

Canals Canada

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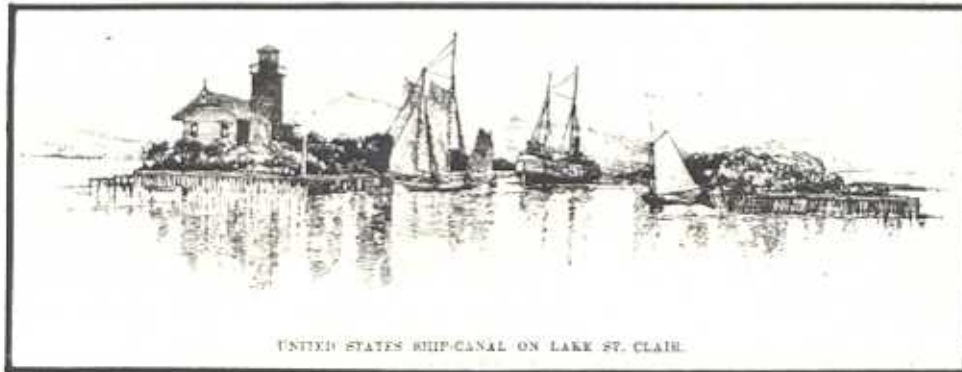
ST. CLAIR FLATS CANAL

The St. Clair River made news in late April of this year by becoming clogged with ice and delaying shipping in this vital waterway. This is indicative of the problems of trying to extend the shipping season. However, in the 1850s, the more serious concern was simply trying to find enough water to get through the St. Clair River.

The "canal" lies on the border between the United States and Canada and has been maintained by the U.S. Over the years the channel was widened and deepened to handle large ship sizes. However, the canal followed a long arc through the delta. As part of twentieth century Seaway improvements, a straight "cut-off" through Canada avoids the rather curved course of the canal. Nevertheless, the St. Clair Flats Canal still exists for navigation.

A true navigation canal should be an artificial, man made watercourse. However, calling improvements to existing watercourses a canal occurred relatively frequently in the 19th century. Whether such river improvements are technically canals depends upon how much human activity was required in the improvement.

Are the St. Clair Flats Canal and the Peninsula Creek Canals really canals or river improvements? Does the name really matter?



UNITED STATES SHIP-CANAL ON LAKE ST. CLAIR.

The river enters Lake St. Clair through a large delta containing many small channels. None were naturally navigable for the growing ship sizes of the mid-nineteenth century. The first channel excavated through the shifting channels of the delta was completed in 1855 by private shippers. The channel was greatly improved by the United States Government between 1857 and 1858 and by the Canadian Government in 1858. By this time the cut was known as the St. Clair Flats Canal.

The name St. Clair Flats Canal and Alexandria Greaves' article on the canals at Huntsville (CANALS CANADA, #2) remind us once again that the difference between a canal and a river improvement can sometimes be rather obscure.

The canal between Peninsula Lake and Fairy Lake was actually excavated through Peninsula Creek between 1886 and 1888. The canal was really a man made improvement of a river to provide a minimum channel width of 12.3 m (40 feet) and a depth of 2 m (6 feet) and extend navigation in the area.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Even though the snow cover is still deep as I write, the promise of spring is already evident, and will be more so when you read my Report. The plans the Board of Directors has for the Annual General Meeting and Spring Tour are, perhaps, less evident, but they are well in hand. Both the latter are scheduled for Saturday, May 12, 1984, and by then, the sun will be higher in the sky.

Over the winter the Board has met regularly consolidating the

Society and broadening its interests. The membership will be asked to vote on amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws at the AGM in person or by proxy. Our membership is growing, and this augurs well for a joint meeting with our friends of the American Canal Society in the spring of 1985 at Peterborough. Donald Smithies has some interesting plans for this time. Then, in the early fall of 1985 we shall have the opportunity to mix with another group of canal buffs when we host the English Inland Waterways Association overseas tour, probably in St. Catharines.

I mentioned in my first Report last September that the geographical distribution of our common interest and its very nature make the meetings and field trips relatively expensive. As your President I am concerned on your behalf with this aspect of our business. To help overcome the problem I can offer a few suggestions: first, some of us may have to consider each meeting and tour as a vacation, and treat it like one by setting aside a little something for it each month; second, the Programme Committee (which I hope the Board will appoint after the AGM) can plan events well into the future and give notice of them; third, whenever possible, individual members cost saving initiatives must be put in place, and last, I recommend that our bi-annual meetings be of a general rather than of narrow interest and include a measure of social contact between members. All members must get value for their registration fee and leave a meeting and tour well satisfied.

Let us look at these options as they apply to the tentative plans for 1984. The 1984 fall meeting and tour are scheduled for Cornwall, Ontario, on October 20/21 to consider the old Soulanges, Lachine and Beauharnois Canals and the St. Lawrence Seaway. An extraordinary event is anticipated and the final details are being

arranged. Cost saving initiatives? A coach from St. Catharines to Cornwall, two nights shared (double) accommodation there, breakfast, and tour are estimated to cost \$125-150 per person. General interest? A wide-ranging field trip and social evening anticipated. Can you plan now for this weekend?

On a sad note the Board has received, and accepted with regret, the resignation of Chris Andrae as a director of the Society and editor of CANALS CANADA due to increased business pressures. Chris remains a supportive member of the Society. Thank you Chris for what you have done for us.

We are looking for a newsletter editor. The Board of Directors will support any member of the Society who would like to promote the Society in this way.

At the end of the Newsletter you will find an application for membership in the Society. Please pass it on (together with a photocopied edition of this Newsletter) to a friend who shares your canal interests. If each present member gained another we would have to book another coach for the spring tour.

Colin Duquemin

BOOK REVIEWS

Roger W. Squires, THE NEW NAVIES: A HISTORY OF THE MODERN WATERWAYS RESTORATION MOVEMENT. Shopwyke Hall, Chichester, Sussex, England: Philmore & Co. Ltd., n.d., \$16.00.

Thirty years of mucking out old canals has given Britain an extensive network of waterways now enjoying new life and an enthusiastic following. Historical background on the development of former canal systems plus an account of their reclamation for use today.

[SIA NEWSLETTER, Publications of Interest, FALL, 1983]

Larry McNally, WATER POWER ON THE LACHINE CANAL, Microfiche Report Series, Parks Canada, available only for use at Provincial Archives or on inter-library loan from Parks Canada.

The issue of water power on the Lachine Canal opens a wide area of study not commonly examined by Canadian canal historians. The commercial importance of using navigation canals for water power is often overlooked. Yet surplus water in most Canadian Government canals was exploited by selling hydraulic rights to industrialists.

In the case of the Lachine Canal water power played a fundamental role in the industrial development in Montreal, particularly the metal industries.

McNally's report only examines the Lachine and could only touch on a variety of issues in the short report. Nevertheless it provides a context and bibliography for further study of the Lachine, and other, Canadian canals.

Incidentally, the Manuscript Report Series of Parks Canada contain a variety of research articles on Canadian canals. Despite the relative difficulty of acquiring these reports, the list is well worth consulting.

John N. Jackson & Fred A. Addis, THE WELLAND CANALS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE, Welland Canal Foundation, Box 745, St. Catharines, Ont., L2R 6Y3, \$9.95 each/10 or more copies \$6.00 each.

The title of this book truly reflects its contents as "a comprehensive guide". Elsewhere in this NEWSLETTER is a bibliography of Welland Canal books; for most of us, this is the only one you will need. In 140 pages and 150 illustrations, the authors outline just about everything one may want to know about the canal.

Chapter one is a geographic/economic/technical/historical overview of the canal and its impact on the region. Chapter two is a guide to the present canal and visible historic features. Chapter three discusses ship operation through the canal with such vignettes as average daily operating costs (\$11,000 in 1981). Chapter may be the most useful in that it provides a collection of facts, figures, sources of information and a bibliography on the Seaway, Welland Canal, shipping, and societies.

The illustrations are particularly good and include contemporary and archival photos, several excellent maps and a number of graphics and charts on lock and ship operation.

The book was written by those that know their subject well. It is well organized, well laid out. *THE WELLAND CANALS* is well worth the purchase price.

REHABILITATION OF CANALS

While some historic canals, notably the Rideau Canal, have maintained both their historic and navigation functions, other canals have not been so lucky. The Shubenacadie in Nova Scotia, and Soulanges in Quebec, for example have been abandoned. But two major historic canals have been the subject in recent years to a revitalized role.

At Montreal, Parks Canada is undertaking a long range rehabilitation of the Lachine Canal while at St. Catharines, a public organization, the Welland Canal Preservation Association² (WCPA) is making sections of the first, second and third canals "navigable" to cyclists and walkers.

The Merritt trail, as the WCPA trail is known, will link Thorold and Port Dalhousie when completed by the end of 1984. The 11 km trail is an 2 to 2.5 metre wide

path that links several parkettes and strategic parking lots within St. Catharines. About \$1.2 million will have been spent when all of the presently committed work is completed. In planning stages are a path along sections of the third canal and to extend the trail to Port Colborne. All of the work is estimated to cost \$2.3 million.

Emerson Banks, general manager of the WCPA, notes that long range plans include reconstruction of demonstration locks on the third canal.

² In Montreal Parks Canada is developing a similar and ultimately much more ambitious project for the Lachine Canal. (See "Rediscovering Montreal's Lachine Canal", *CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC*, April/May, 1983). A cycling/hiking trail has been developed from Lachine to central Montreal at a cost of \$8 million. But because most the canal is still in place, there is some talk of reopening it to navigation. Part of the desire arises from the problem of locking pleasure boats through the massive locks of the Seaway Canal on the south shore. A short, but crucial section of the Lachine canal has been filled in at Montreal harbour and this would have to be excavated.

RE THE SPRING TOUR

The Buffalo EXPRESS says that the Suspension Bridge over the Desjardins, at Hamilton, C.W., and almost over the Swing Bridge which caused the dreadful railroad disaster, fell down on Friday last. A severe thunder storm, accompanied with gust of wind, passed over the city, and the anchors or stays of the structure were broken, the bridge destroyed, and it now lies in ruins in the abyss. Fortunately no one was on the bridge when it fell.

[Livingston Republican, Geneseo, New York, Sept. 3, 1857]

-courtesy of Emily Madden

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 12: Spring Tour & AGM of CCS: A look at the Desjardins Canal.

June 14-17: Society for Industrial Archeology, 13th Annual Conference, Boston, Mass.. Contact Michael Folsom, Charles River Museum of Industry, 154 Moody St., Waltham, Mass. 02154.

July 26-29 Annual Meeting, Lexington Group in Transportation History, Duluth Minn. Contact Don Hofsaenger, 1010 Zephyr, Plainview, Texas, 79072.

Aug. 4-5 CANAL DAYS, Port Colborne Historical and Marine Museum, 280 King St. Port Colborne, L3K 5X8 (416-834-7604).

Sept 19-23 Annual Conference, Association for Preservation Technology, Toronto. Contact Jean Simonton, APT 1984, 77 Bloor St. W. (2nd Floor), Toronto, M7A 2R9.

Oct 12-14 Society for Industrial Archeology Fall Tour, St. Catharines/Niagara Falls. Contact Arden Phair, St. Catharines Historical Museum, 343 Merritt St., St. Catharines, L2T 1K7.

Oct.20-21 Fall Tour of C.C.S. to Cornwall and Montreal.

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The CANADIAN CANAL SOCIETY publishes CANALS CANADA twice a year and promotes an interest in all aspects of Canadian canals. Annual membership is \$10.00.

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Prepared by Rob Taylor

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Please enroll me as a member of the Canadian Canal Society.

I enclose my membership fee of \$.....

Name

Address

Province (State) Postal Code.....

Please mail cheque payable to CANADIAN CANAL SOCIETY (in Canadian Funds) with application to:

Secretary
Canadian Canal Society
P.O. Box 1652
St. Catharines, Ontario
L2R 7K1

Membership fees: Individual \$10.00
Family \$15.00
Contributing \$25.00