ted Goodier looks on.

South Bay United Church hosted a fitting tribute and memorial service Sunday, August 8 to remember sailors and fisherman who lost their lives to the perils of the Great Lakes. The quaint church, nestled in between the scenic hamlets of Milford and Black River, was packed with local residents, including Mayor James Taylor and Prince Edward Hastings MPP Ernie Parsons.

The traditional service has been held annually at the South Bay Church since the mid 1960's. The first service originated in Cherry Valley in the 1920's and gradually relocated to South Bay, appropriately situated near the gorgeous shoreline of South Bay. This is now the only surviving service of it's kind to continue the traditional Mariner's service in all of Ontario.

"We lack too many traditions in Ontario and to remember our marine heritage is extremely Important," said Robert Townsend, chairman of the Prince Edward County Museum Board. "We're keeping the tradition alive by holding an annual Mariner's Service. To my knowledge we are the only community in Ontario that continues to pay homage to the sailors who have travelled these waters." Rev. Ted Goodier conducted the service which featured scripture readings and beautiful hymns based on a nautical theme.

A lovely Handel solo was performed by Donald Roberts with accompanist and pianist Patricia Calnan, who contributed her musical talent to all who attended.

A roll of honour to remember sailors who have passed away over the years was read aloud by Roxy Lancaster, followed by a minute of silence.

Sunday's memorial service was based on services which were held every spring for

sailors leaving port with their vessels during the summer and fall months. "It was originally a sailor's farewell service," Townsend explained. "The captain and his crew attended the service before heading out. Some, unfortunately, never made it back home again. We're keeping this tradition alive and remembering them."

Norman Ruttan, superintendent of St. Lawrence Islands National Park, was guest speaker at the service. "I'm encouraged that this community cares enough about its marine heritage to hold this service," said Ruttan. "This tells me the community that cares about its past, also cares about its future."

The Mariner's Park Museum, situated next door to the South Bay United Church, boasts the second lighthouse ever to be built on the Great Lakes, the False Duck Lighthouse. Notably, this is a historic landmark that symbolizes an important part of this area's maritime heritage.

[Adapted from Corinne Gervais in the County Guide, 13 August 1999]