



## **CANALS CANADA/CANAUX DU CANADA**

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The Canadian Canal Society mourns the loss of two former Presidents.



Roberta (Bobbie) McAfee Styran  
1926 - 2015



Sheila Moraig Wilson  
1921 - 2015

**Roberta (Bobbie) McAfee Styran** passed away on July 18, 2015 at the age of 88 in the Welland County Hospital. She will be deeply missed by her sister Elizabeth Charge of Aurora, ON, her nephews, Dic of Lethbridge, AB and Lawrence of Vancouver BC, as well as her great nephews Nathan and Mackenzie, great niece Erika, and friends and colleagues in the Niagara area and beyond.

Born and raised in Fredericton, NB, "Bobbie" had a B.A. and an M.A. from McMaster University and a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (in History). She taught History at Brock University and later worked for the Ministry of Education in Toronto.

In St. Catharines she helped to found the Welland Canals Preservation Association and served as president of the Canadian Canal Society. She was editor of the Society's newsletter for several years and was an Honorary Life Member. A Director of the American Canal Society, she was also on the governing Council of Inland Waterways International. In that capacity she organized the Canadian Canal Society's memorable tour of English canal sites in 1996 and organized and chaired the 2004 World Canals Conference at Brock University.

She was the co-author of several books and articles on the history of the Welland Canals, including *The Welland Canals*, *The Growth of Mr. Merritt's Ditch* (Boston Mills Press), *Mr. Merritt's Ditch, A Welland Canals Album* (Boston Mills Press), *The Great Swivel Link, Canada's Welland Canal* (University of Toronto Press), *This Great National Object, Building the Nineteenth-Century Welland Canals* (McGill-Queen's University Press) and *The Welland Canals Corridor Then and Now* (Looking Back Press).

In recognition of her services to Canadian engineering history, she was given the W. Gordon Plewes Award by the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering in 2009.

In historical and heritage circles, her dynamism, intelligence and sense of humour were much appreciated.

In lieu of flowers or sympathy notes, her family requests that a donation in Bobbie's name and memory be made either to the St. Catharines General Hospital/Niagara Regional Health or to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. Following Bobbie's wishes, no funeral or service will be held.

## **Longtime St. Catharines librarian leaves legacy**

By Maryanne Firth, St. Catharines Standard

**Sheila Moraig Wilson** former long-time St. Catharines librarian, who immersed herself in history and played a significant role in preserving the city's past, died Tuesday at the age of 94.

Known to many in the community as an endless source of Niagara knowledge, Wilson spent much time working to ensure history was properly documented for future generations.

Along with her duties at the library, where she worked from 1959 to 1985, Wilson promoted local history through her roles with a number of organizations. She served as president of the Historical Society of St. Catharines from 1983-85 and 1988-89, and as president of the Canadian Canal Society from 1992-93. She was also active with the Royal Niagara Military Institute.

Wilson also had quite a history of her own. She was born in Scotland and served in the Women's Royal Naval Service during the Second World War — a fact she rarely spoke about; she retired as a Lieutenant Commander.

"Her belief was that if she saw something worthwhile, it should be captured somehow," historical society president John Burtniak said.

Wilson did her fair share of capturing, working to build up the local history collection during her time with the library. She took on the tedious task of indexing newspapers, articles and other useful pieces of information so they could be easily discovered by the public when on a hunt for details. Wilson either started or had a hand in growing several useful resources at the library, including the scrapbook, poster and photograph collections, as well as the local names index and newspaper vertical files.

"She felt it was the public library's responsibility to collect information about the community," Burtniak said. It was a task she felt obligated to take on, especially for the benefit of youths in the community, but it was also an activity she greatly enjoyed, he said. "For her, local history was not just about working at the library from 9 to 5. She really believed in it. She was involved in historical societies, gave talks and lectures to other organizations and was always travelling and taking walking tours."

The local historian was often sought out by others wanting to learn more about the area. "People knew she was top-notch at this," Burtniak said. "She was a great person — entertaining, witty and a great speaker. She had a great command of language," he said. "She was always worth listening to, not just for the information, but for her manner and style."

Wilson's extensive knowledge of the Garden City was compiled to create *St. Catharines: Canada's Canal City*, which was co-authored by John N. Jackson and printed by The Standard in 1992.

A second book, *Taking the Waters: A history of the spas of St. Catharines*, followed in 1999.

Wilson was found of researching and spent much of her spare time collecting any information she could about the area. She would often stop by the library at Brock University, where long-time friend Carol Gaspari worked. The pair would use the opportunity to catch up over a cup of coffee, but talk often returned to the exciting projects Wilson had on her plate. "We really liked spending time with each other," Gaspari said, adding they shared similar interests and maintained a friendship for 50 years.

While St. Catharines library assistant Sandy Enskat never worked with Wilson, she came to know the retiree through her many visits. She would often stop by the special collections department, which Enskat oversees, to deliver old notes, articles and interesting pictures she felt worthy of the collection. "Her memory was amazing. She knew everything about history," Enskat said, adding she was often in awe of how much Wilson was able to retain. "She was really the start of preserving the past of people in the community. She emphasized how important people are."

**WILSON, Sheila Moraig (Chapman) wife of the late E. MacKay Wilson, 1921 – August 25, 2015.** Mrs. Wilson passed away peacefully at the Niagara Health System, St. Catharines site. She came to Canada with her parents in 1927 and returned to Scotland in 1935 to continue her schooling. Served with the Womens Royal Naval Service during World War II, 1940 - 1946, serving in North Africa and Italy. Returning to Canada she received her B.A. from McMaster University & Bachelor of Library Sciences degree from the University of Toronto, taking a position with the Hamilton Public Library. After her marriage, lived in many parts of the United States and also in the Philippines where she taught school. Her husband's ill health brought them back to Canada and they were for a time residents of Port Dalhousie. She joined the staff of the St. Catharines Public Library in 1959 and was head of the Reference Department until 1978. She then became Special Collections Librarian where she developed an extensive local history collection. She retired from the Library in 1985. Since that time, Mrs. Wilson was actively involved in several local history & heritage groups as well as the Canadian Canal Society and the Niagara Military Institute. She was co-author with Dr. John N. Jackson in writing "Names Across Niagara" and *St. Catharines, Canada's Canal City*, and also wrote *Taking the Waters*, a book about the mineral spas of St. Catharines. In accordance with her wishes, cremation has already taken place.

## **President's Remarks**

The Canadian Canal Society has only had two women Presidents and now we have lost both of them in the space of one month. They each brought their own special qualities to the job, but, in each case the history of the canals was foremost in their minds. We can be thankful that they both shared their knowledge, in their publications, for future generations to enjoy.

## **Lock 45 Centennial - Trent-Severn Waterway**



The first lock on what was to become the Trent-Severn Waterway was built at Bobcaygeon in 1833. The last lock was completed at Couchiching in 1920.

Port Severn was not the first choice for an outlet from the Severn River. That honour fell to the short portage between Little Go Home Bay and Baxter Lake. This route would have made Honey Harbour the principle outlet for the waterway.

In 1911 Big Chute did not yet have the Marine Railway that exists today. But, it did have a powerplant, and its isolated location made getting supplies to it difficult. Besides improving access to the power plant a lock at Port Severn would also promote tourism.

In the summer of 1913 a tender was issued and on 24 September a contract was awarded to York Construction Company of Toronto. The contract called for the construction of the main dam, lock and swing-bridge and two smaller control dams. The contract worth \$130,000 would provide a lock 100 feet by 25 feet.

In June 1914 the Hydro Electric Power Commission of Ontario purchased the powerplant at Big Chute. They requested an increase in height in the dam at Port Severn which necessitated changes to the lock and swing-bridge. These changes delayed the opening of the lock, but it was officially opened on 26 July 1915.

Port Severn was to be a temporary lock, which is why it was built smaller than the other locks. It now dictates the size of boats that can pass through the Trent-Severn Waterway.

Only in Canada would we have a Centennial Birthday Party for a temporary lock?





Retired Parks Canada historian Dennis Carter-Edwards acknowledges the cheers of the crowd. He is portraying WH Bennet MP who was instrumental in having the Port Severn Lock constructed.

Many of the boats in the Centennial lockage were also at the opening 100 years ago.



## Welland Canal Fallen Workers Memorial

Here are illustrations of the winning design by Dereck Revington Studio Inc.



As the visitor approaches the site from the south a monumental blackened steel veil will greet them. Sombre and shadowed, it contains the words spoken by Dr. R.J. Manion, Minister of Railways and Canals, in 1932: Peace has its heroes, as well as war . . .”

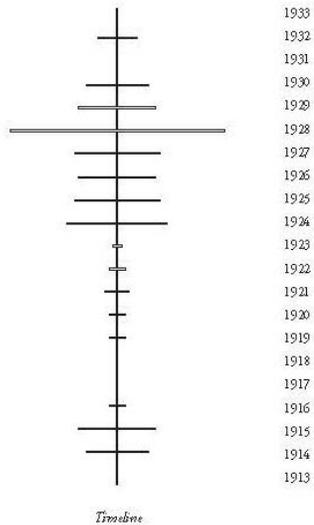


A visitor’s experience of the site is compelling from each approach: pedestrians and bikes on the Greater Niagara Circle Route; cars on the Welland Canal Parkway; and workers on the ships in the canal. Every vista will entice viewers to pause and discover the story of the men who helped make the Canal what it is today.





The timeline of the fallen reflects the number of men who died each year – simple lines eloquently tell tragic stories: 29 men died in 1928, the year which saw the worst loss of life on the construction site.

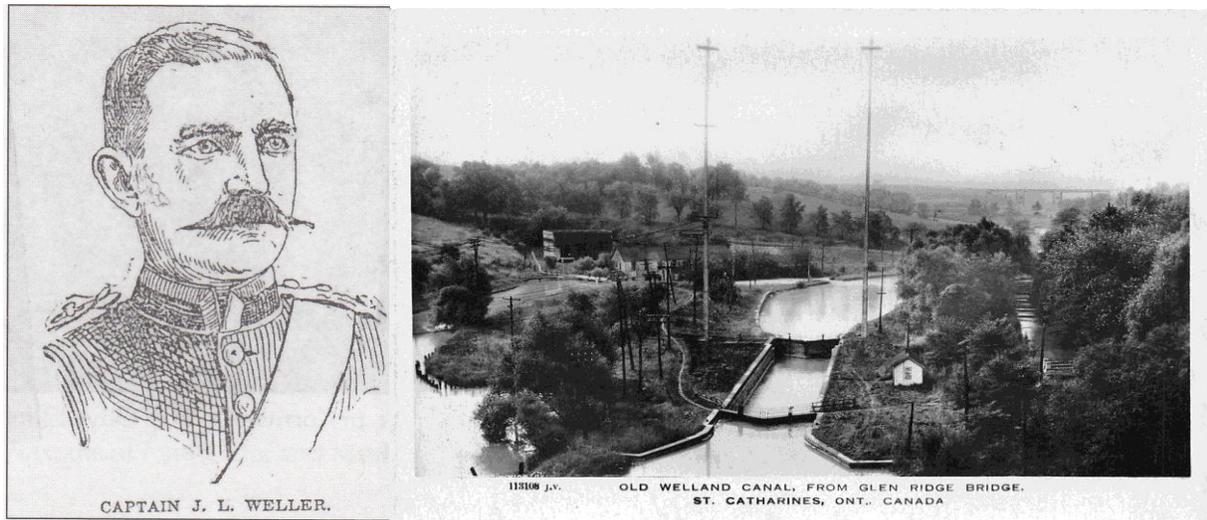


[www.stcatharines.ca/CanalWorkersMemorial](http://www.stcatharines.ca/CanalWorkersMemorial)

The Memorial will be located to the north of The Welland Canal Centre and St Catharines Museum. Unveiling is scheduled for 2017 as one of the events marking the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

## John Laing Weller – the Concrete Soldier

John Laing Weller, a graduate of the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, (College #101, finished fourth in a class of 33) and the first Superintending Engineer of the Welland Ship Canal, was a strong advocate of the use of concrete.



In 1906 two 150 foot patented reinforced concrete poles were raised in St Catharines. The poles carried hydro lines over the Second Welland Canal. They were two and one-half feet square at the base and tapered to eleven inches square at the top. Weighing 45 tons each they were set 10 feet into the ground. All did not go well, at the first attempt to raise a pole a cable snapped and the pole fell, breaking into three pieces.

In 1910 a concrete scow was built for use on the Welland Canal. It was eight feet long by twenty-four feet wide and had sides seven feet high. The scow was humorously named *Pioneer* in case it became an early settler. Basic construction was twenty-two inches thick with one-quarter inch reinforcing wire.

A company in Missouri wrote to Weller asking about the concrete scow. Weller advised them that though economical in construction they tended to sit one to one and half feet lower in the water than a similar wood or steel scow. Therefore, he thought that they would not be suitable for use on the Missouri River.



The northern terminus of the Welland Ship Canal is named Port Weller in honour of John Laing Weller. Weller was responsible for creating the two long piers that jut into Lake Ontario and protect the entrance of the Canal. Again Weller turned to concrete. He designed and patented a concrete crib that was floated into place, then sunk and filled in.

Weller's love of concrete did not end when he retired from the Department of Railways and Canals in 1917. Still a young man at 55 he founded Concrete Pipes and Products Limited in Hamilton, Ontario.

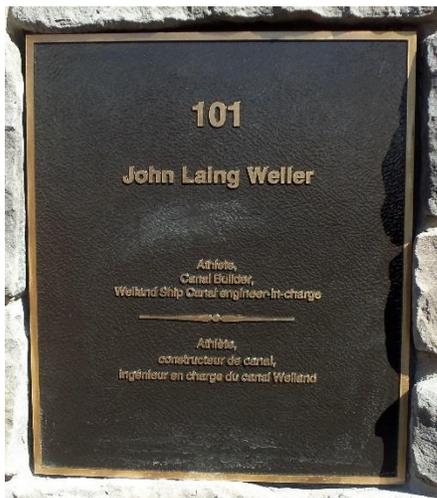
Reference:

John Laing Weller CE MEIC – “The Man Who Does Things”, Peggy Muntz, St Catharines Museum/Vanwell Publishing 2007 ISBN 978-1-55068-984-6

## Royal Military College – Wall of Honour

On 28 September 2013, John Laing Weller's name was added to the Wall of Honour at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario. The Wall of Honour recognizes ex-cadets of the Royal Military Colleges and others with College numbers for outstanding achievements and contributions to Canada or the world.

The Canadian Canal Society was represented by **Robert Sears**, and Laing's granddaughter **Madelein "Peggy" Muntz** who authored the biography of her grandfather.



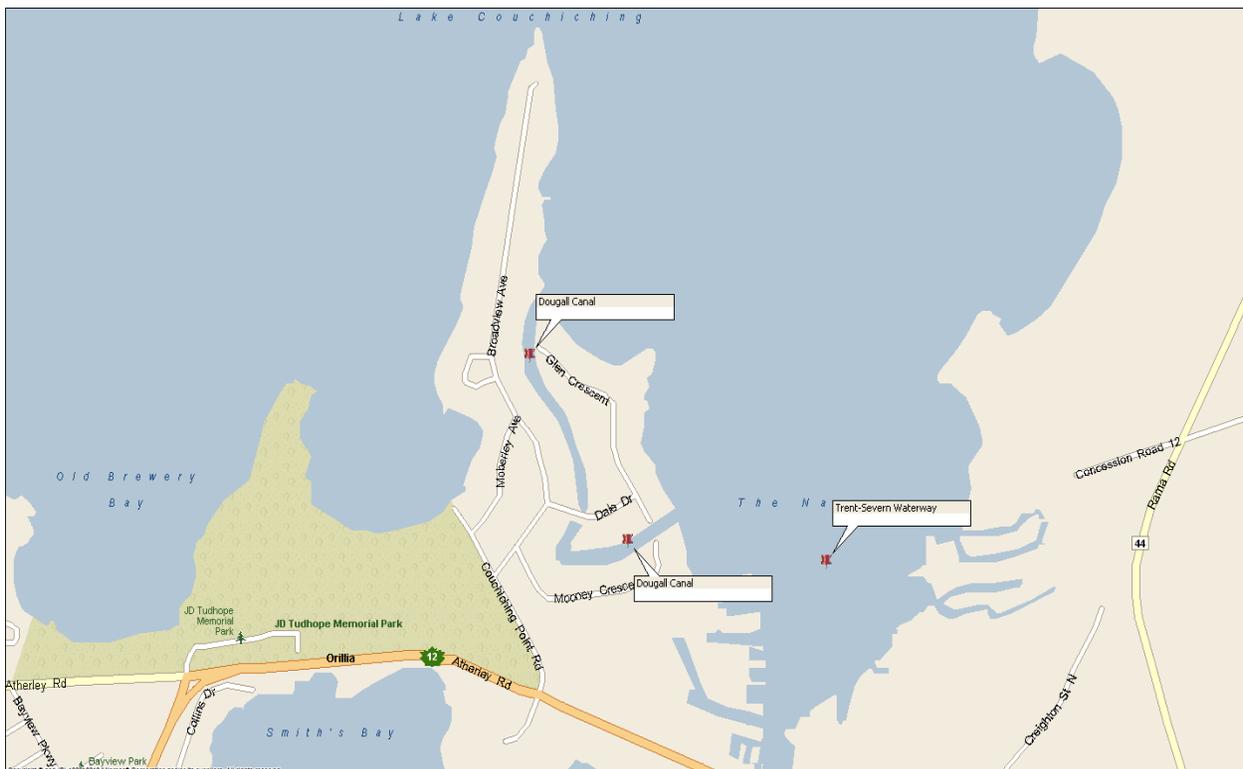
## Canada's Newest Canal

Canada's newest canal, named after Bruce Dougall, is located in Orillia, Ontario.

The original Couchiching Point subdivision was conceived as having 280 houses. But, this was not the vision of Bruce Dougall who spent seven years digging a canal to be part of the subdivision. The canal reduced the development to 80 houses. When the canal was completed it was turned over to the City of Orillia.

The City received a request in May 2014 to name the Canal after Bruce Dougall, however, the Ministry of Natural Resources is responsible for the naming of bodies of water. The Ministry approval was received in January 2015 and a naming ceremony was held on 9 July 2015.

Primary care of the Canal is by the Couchiching Point Ratepayers Association and property owners.





## President's Message

As the Chinese Proverb states, "we live in interesting times". The Society is probably busier now than it has ever been. We have taken on a "Community Partner" role in the building of the Memorial to honour the memory of the workers who died building the Welland Ship Canal. The Society was the first to community group to step forward with a commitment of \$1,000 towards the construction of the Memorial. I hope that Society Members will also make personal contributions towards this worthy cause. Your donations are tax deductible and details may be found on the City of St Catharines website, a link is provided from the Society website.

We also continue our Outreach Program and in October we will hold a General Meeting in Port Robinson followed by a Presentation, Port Robinson: A Welland Canal Community, followed by a walking tour (see details on insert).

The Society also continues with its plan to provide signage along the former route of the Third Welland Canal. The land in St Catharines was rural when the canal was built but the route has now largely disappeared from view with urban development.

I hope that some of you will take the time to join with our fellow canal enthusiast in the Canal Society of New York State as we explore the Genesee Valley Canal. Ten years ago we explored the northern portion of the canal from Rochester to Letchworth Gorge. This trip will explore the portion south of the Gorge.

### Canadian Canal Society

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President: Bob Sears  
Vice-President: George Hume  
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Treasurer: Steve Hinchliffe  
Past President: Tom Whitelaw  
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