THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST LACHINE CANAL, 1815 - 1826.

by

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FOREWARD

This thesis purports to be a narrative account of the factors leading up to the building of the Lachine Canal and the problems dealt with, while it was under construction. In his research, the author found that sources, primary and secondary, bearing directly on the canal, were scarce. This may help to explain the inability to come to more definite conclusions concerning some matters raised here. Hugh G.J. Aitken's Welland Canal Company often served as a guidepost while this work was in progress. Although the author found it impossible to emulate that excellent study, it is hoped that this thesis will cast some light on an unexplored area of Canadian economic history.

The patient assistance and interest of Professor J.I. Cooper were of great value and are gratefully acknowledged. Thanks must also be given to the staff of the Redpath Library and McCord Museum of McGill University.

List of Abbreviations

A.H.R.	American Historical Review
B.R.H.	Bulletin des Recherches Historiques
C.H.R.	Canadian Historical Review
C.J.E.P.S.	Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science
Commissioners' Minutes	Minutes of the Commissioners for the Lachine Canal
Committee Minutes	Minutes of the Committee of Management of the Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal
J.C.B.	Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association
O.H.S.P.R.	Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records
P.A.C.	Public Archives of Canada

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PART I UNFINISHED BEGINNINGS

Chapter 1 Introduction

a) The geographical location of the Island of Montreal, where the St. Lawrence River meets the Ottawa, is perhaps the most significant factor contributing to Montreal's commercial importance.[1] Geology has assisted in making Montreal an entrepot between the Atlantic and the St. Lawrence - Great Lakes hinterland. The Sault St. Louis or Lachine Rapids, at the south-west corner of the island, are composed of extremely hard rock which resists the erosive character of the river.[2] The Lachine Rapids are turbulent and dangerous, so that the port of Montreal at the foot of them is the farthest point accessible to ships ascending the St. Lawrence. Below the port, the St. Mary's current was, in the time of sailing ships, another serious impediment to craft moving upstream. Here, ships were sometimes delayed for weeks while waiting for a stiff north-east wind, strong enough to overcome the current.[3] Montreal became the stopping place, the point of debarkation, for the vessels plying the St. Lawrence between Montreal and Quebec. At Montreal goods were unloaded and repacked for the voyage up the St. Lawrence or the Ottawa and it was through Montreal that most of the produce from the Upper Canada passed, if it were destined for shipment abroad.

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[1] See opening paragraph of E.R. Adair, "The Evolution of Montreal Under the French Regime," Canadian Historical Association Annual Report, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942), pp. 20-41.

[2] T.H. Clark, Montreal Area: Laval and Lachine Map Areas, Quebec Department of Mines, Geological Report, 46, 1952, p. 92.

[3] Thomas Storrow Brown, Montreal Fifty Years Ago, (Montreal: n.d.), p. 20.

For approximately one mile, the river thrashes upon the flat, hard rock lying close to the surface of the water between Île au Héron and Montreal Island. Cartier and Champlain had both marvelled at the river's turbulence and one of Canada's early geographers described these rapids, which came to be known as the Lachine Rapids, as "extraordinary appalling and terrific."[1] They were also virtually impassable to navigation so that the conveyance of most goods between Montreal and Lachine was by land.[2] From Lachine, on the western side of the Island above the Rapids, canoes and bateaux departed for the country further west and to Lachine came those same river craft carrying the products of the interior. Just as Montreal was the stopping-off place for vessels plying the lower part of the river, so Lachine served the same purpose for boats and canoes on the Ottawa River and the upper St. Lawrence.

What was needed was a bridge of water, a canal, to link the upper and lower St. Lawrence, divided at Montreal by a ridge of impenetrable rock, impervious to centuries of the river's corrosive force. This thesis will emphasize the first of these projects that was built between 1821 and 1826, the canal whose construction was supervised by Commissioners appointed by the Legislature of Lower Canada. However, almost from the

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[1] Joseph Bouchette, A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada, with Remarks Upon Upper Canada and on the Relative Connexion of Both Provinces with the United States of America, (London: W. Faden, 1815), p. 126.

[2] There is some evidence of timber being floated through the Lachine Rapids, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, VII (1805), 94. However, most commodities were carried by carters from Lachine, Brown, Montreal Fifty Years Ago, p. 22.

beginning of European settlement on the Island of Montreal, the problem of the Lachine Rapids and the challenge which they posed, had elicited the ingenuity of men concerned with the need for easing waterway communications with the interior.

b) The first known attempt to effect a means of circumnavigating the Lachine Rapids, was made in 1689 under the direction of Dollier de Casson,[1] who was then superior of the Sulpicians on the Island of Montreal.[2] Using the labour of some Lachine tenants behind in rent to their Sulpician landlords, de Casson proposed to cut a one-mile channel from the St.Lawrence at Lachine to the River St. Pierre or Little River, which wound through the Island and emptied into the St. Lawrence below the Rapids.[3] The ambitious priest's purpose was to make a navigable channel[4] for laden canoes and in addition to increase the flow of the Little River so that it would provide power for watermills which he proposed to build along its banks.

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1 For a brief biography of Dollier de Casson see introduction of De Casson, History of Montreal, trans. and ed. R. Flenley (London: J.M. Dent, 1928), pp. 1-49.

2 See Pierre Rousseau, P.S.S., Le Canal de Lachine, MS,Sulpician Archives, Notre Dame Church, Montreal, for a history of pre-Cession attempts to build a canal at Lachine (according to Mgr. Olivier Maurault this account was written between 1885 and 1912). The most complete available history of French attempts to build a canal is by R. Bonin, P.S.S., "Le Canal de Lachine Sous le Régime Français", B.R.H., Vol. XLII, (May, 1936), pp. 265-299.

3 ibid., p. 273.

4 ibid., p. 89. The depth and width of the canal was not rigidly laid down and the"Contractor" was permitted to alter its dimensions where terrain made it necessary.

Although news of the project was not well-received by his superior in Paris, Tronson, de Casson's plan might have been completed had it not been for the massacre of the inhabitants of Lachine by Indians, in August, 1689. The fear of renewed attacks made continuation of the work impossible and twelve years elapsed before de Casson could take up the project once again.[1] This time, he engaged a professional engineer, Gédéon de Catalogne, to cut a canal within one year in the same area as the earlier one had been planned.[2] For a variety of reasons, most of them financial, bickering developed between the Sulpicians and the engineer-contractor, and the work was only half completed. The new Superior-General of the Order was even less favourable to the project than his predecessor had been and had all but forbidden de Casson from continuing.[3] After the latter's death in 1701, work ceased altogether. Subsequent attempts to revive the project failed, although Louis XIV was sufficiently interested to have ordered new surveys in 1708.[4] De Casson's dream of a dual purpose watercourse, for canoes and waterpower, from Lachine to Montreal was left unfulfilled, although his attempts in that direction reflect considerable foresight and ingenuity.[5]

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1 For brief biography, see Pierre Georges Roy, "Gédéon de Catalogne," B.R.H., Vol. XIII, (Fev.; 1907), pp. 50-54.

2 ibid., pp. 88-90. Contract between de Catalogne and de Casson.

3 Bonin, "Le Canal de Lachine Sous le Régime Français," p. 287.

4 ibid., p. 291.

5 See Olivier Maurault, "Dollier de Casson," Revue Trimestrielle Canadienne, Vol. IV (Fev., 1919), pp. 361-370, for an examination of de Casson's interest in the general improvement of Montreal's physical appearance.

c) On the instructions of Governor Sir Frederick Haldimand, the Royal Engineers from 1779 to 1783 constructed a nine hundred yard canal at Côteau du Lac and cut channels through the rock in the river at the Cascades, about ten miles up the St. Lawrence from Lachine. Although meant primarily to facilitate military transport, these improvements were also of great benefit to merchants and fur traders. There is, however, no evidence that Haldimand's plans included the construction of a canal to bypass the Lachine Rapids. It would have cost more money than the Governor could have spared from his budget.To maintain even the modest works above-mentioned, necessitated the collection of tolls from those who used the canals for commerce.[1] For the military to undertake the building of a canal would have required the mustering of funds far in excess of those at Haldimand's disposal. Moreover, its construction would have siphoned off from his meager forces more troops than he could spare from the defense of the western posts.[2] Thus, there seems to be little ground for agreement with the suggestion that a canal was built at Lachine at the same time as the one constructed at Côteau du Lac.[3] Military supplies were carried by cart over the rough road from Montreal to Lachine, along the north shore of the river; at Lachine they were transferred to bateaux for carriage

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1 D. Brymner, Report on Canadian Archives, 1886 (Ottawa: 1886), p. XXII.

2 A.L. Burt, The Old Province of Quebec, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1933), p. 288.

3 Brymner, op. cit., p. XXX

further upriver.

With the beginning of settlement in Upper Canada after the American Revolution, the need arose for better transportation facilities on the St. Lawrence River so that imports could be brought in and produce exported in a safe, inexpensive manner. Most of the bateaux used on the St. Lawrence carried approximately four and a half tons of goods and required five men for safe navigation.[1] The same number of men could have handled a much larger craft if the disturbances in the river could be circumnavigated by means of a series of shallow canals, with the result that costs would be lessened. Nonetheless, even without improvements, the St. Lawrence was the shortest, and even in its unimproved state, the most convenient route to the Great Lakes region. The products not only from Upper Canada but from the sparsely settled American shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie were sent down the St. Lawrence. The knowledge that most western New York, northern Pennsylvania, and the Ohio country exports found their way down the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence,[2] was one of the strongest

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[1] George Heriot, Travels Through the Canadas, Containing a Description of the Picturesque Scenery on some of the Rivers and Lakes; With an Account of the Productions, Commerce and Inhabitants of Those Provinces, (London: Richard Phillips, 1807), p. 117.

[2] In a letter to John Graves Simcoe, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada in 1792, John Richardson and other Montreal merchants asserted that "the St. Lawrence admitting of larger Boats than the Mohawk, diminished our expense of Transport". The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, collected and ed. Brig. Gen. E.A. Cruikshank, (4 vols., Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923), I, 135.

reasons for the lethargy and inaction in Lower Canada concerning "internal improvements".

Nonetheless, the need to get round these obstacles was not unnoticed. In 1796, during a discussion in the Legislative Assembly on the question of improving the middle road (the one most regularly used) to Lachine, John Richardson, of whom much will be said later, introduced a bill for the construction of a canal from Lachine to Montreal.[1] The bill failed, however, to secure a final reading, and it can perhaps be inferred that the tenor of Legislative and governmental opinion was unfavourable to the project on the grounds that the cost of such a canal would be prohibitive. Provincial revenues were probably considered to be insufficient to pay for such projects, the need for which was not entirely clear at the time. But if the cost and dimensions of a canal put it beyond the financial resources of the colony, the Assembly considered it useful to try to improve both the land and river communications between Montreal and Lachine. In response to a petition[2] in 1805 from a group of Montreal merchants, 1,000 pounds was appropriated for removing dangerous rocks and cutting a channel through the less turbulent parts of the Lachine Rapids.[3] This work was completed and improved over the next ten years and afforded an additional measure of safety to the loaded bateaux which some "conductors" were brave enough to

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1 Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, III (1795-1796), 249.

2 Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, VII (1805), 94-96.

3 Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 48 Geo. III, c. 19 (1805), An Act for applying the sum of one thousand pounds out of any unappropriated monies in the hands of His Majesty's Receiver General, towards the improvement of the inland navigation of this Province.

bring down the river. Money was also spent on more improvements to the Lachine Turnpike road or the Middle Lachine road. But neither river nor road transportation were adequate to meet the growing need for swifter, safer and larger means of conveyance, not only between Lachine and Montreal, but along the whole St. Lawrence River to Kingston.

d) Of the United States seaports, New York in particular seems to have been especially jealous of the increasing dependence of American north-western settlements on the St. Lawrence River system for commercial purposes. With its dual attraction of protected markets and comparatively easy transportation facilities, Montreal had almost succeeded in making of the entire settled Great Lakes area, including the American side, an economic dependency. The threat was more serious to New York State for it had frontage on both Lakes Ontario and Erie and once that area became settled, New York stood to lose valuable trade, if Montreal's hegemony went unchallenged. It would only be a matter of time before settlements produced beyond what was needed for self-sufficiency and would need to have their surplus conveyed to tidewater, there to be traded for manufactured goods from Europe. Even before the War of 1812-1814, New York had attempted to meet the northern threat. In 1792, the New York State Legislature chartered the Western Inland Navigation Company to improve the navigation on the Mohawk River, in the western part of New York State. It was thought that if the Mohawk was cleared of obstacles, the river could be used as a waterway into the comparatively unsettled areas of the state with the result that settlement and commerce would be encouraged. Some improvements to the Mohawk were begun, but because of the river's

sluggishness, it was no more economical to transport commodities by water than over the very rough roads then in use.

The War of 1812-1814 and the consequent heavy upriver traffic in military supplies seriously taxed the existing St. Lawrence transportation system. The Americans were also hard-pressed to keep their troops and ships on the Great Lakes supplied, and by the end of the war both belligerents had begun thinking in terms of improving the existing lines of communication with the Great Lakes. In 1815, the Governor-in-chief, Sir George Prevost, recommended to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada that financial assistance be given to the British government for the building of a canal around the Lachine Rapids, viewed as the main impediment to waterway communication with the interior. In 1816, the Legislature of the State of New York, informed of these ominous activities to the north, became aroused once more to the need for a canal of its own. Not only was Montreal her competitor, but New Orleans, Philadelphia and Baltimore threatened to establish economic control of the new West. To insure its own future, therefore, New York felt compelled to take swift and bold action. The Commission which had been appointed in 1810 to examine the route for a canal along the Mohawk valley and one up the Hudson to Lake Champlain, was revived. While the Lachine project lingered in abeyance, the New York scheme gained in strength as popular enthusiasm and political support for it grew enormously. In April 1817, an Act to build a canal from Lake Erie to Albany on the Hudson River was passed by the Legislature and on the fourth of July that year, just west of Rome, work was begun on the Erie Canal. The fourth of July, a more significant date could not have been chosen, for it had

once marked a dramatic change in the political history of North America. Now it seemed to the celebrants at Rome, and to Montreal's commercial mandarins when they received the news, that the economic pattern of the region would also be remoulded.

It was only after the announcement, in Montreal, that this legislation was under favourable consideration in New York, that important action was aroused in the Canadas. At the insistence of Upper Canada, Commissioners were appointed by both provinces to discuss the possibilities of improving navigation on the St. Lawrence between Montreal and Kingston. Although their joint report reflected a well-founded fear of the disastrous effects which the Erie Canal would exert on Canadian trade, they failed to agree on the necessary action to meet this threat. Moreover, the depressed economic conditions, crop failures and shortage of funds, especially in Upper Canada, dampened people's spirits and made the undertaking of a joint project difficult.

Early the next year, in March 1819, the Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal was chartered to build a canal from Montreal to Lachine. It was largely an attempt by merchants in Montreal to undertake this project, with private finances, not only to obviate the Lachine Rapids but the powerful St. Mary's current as well. It was thus an expensive undertaking, for which sufficient capital could not be raised, and in spite of sizeable financial support from the Legislature and the British government, the Company surrendered its charter in 1821 in failure. Commissioners were appointed by the Legislative Assembly and invested with the task of completing the Lachine Canal. It was a gesture of hopeful defiance to the Erie

Canal, which by this time was more than one third completed and in operation, defiance, because the Commissioners and the Legislators knew that in comparison with the Erie, the Lachine Canal by itself meant nothing. To obviate the Lachine Rapids would not, without a chain of connecting canals to Kingston and a canal across the Niagara peninsula, minimize the threat posed by the Erie. Hopeful defiance it was then, for the Lower Canadians half expected that once the Lachine was begun, the other needed canals would be undertaken.

Thus the Lachine Canal was an experiment, not one attended with buoyant optimism, processions, cannons and bonfires that celebrated the birth of the Erie, but marked by worried glances-over-shoulders and reverent hopes that either the St. Lawrence or the Ottawa-Rideau would make of the lonely Lachine a happy brother to other improvements. The Commissioners and others interested in the Lachine Canal had practically no grounds for these hopes, for the Legislature of Upper Canada adamantly refused to build the Rideau Canal, preferring instead the St. Lawrence route. However, Upper Canada had insufficient funds for either project and though the British government was building the Grenville Canal on the Ottawa, and in distant St. Catherines, William Hamilton Merritt had begun soliciting support for a Welland Canal, hope glimmered faintly. The experiment of the Lachine Canal, the first sizeable attempt at canal-building in Canadian history, was thus a distinctly qualified success.

However, the mere fact that its construction was undertaken and pushed forward, in the face of and in virtual defiance of the Erie Canal, constitutes a story worth telling. The tale is made more interesting and

complete because of the way in which certain problems, general in that they applied to all canal building and particular in that they were somewhat indigenous to Lower Canada, were met. It is the purpose of this thesis, then, to relate an account of the building of the Lachine Canal by examining the factors which led up to its beginning and those which influenced its fulfilment.

Chapter 2 British Attempts

Although the canals at Côteau du Lac and the Cascades were used by the Montreal fur traders and merchants dealing with the new settlements in Upper Canada, these works were built for military rather than commercial use. They were meant primarily to facilitate the quick movement of war materiel and troops to the upper Great Lakes during the American Revolution. After the end of hostilities, no improvements to the St. Lawrence River were made by the British military authorities or by the newly established governments of Upper and Lower Canada until after the War of 1812-1814. However, following the settlement of the upper St. Lawrence and eastern Lake Ontario region, by the United Empire Loyalists and later immigrants, commercial traffic on the river increased. Bateaux, Durham boats and rafts began plying the St. Lawrence in ever increasing numbers, bringing the products of the upper country to Lachine, whence they were forwarded to Quebec.[1] Not only from Upper Canada, but from American settlements on the Ohio River, exports came down the St. Lawrence. Although the river became the artery for the small traffic with the interior,[2] there was growing recognition that transportation on it would

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[1] G.P. de Twenebroker Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Toronto: Ryerson, 1938), p. 65.

[2] The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, I, 135.

be more economical, if the shallows and rapids between Montreal and Kingston were overcome by "improvements".[1] Transportation costs on the river were high and unless measures were taken to lessen them, development of extensive trade would be limited.[2]

In 1796, John Richardson, an important Montreal merchant and then a member of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada, attempted to secure passage of a bill providing for the construction of a canal between Montreal and Lachine.[3] However, these and other efforts to secure the improvement of the St. Lawrence, in the period between the American Revolution and the War of 1812-1814, received no support. Neither of the two Canadas possessed sufficient finances to construct the canals which were necessary to make the river a more efficient waterway. Moreover, neither the British government nor military authorities were sufficiently concerned over the growing inadequacy of the St. Lawrence for either commercial or military use, for them to initiate costly palliative measures.

If that traffic to and from Upper Canada was beginning to tax the St. Lawrence before the War of 1812-1814, the great need for military supplies after the outbreak of hostilities, strained the transportation

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1 D.G. Creighton, "The Commercial Class in Canadian Politics, 1792-1840", Papers and Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association, Vol. V, (Ottawa: 1933), p. 47.

2 Adam Shortt, "The Economic Effects of the War of 1812 on Upper Canada", O.H.S.P.R., Vol. IX, (1910), p. 81.

3 The bill passed two readings, 11th and 13th April, 1796, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, III (1795-1796), 249, 257.

facilities between Montreal and Kingston even more.[1] Not only was the river showing signs of inadequacy, but it was the object of American attack that might have completely severed communications between Upper and Lower Canada. During and after the War, the British military was convinced of the need for a supply line behind the frontier, safe from disruption by the Americans, in any future conflict.[2] Although the American frontier along the St. Lawrence and the south shore of Lake Ontario was comparatively unsettled, the construction of roads and the retention of vessels at Sackett's Harbour worried the British even after the Rush-Bagot Treaty of 1817.[3]

With the cessation of hostilities and the "lessons" of the War fresh in the minds of the civil and military government, they initiated a series of moves to improve the navigation of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers.[4] At the same time consideration was also given to the building of the Rideau waterway between Hull and Kingston. The Lachine Canal and others on the St. Lawrence below Lake St. Francis, along with the Grenville and Carillon Canals on the Ottawa, as well as the Rideau system, were thought of together. They were considered as a unit, a chain

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[1] Shortt, "The Economic Effects of the War of 1812 on Upper Canada", p. 83.

[2] C.P. Stacey, "The Myth of the Unguarded Frontier, 1815-1871", A.H.R., Vol. LVI, (1950, Oct.), p. 3.

[3] Albert B. Corey, "Canadian Border Defence Problems After 1814 to Their Culmination in the 'Forties,'" Canadian Historical Association Annual Report, (University of Toronto Press, 1938), pp. 113-114.

[4] Robert Legget, Rideau Waterway, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), p. 25.

of improvements, each link of which was necessary for the success of the whole.[1] Following the report to Wellington, Master-General of the Ordnance, of three military officers sent to examine the defences of British North America,[2] the British government decided to finance and build the Rideau Canal in 1825.[3] Work had already been begun on the Grenville Canal which was commenced in 1819.

In February 1815, the Governor-in-chief, Sir George Prevost, as one of his last public tasks, before leaving in disgrace for Britain, informed the Legislature of Lower Canada that His Majesty's government was contemplating the construction of a canal to obviate the Lachine Rapids.[4] He solicited the aid of the Legislature and was rewarded with a grant of 25,000 pounds, which was set aside until the canal was "in a course of actual execution".[5] This financial assistance was given with the unanimous consent of the Assembly whose members agreed that it was "expedient" to improve communications in Lower Canada. Although the canal

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1 ibid.

2 Redpath Library, McGill University, Major-General J.Carmicheal Smyth, Lt. Col. Sir G. Hoste and Captain Harris, "Report on the North American Provinces to the Duke of Wellington, Master-General of His Majesty's Ordnance"; see also P.A.C., Q Series, 175-A, Wellington to Bathurst, 6 Dec., 1825.

3 Hamnet P. Hill, K.C., "The Construction of the Rideau Canal, 1826-1832", O.H.S.P.R., Vol. XXII, (1925), pp. 118-119.

4 Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XVI (1815), 104.

5 Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 55 Geo. III, c. 20 (1815), An Act to grant an Aid to His Majesty, to assist in opening a Canal from the neighbourhood of Montreal to Lachine, and to further provide for facilitating the execution of the same.

was viewed by the Imperial authorities as an important part of their back country waterway scheme, the Legislators were alive to the advantages to commerce of a Lachine Canal.[1]

However, after initiating the project of a canal between Montreal and Lachine, after securing the assistance of the Legislature and raising the hopes of those most concerned with its commercial value, the British authorities in London began to balk and hedge. As time passed, no definite steps were taken to begin work on the canal and expressions of regret began to appear in Montreal's newspapers. In November, after a summer of patient expectancy, the Montreal Gazette decried "the want of zeal so manifest in the execution of a project so creditable to the country itself and so beneficial to the increasing commerce of the Canadas".[2] The Quebec Mercury called for the despatch of an engineer from Britain so that work might begin.[3] COUNTRY FARMER writing to the Canadian Courant urged economy in the execution of the work[4] and the sharp debate on the canal between PHILO BRITON and William Gray, the editor of the Montreal Herald,[5] indicates

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1 ibid., preamble.

2 Montreal Gazette, 20 Nov., 1815. The Montreal Herald, 25 Nov., 1815 reprinted the same editorial "since that paper (Montreal Gazette) is read less in Upper Canada than the Herald which thus has the right to make known the sentiments of their contemporaries upon matters which equally interest both provinces."

3 Quebec Mercury, Vol. XI, no. 48, p. 383, 28 Nov., 1815.

4 Canadian Courant, 17 Feb., 1816.

5 Montreal Herald, 23 Dec., 1815; 30 Dec., 1815; 20 Jan., 1816; 3 Feb., 1816.

that there was increasing public interest in the project. Concern increased as news began arriving, early in 1816, of the public meeting held in New York on 30th December 1815. It concerned the digging of a canal between the Hudson River and the Great Lakes. Lengthier and stronger editorials began appearing in Lower Canada's newspapers as the significance of a waterway competing with the St. Lawrence was understood.[1]

In the midst of increasing excitement in Lower Canada during 1816-1817, the Governors-in-chief were repeatedly urging the commencement of the Lachine Canal on the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst. Concern for the canal was so favourable in the Legislature that Sir Gordon Drummond, the Governor-in-chief, felt constrained to inform the Legislators that he awaited "only further instructions..., to proceed to carry it [the Lachine Canal] into effect".[2] The latter, however, instead of concentrating on the plan for a Lachine Canal, was considering the adoption of a scheme to draw boats up the Rapids by water wheels.[3] The idea was shown

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1 Montreal Gazette, 15 Jan., 1816, "this is the most interesting period in Canadian history"; Quebec Mercury, Vol. XII, no. 3, p. 22; 16 Jan., 1816, "Too soon according to appearances will the Hudson... rival the St. Lawrence... while they take the stride of a giant, we scarce to venture the puny length of a pigmy pace". The Montreal Gazette, 7 Oct., 1816, printed two articles on the value of canals to Holland and England, information which the writer may have gathered from the preface of J. Phillips, General History of Inland Navigation, Foreign and Domestic: (New edition; London: I. and J. Taylor, 1795).

2 Lower Canada, Council Journals, (1816), p. 5.

3 Great Britain, Canada Canal Communication, Copies of Correspondence Between the Treasury, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the Ordnance on the Canal Communication in Canada, (London: House of Commons, 1831), Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 1 Apr., 1817, pp. 5-6.

to be impractical,[1] however, and Sherbrooke, the Governor-in-chief, appealed to Bathurst to send out a civil engineer to supervise the construction of the Lachine Canal.[2] Sherbrooke had apparently ordered Captain Samuel Romilly, Royal Engineers, to survey the ground between Montreal and Lachine and report on the best route, as well as the estimated cost of a canal.[3] Nonetheless, a more experienced engineer was desired, but in spite of his appeal and the approval[4] for the despatch of one to Canada, no action resulted. Sherbrooke himself may have been partly to blame for this inaction because he informed Bathurst that the Legislature of Lower Canada would support the project by an additional appropriation.[5] The Treasury Lords subsequently declared their readiness to pay for only half of the canal.[6] However, additional funds were not forthcoming from the Legislature, perhaps out of opposition to Romilly's plan for the two and a half foot depth of the canal, or dislike of having to pay for a greater share of the cost of the canal. After 1817, the British government seems to have lost interest in the project and despite an appeal one year later by Richmond, Sherbrooke's successor,[7] the Lachine Canal was

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1 ibid., Captain Romilly to Major Henderson, 21 March, 1817, p. 6.

2 ibid.

3 ibid., S. Romilly "Report on the Proposed Canal between Montreal and Lachine", pp. 8-10.

4 ibid., Treasury Minute relating to the Proposed Canal between Montreal and Lachine, 4 July, 1817, pp. 6-7.

5 ibid., Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 1 Apr., 1817, pp. 5-6.

6 ibid., Treasury Minute, 30 Dec., 1817, p. 11.

7 P.A.C., Q Series, Richmond to Bathurst, 149-1.

largely forgotten in London.

Since the canal was first projected at the instance of the British military and since the Legislature had already set aside a considerable sum to aid in its construction, it is perhaps understandable that the latter would be reluctant to appropriate more. On the other hand, the British authorities had good reason to be parsimonious: although the canal would facilitate the conveyance of military supplies, it would also be a boon to merchants who would enjoy cheaper transportation costs. The British military authorities did, however, contribute substantially to the financing of the Lachine canal in return for the privilege of paying no tolls for the passage of military supplies on the canal.

In 1817 and 1818, Upper and Lower Canada were growing increasingly impatient for better means of communication between them. Commercial traffic on the St. Lawrence was growing in volume and bulk, and the very physical facilities to move export commodities such as potash, flour and lumber had to be increased.[1] The Erie Canal, which was on the verge of commencement in 1816, would seriously damage the trade of Canadian merchants with the American settlements south of Lakes Ontario and Erie. Perhaps the commodities even of Upper Canada would be diverted from the St. Lawrence and Montreal, the entrepot of this trade, would be outflanked and eclipsed by New York.

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[1] By 1816, approximately fifty Durham boats annually were bringing to Lachine potash and pearlash, wheat, corn, flour, beef and butter from Upper Canada and north-western New York State, J. H. Dorwin, "Montreal in 1816", Montreal Daily Star, 5 Feb., 1881.

Chapter 3 Canal Fever: Montreal versus New York

If contemporary newspapers are a valid indication of the state of public sentiment, Montreal merchants' haunts must have reverberated with excited talk and worried speculation, during the winter of 1816 - 1817. Most of the discussion was probably related to the plan of the Legislators of New York State to build a canal from Albany to Lake Erie and another from Albany to Lake Champlain. The route for the former had been carefully surveyed during the spring and summer of 1816 and the Commissioners' report was presented to the State Legislature in March, 1817. A fear akin to panic beset Montreal merchants who stood to lose the profits of trade in agricultural goods and manufactured articles, which would be carried on the Erie Canal, rather than by the St. Lawrence route. The trade of the Great Lakes region might be lured away from its "natural highway", the St. Lawrence with the result that Montreal's commercial prominence would be greatly undermined. It was never doubted, even by the merchants of Montreal, whose faith in the river seemed to be an obsession, that the Erie Canal, once built, would provide cheaper and faster communication with the interior than the unimproved St. Lawrence. The trade which had been enriching Montreal, inspiring in her commercial group visions of ever-growing profits, would be diverted to her ambitious rival to the south. This gloomy prospect had been facing Montreal since the end of the War of 1812-1814. With the submission of the report of the surveyors for the Erie Canal, in March 1817, and the adoption of definite measures on April 15th, to build it and the Champlain Canal, the commercial future of Montreal looked even darker.

a) The idea of connecting the lakes and rivers of upper New York State to the head of navigation of the Hudson River at Albany, had, like the Lachine Canal project, a long history.[1] The first attempts to improve the northern and north-western waterways were begun in 1793, following the incorporation of the Western Inland Navigation Company and the Northern Inland Navigation Company the previous year.[2] Noble E.Whitford has suggested that the measures undertaken by these companies were too limited to be of lasting benefit. Locks were built at Little Falls, German Flats and Rome; slight improvements were also made to natural waterways, mainly the Mohawk River.[3] However, attempts to clear the channels of rivers and lakes were ineffective and the movement of goods was little more efficient than before. Only the Western Inland Navigation Company had undertaken any sizeable measures, but in general neither trade nor settlement in the interior of New York State were greatly encouraged by them.

In 1810, however, proposals for a survey of a route for a canal from Albany west to Lake Erie and north-west to Lake Ontario, aroused sufficient interest in the New York State Legislature for an appropriation

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1 Noble E. Whitford, "The Canal System and Its Influences", in Conquering the Wilderness, Vol. V of History of the State of New York, ed. A.C. Flick, (10 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), pp. 297-308.

2 Noble E. Whitford, A History of the Canal System of the State of New York, Together With Brief Histories of the Canals of the United States and Canada, (Supplement to the Annual Report of the Engineer of the State of New York; 2 vols.; Albany: 1906), I, 39.

3 ibid., I, 39-41.

of $3,000 to be made for that purpose.[1] Mr. De Witt Clinton, the most influential political leader in New York and then a member of the State Senate,[2] lent his support to the scheme for a canal through the unsettled northern areas of New York. From that time onward, Clinton became an ardent supporter, perhaps the guiding spirit,[3] of the Erie Canal project. The Commissioners appointed to supervise the survey reported the following April, suggesting to the Legislature the construction of an inclined plane canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River.[4] The most important feature of the Report dealt with the route. The Commissioners strongly deprecated the idea of building one canal from Albany to Lake Ontario and another at Niagara to join Lakes Erie and Ontario. If the latter were built, they believed that it would only serve to enhance the prominence of Montreal in the Great Lakes' trade. Once traffic was in Lake Ontario, it would move, not to New York, through the projected Oswego to Albany canal, but to Montreal, a much shorter distance with a considerable saving of time

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1 ibid., I, 63.

2 Dictionary of American Biography, eds. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, (20 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1930), IV, 222.

3 James Renwick, Life of De Witt Clinton, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1845), but see Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 39.

4 Public Documents Relating to the New York Canals, ed. G.Haines, (New York: 1821), Report of "the Commissioners appointed by joint resolutions of the honourable Senate and Assembly of the State of New York, of the 13th and 15th March, 1810, to explore the route of inland navigation from Hudson's River to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie", pp. 1-34; also reprinted 23 Jan., 1817, Upper Canada Gazette.

and money.[1] The Commissioners argued that if a canal should be built from Albany through the interior to Lake Erie, not only would it avoid providing a direct benefit to Montreal, but the canal would help them to wrest economic control of the Great Lakes region from her. They warned that if American settlements near the Great Lakes continued to export and import by way of Canada, "a political connexion....would probably result from a commercial connection."[2] A canal to Lake Erie, they assured the Legislature, would result in benefits not only to New York and Albany but to the growing western settlements as well. New York's year-round ice-free conditions would enable her to export grain to south European markets before her competitors, Montreal and Danzig, were sufficiently clear of ice to permit the movement of ships.[3] Montreal clearly figures as their "bête noire", for the New Yorkers emphatically stated their belief that their northern rival would have a virtual monopoly of western trade, if but sixty miles of canals were built along the St. Lawrence.[4]

The recommendations of the Commission were not acted upon: the plan of an inclined plane (gradually descending) canal, chiefly the idea of Mr. Gouvernor Morris, did not commend itself to the New York

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1 ibid.

2 ibid.

3 ibid.

4 ibid., also Quebec Mercury, Vol. XIII, no. 14, pp. 108-109, 8 Apr., and no. 15, pp. 116-118, 15 Apr., 1817 for speech of Gideon Granger, one of the promoters of the Erie Canal.

Legislators.[1] Then too, the intervention of the War of 1812 - 1814 prevented the adoption of any scheme whatever. The War pointed out, not only the pressing need for improved waterway communication from the seaboard to the interior, but also the desirability of populating the vacant area immediately south of the Great Lakes. Moreover, the economic considerations, so clearly ascertained before the War, reasserted themselves after hostilities ceased and the canal enthusiasts began a vigorous, revitalized campaign for the building of the Erie Canal. On December 30th, 1815, De Witt Clinton began the renewed agitation at a well-attended public meeting in New York City,[2] where a memorial in favour of the canal was enthusiastically approved and signed.[3] The memorial was circulated in the settlements of upper New York State, where obvious commercial advantages would ensure the promoters of considerable support. Popular enthusiasm was aroused in almost every part of the State and with this support Clinton and his colleagues secured an appropriation of $20,000 from the Legislature on March 8th, 1816. With this sum, the Commissioners initiated a detailed survey, with three engineers, for canals from Albany to Lake Erie and north from Albany to Lake Champlain. Their report was submitted on February 8th, 1817, and, in mid April, the Legislature authorized the construction of the Erie Canal as a government

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[1] Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 66.

[2] Renwick, Life of De Witt Clinton, pp. 209-213.

[3] Public Documents Relating to the New York Canals, Memorial of the citizens of New York, in favour of a Canal Navigation between the great western Lakes and the tidewaters of the Hudson, pp. 77-100.

financed project.[1] Work began almost immediately under two American engineers.

b) It was several days before news of the New York State Legislature's decision reached Montreal. When it did arrive, in late April, the Montreal Herald[2] voiced its respect and subdued praise for the promoters of the Erie Canal. However, after performing this chore of praising the enterprise of New York, the editor, William Gray , immediately launched a crusade for the Lachine Canal and other "internal improvements". The Herald and Gazette, had sustained a weak and sporadic editorial campaign for the building of the Lachine Canal since 1815.[3] Now that the threat to Montreal was more ominous and ruin more imminent than ever, editorials designed to awaken fear and appropriate counter action appeared in profusion in all Montreal newspapers over the next two years.[4] Lengthy articles, some of them running in serial form in several issues, were printed on the value of canals and their particular importance to the commerce of contemporary Britain and Holland. 'Not only in the modern world are canals of immense economic importance, but they doubtless contributed to the greatness of the ancient Chaldean, Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Greek and Egyptian civilizations', it was knowingly asserted

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1 ibid., An Act, respecting Navigable communications between the Great Western and Northern Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean, 15 Apr., 1817, pp. 267-275.

2 Montreal Herald, 26 Apr., 3 May, 10 May, 9 July, 1817.

3 See Chapter 2, supra.

4 See Montreal Gazette, 18 Feb., 1818; Montreal Herald, 17 Oct., 24 Oct., 1818.

by the Montreal Herald.[1] Canals seem to have become one of the main preoccupations of Montreal and Quebec newspapers. Whether their editorial writing and frequent reprinting of reports on the progress of the Erie Canal was meant to arouse influential men to action, or whether it expressed the concern of those same people already aroused and seeking wider public support, is difficult to determine. More would need to be known of the business and political affiliations of the publishers and editors of those early Montreal newspapers. However, the concern over the fate of trade and commerce between the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence river was not confined to Montreal. The Quebec Gazette[2] and the Quebec Mercury[2] also published articles and editorials on the value, indeed the necessity, of canals to both Canadas, and on the immediate importance of a canal between Montreal and Lachine. Both the Upper Canada Gazette[3] and the Kingston Gazette[4] gave voice to the same degree of fear and exhortation as their sister newspapers in Lower Canada and soon in far-off Niagara the Niagara Gleaner became involved in the discussion surrounding a projected canal to join Lakes Ontario and Erie.[5]

The progress of the Erie Canal during the first season of its

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1 ibid., 17 Oct., 1818.

2 Quebec Gazette, 8 Oct., 1818; Quebec Mercury, 11 Feb., 1817; 13 May, 1817; 29 July, 1817.

3 Upper Canada Gazette, 13 Jan., 23 Jan., 30 Jan., 6 Feb., 6 Oct., 1817.

4 Kingston Gazette, 1 Feb., 19 Aug., 1817.

5 Hugh G.J. Aitken, The Welland Canal Company: A Study in Canadian Business Enterprise, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 31, 44.

excavation, clearly indicated that the project would be continued with vigour and enterprise.[1] "Cannot the example nor the intentions of our neighbours rouse us to activity?" inquired the Montreal Gazette.[2] If any measures even partially effective in mitigating the threat of New York to Canadian commerce, were to be undertaken, it seemed that action had to be forthcoming very soon.

c) As the result of an address to the Administrator of Upper Canada, Samuel Smith, by the Legislature of the Province "concerning the difficulty and expense which it [Upper Canada] is subjected to in its access by the River St. Lawrence to and from Montreal",[3] a new attempt was made to improve waterway communications between the Canadas. The address asked Smith to communicate to the Governor-in-chief, Sherbrooke, the desire of Upper Canada "that concurrent means be adopted by both Provinces for effecting so desirable an object on liberal and united principles."[4] Sherbrooke presented the message to the Legislature of Lower Canada ten days later, and, after hurried debate, an "Act to Authorize the appointment of Commissioners for the improvement of the communication by Water, with Upper Canada",[5] was passed. The Governor

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1 Quebec Gazette, 22 Jan., 1818; Kingston Gazette, 19 Aug., 1817.

2 Montreal Gazette, 18 Feb., 1818.

3 Upper Canada, Assembly Journals, (1818), (Report of the Bureau of Archives of the Province of Ontario 1912; Toronto: King's Printer, 1913), p. 515.

4 ibid., p. 515.

5 Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 58 Geo. III, c. 10 (1818).

was to appoint three Commissioners to negotiate with representatives from Upper Canada on "what measures may be necessary for the improvement of water communications between this Province and Upper Canada, as well by the river St. Lawrence as by the river Ottawa".[1] (my italics). The latter phrase is striking because it is an indication that, at the outset, ideas on where improvements to waterway communication should be built, were not common to both groups of participants at the brief conference.

To represent Lower Canada, George Garden and George Hamilton, the former a prominent Montreal merchant, were appointed, along with Louis Joseph Papineau, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The former two were not members of the Legislature.[2]

Their deliberations with the Commissioners from Upper Canada, Thomas Clark and James Crooks took place in early September 1818. They ended with no agreement on a unified plan of linking Upper and Lower Canada by a system of improvements to waterway communications. The joint report which both groups of Commissioners submitted to their respective Legislatures[3] contained no concrete suggestions as to how communications

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[1] ibid., preamble.

[2] Garden was a partner in the firm of Maitland, Garden and Auldjo, a director of the Bank of Montreal, later a shareholder in the Lachine Canal Company and a Commissioner of the canal when the project was eventually taken over by the government of Lower Canada; see Thomas Doige, An Alphabetical List of Merchants, Traders and Housekeepers Residing in Montreal, to which is prefixed a descriptive sketch of the town, (Montreal: William Gray, 1819), pp. 46, 99; Committee Minutes, 20 Apr., 1820; Commissioners' Minutes, 26 May, 1821.

[3] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXVIII (1819), Appendix (G), Joint Report on Water Communications betwixt the Two Provinces, Upper Canada, Assembly Journals, (1818), (Report of the Bureau of Archives of the Province of Ontario, 1913), pp. 34-35.

might be improved. A preamble to the report by the representatives of Upper Canada and the sixth clause of the report itself, clearly indicate that they could not agree with the recommendations of their Lower Canadian collegues that surveys of the Ottawa River should be immediately commenced. The Upper Canadians wanted to proceed with caution, with sufficient opportunity for reflection and weighing the merits of the various plans suggested. Their credentials, they thought, limited them to discussing improvements to the St. Lawrence. If the Ottawa was to be considered too, a possibility which they only grudgingly allowed, then further deliberations were assuredly necessary. Crooks and Clark suggested that both Provinces appoint representatives with means to secure "surveys, both of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa Rivers, together with estimates of Canals and Locks for boats and vessels of different constructions, to be laid before the two Legislatures for their selection and approval."[1] (my italics).

The Upper Canadian delegates were understandably reluctant to accept the avowed purpose of Lower Canada to favour the Ottawa-Rideau route over the St. Lawrence. Their Provincial revenues were not sufficient for them to build the Rideau waterway to which Upper Canada would have been committed had they accepted the views of their colleagues from Lower Canada. The reasons for the apparent preoccupation of the latter with the Ottawa-Rideau route is not entirely clear. Montreal newspapers barely mentioned it and filled most of the space devoted to internal communications with phrases extolling the St. Lawrence. Since Garden was a businessman,

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[1] ibid., p. 33.

he might have been expected to echo these sentiments which were soundly based on economic reality. Only the British military authorities were thinking at that time in terms of the best route between the two Provinces (from a military viewpoint), a concern which Garden and Hamilton seem strangely to have also assumed. It is possible that Sir Gordon Drummond, the new Governor-in-chief, or military officers, convinced them of the need for "safe" communications between the Provinces. Whatever the origin of their preoccupations with defense, the conference was ruined because of them.However, if Upper Canada was so deeply convinced of the urgent need for improving the St. Lawrence why would she not have initiated further negotiations on the matter with her sister Province? Instead Upper Canada attempted to secure the assistance of the Colonial Office for building canals along the St. Lawrence, by securing a grant of "waste land" the proceeds from the sale of which would be applied to that purpose.[1] The request was rejected.[2] Perhaps growing agitation for a canal across the Niagara peninsula drew attention and available financial resources away from those more controversial projects.

Interprovincial negotiations on canals were at an end and were not resumed until much later. The hopes expressed in the joint report, of effectively meeting the challenge of the Erie Canal, remained nothing more than good intentions. In Lower Canada the fate of the report was one of

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1 ibid., p. 82.

2 ibid., (1820), p. 219.

virtual oblivion. It was printed, by order of the Assembly,[1] complete with appendices, surveys of the canals that the Commissioners recommended to be built on the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa. No further discussions on the subject took place in the Legislature until April 19th, the following year, when "A Bill to improve the Communications between the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada by Internal Navigation, and for other purposes therein mentioned",[2] was introduced into the Assembly. The proposed legislation appropriated 25,000 pounds and an additional 10,000 pounds per year over the next six years, for canals on the Ottawa River.[3] The bill was discussed in the Committee of the Whole House that day and the next but was left in abeyance by the proroguation of that third session of the ninth Provincial Parliament. Despite Richmond's hopeful expectation that it would be passed at the next session of the Legislature,[4] the legislation was not revived and thereafter the construction of canals on the Ottawa were not seriously discussed in the Lower Canada Legislature. How the proposed legislation originated is not clear, but the apparent absence of persevering support for it in the Assembly indicates that it was probably initiated in some way by Richmond.

The Erie Canal was being built at an accelerated pace during

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1 Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXVIII (1819), 86; see Appendix (G).

2 ibid., 258.

3 Great Britain, Canada Canal Communication..., Richmond to Bathurst, 20 May, 1819, pp. 16-17.

4 ibid.,

1818,[1] whereas, moaned the Quebec Gazette, "not a spadeful of earth has been taken out of the intended Lachine Canal."[2] In spite of this and other baleful reminders of the New York threat to the Montreal commercial interests, the inter-Provincial negotiations had failed. There appeared to be little hope that they would be resumed in the near future. The British, after almost four years of inaction concerning the Lachine Canal, had apparently abandoned the project, in the hope that others would built it and the sense of urgency felt by Montreal merchants concerning this and other waterway improvements, remained unsatisfied. The latter were now prepared to attempt to finance the Lachine Canal themselves, by means of a joint stock company. Whatever would be the nature of other canals to the Great Lakes, whether located on the St. Lawrence or on the Ottawa-Rideau system, a canal between Montreal and Lachine was mandatory if the costs of transportation to the interior were to be reduced.

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[1] As late as September, 1818, more than three thousand men, five hundred span of horses, and two hundred yoke of oxen, were at work on the Erie canal, Upper Canada Gazette,24 Sept., 1818, (reprinted from Albany Daily Advertiser). A report from Canandaigua, New York, mentioned that eighty-five of the three hundred and fifty-three mile Erie canal were being excavated during 1818, Upper Canada Gazette, 13 Aug., 1818.

[2] Quebec Gazette, 8 Oct., 1818.

Chapter 4 The Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal

The Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal was established by an Act of the Legislature of Lower Canada,[1] following the examination of a petition to the Assembly by a group of Montreal merchants.[2]

a) The Assembly set up a Special Committee headed by Austin Cuvillier to inquire into the subject matter of the petition, immediately after it was received.[3] Witnesses were called to testify, not only as to the need for a canal between Montreal and Lachine, but also as to the advisability of its being built either by a private company, as the petitioners desired, or at public expense by the government. Thomas McCord and John Molson were among those called in; they both spoke of the transportation advantages to the trade with Upper Canada which would result from the building of the canal. Molson suggested that it would prevent "the injurious effects which the Great Western Canal of the United States of America is likely to produce on the trade of this Province."[4] The other witnesses supported these opinions and Lieutenant-Colonel Cockburn, Deputy Quarter-Master General, gave the military point of view, i.e. in the event of war with the United States, the Lachine

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1 Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 59 Geo. III, c. 6 (1819), An Act for making and maintaining a Navigable Canal from the neighbourhood of the City of Montreal to the Parish of Lachine in the Island and County of Montreal.

2 Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXVIII (1819), 21-22.

3 ibid., p. 22.

4 ibid., p. 42.

Canal would greatly facilitate the movement of supplies and troops between the Provinces.

Largely, these statements were the generally held beliefs about the value of the canal, but besides being unoriginal repetitious of what had been bandied about in newspapers for years, they were beside the point. The key question these witnesses had been called in to answer was not whether a canal should be built, but who should build it. However, the Committee seemed to be disinclined to decide the issue or attempt to influence the Assembly either way, for its report contained no recommendations. The testimony of the witnesses was submitted, leaving to the Assembly the chore of thrashing out the question of private or public financing and ownership of the Lachine Canal. The debate in the Committee of the Whole House lasted several hours,[1] but when the vote was called, there was a slim majority favouring the former scheme and the petitioners were allowed to proceed with their plans to establish a company to build the canal. The effect of newspaper editorials cannot be known, but it is interesting to note that there was less concern over this matter than there was over the route the canal should take. The opinions of both editors and anonymous letter-writers favoured the ambitious plan of building it from Lachine to the foot of the Current St. Mary and a branch through the town of Montreal to the Port.[2]

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[1] Quebec Gazette, 29 March, 1819; Le Spectateur Canadien, 3 Apr., 1819.

[2] Canadian Courant, 16 Jan., 6 Feb., 13 March, 27 March, 1819; Quebec Gazette, 4 Feb., 8 Apr., 1819.

The Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal was capitalized at 150,000 pounds, of three thousand shares of 50 pounds each. The Canal would be a toll canal and was to extend, according to the enabling act, 59 Geo. III, c.7, from Lachine to the foot of the Current. It was to be forty feet wide at the surface of the water, twenty-eight feet wide at the bottom and five feet deep. The locks were required to be no less than one hundred by twenty feet and five feet deep. According to the act, the Company had to complete the canal from Lachine to the foot of the Current St. Mary, with a branch to the Port of Montreal, within three years.

John Forsyth, Louis Guy, William McGillivray, Joseph Perrault, Thomas Porteous, Jacques Antoine Cartier, and David David, presumably those who had been instrumental in drawing up the petition to the Legislature, were authorized to conduct the sale of shares. This group sought subscribers in Montreal at the Montreal Bank[1] while others sold shares in Quebec and Three Rivers. In late May, after the subscription books had been open only a short while, the Canadian Courant proudly announced "that shares in the Lachine Canal are sought with great avidity,"[2] and attempted to show its readers that the shares would bring in the considerable revenue of fourteen and one half percent.

In spite of these optimistic pronouncements, response to the sale of shares was weak. Of those who undertook to promote the Company

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[1] Porteous, Forsyth and David were directors of the Montreal Bank, Thomas Doige, An Alphabetical List of Merchants, Traders and Housekeepers Residing in Montreal, (Montreal: 1819), p. 46.

[2] Canadian Courant , 29 May, 1819.

in Quebec, only one seems to have had enough confidence in it to buy shares himself and only one of the three correspondents in Three Rivers bought any. No attempt seems to have been made to solicit subscriptions from interested parties in Kingston or York and none were sold in London or New York. Contrasted with the attempts of the Welland Canal Company promoters to sell shares in Britain and the United States as well as in Lower Canada,[1] the salesmanship of these earlier entrepreneurs seems to have been poor indeed. Of the fourteen hundred and twenty-six shares which can be accounted for,[2] from the Minute Books of the Company's Committee of Management,[3] nine hundred and seventy were sold to residents of Montreal. Of the remainder, two hundred were purchased by the Province of Lower Canada and one hundred and fifty by the British government. Most of the remainder was sold in Quebec. The inexperience of the promoters, in this kind of endeavour, helps to explain what seems to be an appalling lack of initiative in the sale of shares. However, the validity of this suggestion is lessened by the knowledge that many of these businessmen of Montreal had established the Montreal Bank, two years earlier. At that time the Bank was an innovation in Canadian business but they had been sufficiently astute then to sell many shares in Boston and New York.[4] The British

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1 See Aitken, The Welland Canal Company, chapter 2, pp. 25-56.

2 The Company claimed to have sold seventeen hundred and sixty, P.A.C., Public Works Series, Vol. 12, Committee Minutes, Letter to Auldjo, 31 July, 1819.

3 ibid.

4 Interview with Mr. Merrill Denison, Historian of the Bank of Montreal, 16 May, 1960.

government bought only one hundred and fifty of the six hundred shares set aside for it in the Lachine Canal venture. This disappointment, however, does not explain the lethargy and absence of vigorous enterprise which surrounds the project.

In Montreal itself there was a certain amount of popular enthusiasm over the commercial prospects of the canal. Not only merchants took up shares but others, such as a few notaries, a perfumer, tailors, grocers and tavernkeepers, were among the subscribers.[1] All but two of the directors of the Montreal Bank and several from the rival Bank of Canada subscribed to shares, although there was no official connection between either of these banks and the Company.[2] Le Spectateur Canadien, a Montreal French newspaper decried the absence from the Company's subscription book of "nos Capitalistes Canadiens" who, the paper asserted, "ne se sont pas encore présentés, quoique ou aye la certitude qu'un grand nombre d'entre' eux aspirent à prendre des Actions dans ce louable établissement,"[3] The canal thus began very largely as a Montreal English undertaking, mainly because so few Canadiens were engaged in inter - Provincial commerce. Most of them who did possess capital did not appear to be interested in investing in a project with such pronounced commercial pretentions. A certain amount of jealous fear that Montreal's prestige

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[1] Check names of shareholders in Committee Minutes with T. Doige, An Alphabetical List of Merchants, Traders, and Housekeepers Residing in Montreal.

[2] One letter to the editor of the Quebec Mercury, Vol. XVI, No. 1, p. 4, 4 Jan., 1820, complaining of the lack of activity by the Company suggested this possibility.

[3] Le Spectateur Canadien, 5 June, 1819.

would surpass its own, may well explain the absence of strong support from Quebec.

On July twenty-sixth, 1819, the required number of half the authorized number of shares having been sold, a meeting of subscribers was held in the Montreal Courthouse. The Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal officially began to function. An executive body, called the Committee of Management, was selected and consisted of John Richardson (chairman), Lieutenant-Colonel John Ready, Thomas Thain, Thomas Gillespie, François Desrivières, Thomas Phillips, Robert Froste, and Toussaint Pothier. The shareholders met only twice more, once on May twenty-seventh, 1820, to hear a report on the progress of the Engineer's survey,[1] and again in January, 1821, to approve a petition to the Legislature for changes in the enabling Act. In the interim between these meetings, the Committee under Richardson's direction carried on the Company's affairs and it is to the affairs of this body that we must look for evidence of efforts to get the project started.

b) The first, and the most important, task which the Committee felt obliged to undertake was to secure an engineer "who has had experience in Canal making etc."[2] The only survey for a Lachine Canal made up to this time was completed in 1817 by Captain Samuel Romilly of the Royal Engineers. He planned a canal from Lachine to the foot of the Current St. Mary but one much narrower and shallower than that which the Company was obliged

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1 Committee Minutes, 27 May, 1820.

2 ibid., 26 July, 1819.

to build.[1] Moreover, Romilly's estimates were almost four years old.

A group of professional canal builders had arisen in Britain, men of great ability and experience whose worldwide prestige was based on their successful supervision of the construction of many canals in Britian since 1765, an era which experienced a virtual revolution in internal transportation in Britain.[2] After Brindley, the first of these builders, had come John Rennie, Thomas Telford and George Stephenson whose works were regarded as models of how canals should be built, as anyone knew who had read J. Phillips' current work, General History of Inland Navigation, Foreign and Domestic.[3] Since there was no one in North America who pretended to the engineering stature of these men, or their younger colleagues, it was a natural and wise decision of the Committee to seek technical assistance from Britain.[4] They decided to appeal directly to one of these master builders, to assist them in finding a qualified engineer to supervise the construction of the Lachine Canal.

To treat on their behalf, the Committee enlisted the aid of

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1 supra, chapter 2.

2 C. Hadfield, British Canals, (London: Phoenix House, 1950), chapter 2, pp. 32-48.

3 A Complete account of the canals already executed in England with consideration on those projected, passim.

4 The same problem faced the Erie Canal Commissioners. They decided nonetheless to take their chances with two inexperienced American engineers, after James Weston, a British canal builder, declined their offer for constructing the Erie Canal, Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 76.

Alex Auldjo, a former Montreal merchant who had been living in retirement in England since 1805.[1] Auldjo was held in great esteem by his former colleagues: "from his known attachment to the interests of these provinces and the pains he is known to take in whatever he undertakes, (Auldjo) is a fit and proper person to be employed to find and send such a professional character."[2] Auldjo was instructed to consult with either Rennie or Telford and to hire "a professional character, duly qualified,"[3] without referring back to the Committee. Auldjo consulted with Telford and concluded an agreement with Thomas Burnett to build the canal. So that no time would be lost in getting Burnett on the site as early in the spring of 1820 as possible, he was requested to proceed first to New York and overland to Montreal, rather than wait until the commencement of navigation in the St. Lawrence.

Nothing of Burnett's origins or engineering experience is known.[4] However, since he was recommended by Telford for the job and since his work on the Lachine Canal remained, for many years, a model of excellent

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[1] Auldjo was the senior partner in the firm of Maitland, Garden and Auldjo. He married John Richardson's daughter, Eweretta Jane, R. Campbell, A History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church, St. Gabriel Street, Montreal, (Montreal: W. Drysdale and Company, 1887), p. 99.

[2] Committee Minutes, 26 July, 1819.

[3] ibid., Letter to Auldjo, 31 July, 1819. The area of Britain which was most likely to furnish the best engineer seems to have been a matter of debate among the members of the Committee: "Some are of the opinion that Scotland would be the most likely country to succeed in, while others consider that in England there must be more experience in such works,"

[4] Letter from A. McDonald, M.I.C.E., Secretary: Institution of Civil Engineers, London, U.K., 21 March, 1960.

design, he was likely of recognized professional stature in Britain. Burnett was to survey the route for the canal, make plans and estimates of the works and superintend the construction of the project. He was engaged for three years, at an annual salary of 500 pounds and was promised a "liberal gratuity" when the work was completed, if "he should by his good conduct and exertions give that satisfaction to the directors of the Lachine Canal Company so as to entitle him to their approbation."[1]

Since Burnett's surveys, soundings, plans and estimates were the most tangible accomplishments of the Company, they would seem to merit, more than a brief treatment. The Committee issued few and only general instructions to the Engineer and the Surveyor, John Adams, who had surveyed the route for the Grenville Canal in 1818, "as your own professional experience will be the best guide."[2] Three things the Committee did request, however: a survey of the St. Lawrence river shore in the vicinity of Lachine so that the most suitable place for joining the canal to the river could be determined. Secondly, the Committee asked him to gather information about water levels in the river, at various seasons during the past number of years, and thirdly, surveys of two alternative lines for the canal so that the land speculation and consequent high prices for a right-of-way might be avoided. But these general instructions contained no demands which an experienced engineer and surveyor would not answer in a report, after

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[1] Contract between Company and Burnett, Committee Minutes, 27 May, 1820. In the event of any disagreement between them, Thomas Telford would adjudicate.

[2] Committee to Burnett, Committee Minutes, 10 May, 1820.

thorough examination of any given terrain, for the purpose of building a canal through it. The Committee was careful to give the engineer a paper carte blanche by telling him to "do whatever in your opinion will conduce to the proper commencement and execution of the work."[1] In practise, however, the Committee interfered at every important juncture of Burnett's work and his Report really should be considered as a compendium of his work and recommendations, which were strongly influenced by the indeas of Committee members, chiefly Richardson, Gillespie and Porteous.[2]

Burnett submitted his Report to the Committee early in December, 1820; it was copied into the Minutes of the Committee. It is the most important document to come out of the two years of the Company's existence and it is all the more significant because it embodied the ideas, not only of the engineer, but of the members of the Committee as well.

Burnett began, as most people who wrote anything on the subject seem to have thought necessary, with a statement of the need for a canal between Montreal and Lachine because of the growing volume of commercial traffic between Upper and Lower Canada, making necessary "an improvement

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[1] ibid.

[2] They had been called in to help decide on the location of the upper inlet of the canal and the exact line it would follow from there. See Committee Minutes, 16 May, 1820. To save on costs they had consulted with Burnett on narrowing the canal where it crossed the Recollet and St. Lawrence suburbs; ibid., 17 June, 1820. See also Committee Minutes 10 July, 12 July, 17 July, 27 Nov., 1820.

in the means of facilitating that intercourse."[1] He noticed that the Lachine Canal was needed, not only as an end in itself, i.e. to lessen the cost of transport between Montreal and Lachine, but also as part of the general improvement to communications in Canada by way of the St. Lawrence, Ottawa and, ultimately the Rideau River, route. Burnett, I think, would hardly have had time personally to make an assessment of the comparative merits of that route, over those of the direct St. Lawrence route to Kingston. It seems, then, that he had been primed with certain attitudes[2] on the question prevalent in Lower Canada and simply parrotted them in his Report. He proposed to take the canal over the least expensive of three possible routes that he had surveyed. It ran roughly from a place called 'Finchley's store' in Upper Lachine along the shore of the river for approximately one hundred yards, until it was beyond the village where, it turned east towards the property of McNaughton, near Côte St. Paul. This was to be the upper reach of the canal and the line to which the canal eventually did conform, when under construction three years later. It ran for a distance of more than two and a half miles, most of which was through solid rock.

From McNaughton's to Hurtubise's property (on the west corner of the St. Lawrence suburb) was the second link of the canal, a distance of eighty-six hundred yards, or almost five miles; on this segment Burnett proposed to build locks (probably two) to bring the canal down twelve feet.

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[1] Report of Engineer, Committee Minutes, 8 Jan., 1821.

[2] See chapter 3, supra.

The problems posed by building the canal through a three hundred yard long swamp, were to be overcome by replacing "the soft vegetable matter of which this swamp is composed"[1] with earth from a woods nearby. The River St. Pierre, or Little River, which lay in the path of the canal, would be carried under it by a tunnel. On the Hurtubise property, Burnett intended that the branch line to the Port should begin and proceed to the river, entering it at the eastern end of Munn's shipyard. An embankment ten and a half feet high, was to carry the branch over low ground, for about four hundred yards in the St. Anne's suburb, before it reached the St. Lawrence River.

The main branch, continuing from Hurtubise's east through the St. Lawrence suburb would, for almost two miles, be narrowed down to twenty feet, i.e. half its normal width. This ground must have been low because the reason given for contraction was that the expense of building an embankment, large enough to support the amount of water needed in the unnarrowed canal, would have been prohibitive. The costs, too, of buying a right-of-way through this populous and therefore expensive area of Montreal, would be greatly curtailed with the narrower canal. Even the bridges over it would be less costly. Burnett and the Committee were understandably concerned with keeping the project within as close financial bounds as possible. On the property of Strothers (farther east in the St. Lawrence suburb), the canal was to resume its original width and

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[1] Report of Engineer, Committee Minutes, 8 Jan., 1821.

proceed "over very favourable ground,"[1] to the King's Naval Stores, where it would turn south and, by means of five locks, be carried down to the river at the foot of St. Mary's current, near the Cross (the ferry to Longueil).

Burnett estimated that the total length of the canal, if built over this route, and including the collateral branch, would be about twelve miles. The engineer explored two alternative routes; one would, on the upper section, take the canal directly through the village of Lachine to McNaughton's, instead of along the river shore, a possibility which would greatly increase land expropriation costs. The other would carry the canal along the Côte St. Pierre, i.e. closer to the river along lowlying marshland. Both were discounted as impractical. If it were built according to his specifications, Burnett estimated that the final expense of the canal would be 78,000 pounds.

The Company ceased operations and went out of existence early in 1821 and was taken over by a government commission which, except for the upper reach, built the canal over a much different route. Therefore, Burnett's plans and estimates could not be tested against the daily problems, setbacks and overexpenditure which beset most pioneer construction projects. It is doubtful, however, that his estimates were realistic in view of the fact that the much shorter canal, that was eventually built, cost 107,000 pounds. This was only a few years after Burnett's Report was submitted and thus discounts any argument which

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[1] ibid.

would attribute the difference to a serious rise in the cost of labour or materials.

The influence and assistance of the members of the Committee in compiling this Report was, as has been indicated, considerable, if not vital. Aside from the frequent inspections of the engineer's activities, the Committee performed very little else. The activities which they did busy themselves with, were mostly concerned with having the enabling Act amended. They did, however, try to explore the cost of purchasing land for the canal by calling a meeting of some Upper Lachine and Côte St. Paul residents on August 19th, 1820.[1] The conference proved to be unsatisfactory, probably because of disagreement on the prices to be paid for the land and the matter was allowed to lapse. The Committee was also interested in the state of navigation of the St. Lawrence River, between Lachine and the Cascades, further upriver.[2] The reasons for this interest can only be guessed, although it may have had something to do with possible plans to extend canal-building operations, at some future date, if the Lachine venture proved to be successful.

By the autumn of 1820, a little more than one year after the establishment of the Company, financial difficulties resulting from the inability of the Committee to sell more shares, forced a reassessment of their ability to build the canal, under existing regulations. It was becoming increasingly clear that unless the Company's financial position

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1 Committee Minutes, 19 Aug., 1820.

2 ibid., 28 Aug., 11 Sept., 1820.

were somehow reinforced, the money already collected would be insufficient. Calls for money on subscribers met with much disappointment and almost two hundred shares were forfeited, as confidence in the project waned and the onset of "bad times" forced many subscribers to abandon payments.[1]

c) The Committee had discussed and decided on several means of alleviating the Company's financial embarrassment. One, as we have seen, was the careful paring off of expensive construction. Another was the amendment of the enabling Act so that the earning power of the canal by tolls would be enhanced, and more investment would thereby be attracted. If the Provincial government refused to amend 59 Geo. III, c. 6, then perhaps the Province itself could be induced to buy more shares, in order to rescue the canal project from failure. Either of these possibilities, along with a request for more time to construct the canal, were presented to the Assembly by means of a petition. Towards the end of 1820, while they were preparing the required annual report to the Legislature, the Committee determined to petition for all the changes that they had been discussing during the previous summer. Richardson, Gillespie and Desrivières began to draft the petition which was read to the Assembly on January 15th, 1821. It was a lengthly document, attempting to convince the Legislators that assistance to the Company, both by the Province subscribing to more shares and by changing section thirty-one of the enabling Act, would be in the interests of both the Province and the Company. Section thirty-one required that the costs of repairs and general upkeep on the canal and its branch, were to be considered as operating expenses, to be paid out of the tolls

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[1] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXX (1821), 90.

collected. But if these charges were considered as part of the capital outlay, the petitioners argued, then the untaxed revenues could be passed on to the shareholders, giving them a much higher rate of return on their investment. Once this change was advertised among potential buyers, they felt that more investment would be attracted to the venture. The Petition was, of course, generously embellished with grandiloquent prophesies, such as "no external power can by any expense wrest from us the striking advantages of it," if the canal were completed. But if it were not built, the petitioners forboded gloomily, "we shall hereafter have to deplore the sad neglect as irremediable."[1]

The scheme to pay for maintenance costs out of capital funds in order to help cure the financial ills of the Company was not without precedent,[2] but was unacceptable to the Legislators. Surely, if indefinitely recurring charges, as maintenance costs are, were paid out of capital funds, the shareholders would be literally paying for their own dividends, which would inevitably crash once the originally subscribed capital ran out. The Legislators were totally unprepared to accept this scheme, nor did they seem to be willing to subscribe more money to the venture, by investing more than the ten thousand pounds they had already put in.[3] The Assembly was being asked to support a weak, if not tottering, structure, the existing financial basis for which was of dubious duration, in view

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[1] ibid.

[2] Hadfield, British Canals, p. 33.

[3] Together, the Province and the British government had subscribed to almost twenty percent of the shares.

of the strained circumstances of many Montreal merchants, especially those involved in the North West Company.

The Petition, once received, was immediately referred to the inevitable Special Committee of five members of the Assembly. Two of them, Austin Cuvillier and George Garden (the latter who had been one of the Lower Canada representatives in the negotiations with Upper Canada in 1818), were shareholders, whereas the others, Dessaulles, Oldham and Denis B. Viger, had no known connection or avowed sympathy with the wishes of the Company. It was Viger, who made a motion in the Assembly that the Special Committee be instructed to consider whether the Province should undertake the construction of the Lachine Canal, "as soon as it shall have been ascertained that the Company of Proprietors of the said Canal shall have abandoned their right of making it."[1]

On February 12th, the Special Committee brought in its report and recommendations. None of the requests of the Petition were answered. Clearly then, no relief for the Company's worsening financial situation was forthcoming from the Assembly. Since the time allowed by the Act for completing the canal, would be over in July, 1822, only one construction season remained for the Company to fulfill its franchise. The Special Committee recommended that the Province consider assuming control of the project, since "so useful an undertaking to the commercial prosperity of His Majesty's Provinces in North America, and even to the Empire, will in consequence be retarded, to the great detriment of both."[2]

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[1] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXX (1821), 133.

[2] ibid., 162.

Nine days later, the Committee of the Whole House accepted the resolutions of the Special Committee that steps be taken to build the Lachine Canal, if (and of this there was little doubt) the Company failed to fulfill the conditions of the enabling Act. Now in despair at the failure of their Petition, virtually their last hope, the Company was ready to resign. They began to take steps to salvage as much of their money as had already been expended on surveys and other charges. On March 23rd, Richardson officially notified the members of the Committee of the Assembly's moves: the appointment of Commissioners to arrange with the Committee, the terms of surrender.[1] A general meeting of the shareholders authorized the Committee to negotiate the transfer of the Company's property: Burnett's report, and its obligations, Burnett's contract of service, to the Province. By May 12th, the Honourable Chartier de Lothbinière, Isaac Winslow Clarke, and Stephen Sewell, for the Province, and the Committee, for the Company, came to an agreement. On May 18th, the Governor-in-chief, the Earl of Dalhousie, gave his official blessing to the agreement and the Company of Proprietors for the Lachine Canal came to an unlamented end.

There were few, if any, tears at the interment of this ambitious attempt by private capital to build the canal and there was a noticeable absence of wailing, or wearing of sackcloth and ashes, by Montreal newspaper editors. There was no contemporary assessment, attempting to explain the reasons for the failure of the Company. Why its promoters blandly ignored

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[1] Committee Minutes, 23 March, 1821.

possible sources of financial support in New York and London, remains a mystery. With their strong commercial ties with the latter, some funds could almost certainly have been secured there by these experienced Montreal businessmen. In view of the extensive resources which the promoters of the Welland Canal secured in New York,[1] it is likely that some money would have been invested in the Lachine Canal as well, had it been solicited. Perhaps the group in charge of selling shares believed that the necessary funds could be found in Lower Canada, or that more support was forthcoming from the Legislature and the British government. The latter was concerned, at this time, with the Grenville Canal and seemed unwilling to extend further aid to the Lachine Canal. The Legislature, on the other hand, was not prepared to continue its financial assistance to the Company, but was willing to build the canal itself. If additional Legislative support was necessary, the concensus of opinion among its members seemed to be, that it should be a public project.

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[1] Aitken, The Welland Canal Company, Appendix IV, Table VI, p. 147.

Chapter 5 John Richardson: The Guiding Hand

Since the end of the War of 1812-1814, events had been ripe for the building of a Lachine Canal, but in the absence of strong leadership prior to the formation of the Company of Proprietors, the project had been left in abeyance. The Montreal businessmen who took over the scheme, in the hopes that it would be a profitable venture, some of them later becoming members of the government-appointed board of Commissioners, contributed the energy and perseverance necessary for the realization of the canal. Of all the men who took part in the project, from the time positive steps began in 1819, John Richardson was the most consistently active.

a) Various studies of Richardson's many-sided career have been written; of these the most useful for purposes of this exposition was Adam Shortt's "The Honourable John Richardson, Merchant, Financier and Statesman,"[1] a biography of wide scope that provided much information. A brief sketch of Richardson might well be included here, to emphasize some features of the public life of one so intimately connected with the Lachine Canal. Before and after assuming the commanding role in the canal venture, Richardson was one of the most prominent 'public spirited' citizens of his day. He was one of those supervising the collection of

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[1] "The Founders of Canadian Banking," J.C.B., Vol. XXIX,(Oct., 1921; Jan., 1922), pp. 17-27, 165-178.

funds to help: erect a monument to Nelson in Montreal, those widowed by the battle of Waterloo, build the Montreal General Hospital[1] and the sufferers of the 1825 Miramichi disaster.[2] He headed a number of the annual November 30th celebrations of the Montreal St. Andrew's Society and was the proprietor of a pew in the St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church, where most of the city's merchant aristocracy worshipped.[3]

Richardson's commercial "home base" was the Montreal trading firm of Forsyth, Richardson and Company, which he formed in 1790, after a period of employment with Phyn, Ellice and Company of Schenectady.[4] Before coming to Montreal in 1787,[5] Richardson had enjoyed a brief, but adventurous, career aboard the Loyalist privateer "Vengeance," during the American Revolution.[6] For furs, Forsyth Richardson traded in the area south-west of the Great Lakes[7] and, in the northern regions, they competed

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1 Canadian Courant, 9 June, 1821.

2 See Robert Christie, History of the Late Province of Lower Canada, (6 vols.; Montreal: Richard Worthington, 1866), III, 75-77(footnotes).

3 Campbell, A History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church, St. Gabriel Street, Montreal,p. 88.

4 For some of Richardson's letters which throw considerable light on his early trading activities see Col. E, Cruikshank, "The John Richardson Letters," O.H.S.P.R., Vol. VI, (1905), pp. 20-36.

5 W. Stewart Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, (2d ed.; 2 vols.; Toronto: MacMillan, 1945), II, 556.

6 Henry R. Howland, "A British Privateer in the American Revolution," A.H.R., Vol. VII, (Jan., 1902), pp. 286-303.

7 W.T. Eastbrook and Hugh G.J. Aitken, Canadian Economic History, (Toronto: MacMillan, 1956), p. 176.

with the North West and Hudson's Bay companies, as a partner in the X Y Company,[1] until it was absorbed by the former, in 1804. Following the Loyalist migration to Upper Canada, the firm's interests seem to have shifted to wholesale merchandising of manufactured goods to Upper Canadian merchants,[2] and the handling of various forms of paper or raw produce, which their correspondents used to pay for them. Richardson helped to establish the shortlived Canadian Banking Company in 1792,[3] in order to facilitate the transaction of business and co-ordinate the banking functions, which the forwarding merchants were required to undertake. Richardson was later connected with the formation of the Bank of Montreal.[4]

Richardson's involvement with politics was nearly as extensive as his business interests.[5] He was a member of the Executive Council. As a member of the Legislative Assembly and later, the Legislative Council, he was associated with the state of war existing between the English dominated Council and the predominantly Canadien Assembly. During the

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1 R.H. Fleming, "The Origins of Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company," C.H.R., Vol. IX, (June, 1928), pp. 137-155.

2 One of Richardson's business connections in Upper Canada was William Hamilton Merritt, who promoted the Welland Canal, J.P. Merritt, Biography of William Hamilton Merritt, (St. Catherines: 1875), p. 41.

3 Adam Shortt, "The Honourable John Richardson...," p. 22.

4 Adam Shortt, "The Early History of Canadian Banking, III - From 1791-1812," J.C.B., Vol. IV, (Apr., 1897), p. 239. Richardson delivered a lengthy speech to the Assembly on 12th April, 1808, in an attempt to enlighten the members on the usefulness of a bank in Lower Canada, Quebec Mercury, 2 May, 1808.

5 Wallace, Dictionary of Canadian Biography, II, 556.

very first session of the first Provincial parliament, Richardson, one of the members for Montreal's East Ward,[1] tried to prevent the use of the French language, for introducing bills into the Assembly.[2] This attempt to curtail what they regarded as their privilege, was vigorously resisted by the Canadien leaders, as was the English group's earlier suggestion that one of them, supposedly experienced in parliamentary procedure, be elected Speaker of the Assembly.[3] These moves of Richardson's and his subsequent support of the Union Bill in 1822, earned him the recognition by Canadiens as one of their bitterest enemies;[4] he received the vehement contempt that went with that distinction. Early in 1822, he had been singled out for unprecedented censure by the Assembly,[5] for his remark

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[1] See F.J. Audet and E.F. Surveyer, Les Députés de la Premier Parlement du Bas Canada, (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1946), for brief biographies of some members of the first Legislative Assembly and some members of the Legislative Council. Audet published a sketch of Richardson in La Presse, 15 Oct., 1927, and in F.J. Audet, Les Députés de Montreal, (Montréal: Les Éditions des Dix, 1943), pp. 31-44.

[2] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, I (1792- 1793), 142; see Thomas Chapais, Cours d'Histoire du Canada, (8 tomes; Québec: Libraire Garneau, 1921), II, DeuxièmeLecon, for the debates on these questions.

[3] See F.H. Soward, "The First Assembly in Lower Canada," C.H.R., Vol. IV, (Sept., 1923), pp. 258-263, for Richardson's plaintive letter to Edward Ellice summarizing the "unfortunate happenings" in this first session.

[4] Richardson chaired a meeting on 22 Oct., 1822, in Montreal when resolutions were passed by the predominantly Anglo-Saxon group in attendance favouring the political union of Upper and Lower Canada, Shortt, "The Honourable John Richardson...," p. 167.

[5] Four resolutions were passed by the Assembly condemning Richardson in exceptionally strong terms. Both the Governor-in-chief Dalhousie, and the Legislative Council were officially asked to punish Richardson. The Governor was asked to strip him of all public offices, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXI (1822), 137. Dalhousie rejected this demand, ibid., 140. The Legislative Council's answer amounted to an outright refusal, Lower Canada, Council Journals, (1822), pp. 57-58.

in the Council that some of the members of the lower house were meeting in secret. He termed it "a Committee of Public Safety," in those days a charge containing none-too-subtle implications. The bitterness between the Council and Governor, on the one hand, and the Assembly, on the other, had reached a high level of intensity in 1821 and 1822, as Christie points out,[1] over the crucial issue of whether the Assembly was constitutionally bound to vote supply to the government, for the life of the monarch, or annually. Richardson's indiscretion simply gave the Assembly an additional opportunity to show its contempt, not only for the person of an inveterate foe, but for the Council too, the repository of considerable antipathy to the seemingly balkly, uncompliant lower house.

Richardson's embroilment in these serious political issues may have been even more far-reaching. Colonel Cruikshank has suggested[2] that he was either the author, or collaborator, of the person who wrote the Letters of Veritas.[3] As the subtitle of these ten "Letters" suggests, they were attacks on the conduct of the former Governor-in-chief, Sir George Prevost, during the War of 1812-1814. That there may have been some well-founded reasons for criticising Prevost (in view of the disaster at Plattsburgh in 1814), is not our present concern, for a reading of them

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[1] Christie, History of the Late Province of Lower Canada, III, 2-4.

[2] Cruikshank, "The John Richardson Letters," p. 21.

[3] The Letters of Veritas, A succinct narrative of the military administration of Sir George Prevost, during his command in the Canadas; whereby it will appear manifest, that the merit of preserving them from conquest belongs not to him, (Montreal: 1815). These "Letters" appeared in the Montreal Herald in April, May and June, 1815.

gives one the indelible impression that they were written for political reasons as well. The "Letters" were probably composed by a member of the "English party," those who had disliked and distrusted Prevost's conciliatory treatment of the Canadiens. The author may well have been Richardson,[1] since he was one of the leading members of that group. The strongly technical theme of the "Letters" does not bar him, for Richardson, if he was the author, would have had such an expert advising him.[2]

b) It is worth noting that the wrangling and debate between the two houses of the Legislature, never involved the Lachine Canal. The Legislative Assembly, whose child the canal was, usually made appropriations for it readily. The extra funds that were necessary to carry on work, during 1824 and 1825, were given in a relatively trouble-free manner. If there were bitter debates in the Assembly, on any feature of the canal, or the personnel connected with it, such as Richardson, these divisions cannot be noticed in the Assembly's Journals or in contemporary newspapers, which were ever-ready to discuss contentious issues. Aside from the route controversy, which was apparently completely unrelated to the major sore spots between the Assembly and Council, the Lachine Canal remained outside the pale of contemporary hurly burly. One surmises then that there was a common opinion amongst both Canadien and

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[1] Richardson was by no means unlettered. His essay on banking is well written and mildly learned, see footnote p.55 supra. Another essay attributed to him, concerning the Lachine Canal, Canadian Magazine and Literary Repository, (4 vols.; Montreal: Joseph Nickless, 1823), I, 86-90, is admirably written.

[2] "Les Lettres de Veritas," B.R.H., Vol. XXVIII, (Aug., 1922), p. 251.

English, in the Assembly and the Council, that the Lachine Canal should be constructed. Since the canal would obviously be of much more benefit to the English commercial group of Montreal than to the Canadien agricultural-rural interests, it might have been the subject of some 'log-rolling'. Who would have acted as go-between in such negotiations, if they occurred, is not entirely clear. Louis Joseph Papineau, Speaker of the Assembly, the most unobtrusive participant in the 1818 negotiations between Upper and Lower Canada, on improving the St. Lawrence, would seem to have been the most probable choice. However, only after it was completed did the canal creep into the arena of Lower Canadian politics,but then just briefly, as an illustration in John Neilson's voluminous testimony before the Special Committee of the Imperial Parliament, inquiring into the government of Canada. Neilson alleged that the management of funds by the Commissioners had been faulty.[1] Richardson, who, with two others, had retained his post of Commissioner to supervise the canal's operation, unleashed an explosive reply to Neilson and thereafter the matter seems to have been forgotten.[2]

The Canal Commissioners adhered to a rigoreus schedule of regular weekly meetings each Monday morning at ten, usually one inspection tour every week and numerous special meetings, to stave off the crises, concerning personnel or construction, which seem to have arisen regularly.

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1 Report from the Select Committee on the Civil Government of Canada, (Quebec:1829), pp. 117-118.

2 P.A.C., Q Series, 184 -1 -2 -3 -4, p. 459, Richardson and Grant to Neilson.

From the lists of attendance at meetings, it seems that Richardson was rarely, if ever, absent during the five years of the canal's construction. When the Commissioners left to inspect the works, usually setting out at six or seven on a Saturday morning, they invariably left from Richardson's home on Notre Dame Street,[1] where the aristocracy of Montreal then lived.[2] It was Richardson who represented the Commissioners' wishes to the Assembly, or more often to the Receiver-General, from whom the Commissioners received funds to carry on the work.[3]

Certainly it was to be expected that a conscientious chairman of a public undertaking, even if unpaid, should have been present at all meetings, scheduled or otherwise, and have represented the Commissioners to the governmental authority. Richardson's conscientiousness in this regard should also be considered in the light of his business interests, political duties and social activities. He seems to have been an exceptionally busy man, and the fact that he was able to devote so much time and energy to supervising the construction of the canal, is a tribute to his stamina. However, it should be emphasized that he and his colleagues on the board of Commissioners were leading members of the group that hoped to benefit financially from the Lachine Canal, when it was completed. The expected long run advantage to their commercial activities was the main incentive to most of these men, who devoted their energies

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1 Doige, An Alphabetical List..., p. 159

2 J.H. Dorwin, "Montreal in 1816," Montreal Daily Star, 5 Feb., 1881.

3 P.A.C., S. Series, Civil Secretary's Letter Books, Vol. 152, Richardson Letters.

to the canal.

That he was unstinting in giving of his time and strength to push the canal through to completion is, I think, without question. But it is not entirely true that Richardson was so unselfish as to oppose extending it to the foot of the Current St. Mary, solely because he did not want to be accused of profiteering on lands that he owned, in what was then the eastern part of Montreal.[1] In his evidence before the Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly, called to examine the recommendations on the route question in the Commissioners' 1823 Report,[2] Richardson did not insist on carrying the canal to the foot of the Current, for the time being.[3] He did not, however, suggest that it should never be extended further east, but only when it would be financially feasible to do so. To this end, he recommended that the land over which the canal would pass (presumably his included) should be acquired immediately, so as to hedge against any future rise in its price. The value of Richardson's land, on which the canal would be built in the eastern section of Montreal, was almost negligible, when considered together with the other, much more expensive, property that would be needed to carry it to the foot of the Current St. Mary.[4] Moreover, to

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[1] Campbell, History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church, p. 87.

[2] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1824), Appendix (D), Nos. I and II.

[3] ibid., 121.

[4] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1823-1824), Appendix (D), No. II, Estimate of the value of the Property in the line of the proposed Canal, from where it would leave the branch which is to lead to the Port of Montreal, to the foot of the Current Saint Mary.

suggest, as does Campbell,[1] that the ultimate decision in the route controversy rested with Richardson, is a presumption with which the essayist does not agree, for it was a hotly debated issue, fought for years, between two vigorous factions.[2]

John Richardson was a respected figure, an imposing man, whose enemies, particularly the Canadien members of the Assembly, singled him out as an object of their sharpest rebukes, giving an indication of his importance in contemporary politics. To him can be attributed a substantial measure of responsibility, blame perhaps, for the worsening of relations between the English and Canadiens in Lower Canada, during the early part of the 19th century.[3] Most of his obituaries, a special volume of which was published soon after his death in 1831,[4] speak of the stern, uncompromising attitude with which Richardson met all oponents in his political life. It was probably this same attitude of dogged perseverance that characterized his guidance of the Lachine Canal. If the reader will follow this narrative further, he will find that an attitude such as Richardson's was perhaps necessary.

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1 Campbell, op. cit., p. 87.

2 See chapter 7, infra.

3 Unlike many of his contemporary Montreal commercial group, Richardson founded no dynasty. His son, John, who had been educated in Britain, drowned soon after his return to Montreal in August, 1819. Montreal Gazette, 4 Aug., 1819.

4 Some Memorials of the Honourable John Richardson, (Kingston, 1831).

Chapter 6 The Launching by the Province of Lower Canada

a) Montreal and Quebec newspapers enthusiastically hailed the government's assumption of responsibility for the canal. A lengthly editorial had appeared in February in the Montreal Herald, setting forth the advantages of its being built by the government, instead of by private enterprise.[1] The Montreal Gazette had chirped three days earlier that "had this method been adopted at first, the canal would, by this time, have been nearly completed."[2] No one seemed to be opposed to the new plan, so long as the government of Lower Canada would get the canal built. Newspapers were even noticeably short of letters-to-the-editor, in which people,sufficiently annoyed by the Legislature's decision, could have expressed their dismay, as most letter-writers did, anonymously. However, barely a whimper was heard, except a mild afterthought, by one who signed himself "Cardo," in the Canadian Courant on March 24th, one week after the new Act became law. He admitted that efforts on the canal until then had been paltry, but suggested that, if the government had given more assistance, rather than take over the project, the Company might have been able to carry on. The argument had its merits, but under the circumstances it was entirely inopportune and Nahum Mower, the Courant's editor, not wanting to be drawn into a new

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[1] Montreal Herald, 10 Feb., 1821. A little more than six years earlier an editorial calling for only private enterprise on the Lachine Canal had appeared in the Herald's columns, ibid., 23 Dec., 1815.

[2] Montreal Gazette, 7 Feb., 1821.

and pointless controversy, simply ignored "Cardo's" letter. For the editors of these journals, which hovered tenuously between forming and expressing what there was of public opinion in those days, the issue between private and public enterprise seemed somehow to have been quietly solved. The debating and honest head-scratching over this question that attended the canal project in 1819, was now absent. To the Legislature's announcement that it would finance the canal, the newspapers and Montreal's merchants, happy to escape from their fast-failing enterprise at no loss, both thankfully intoned - "At last."

The preamble of the Act[1] by which the Legislature simultaneously repealed the Company's charter and made the canal their own responsibility, set forth the immediate financial backing that they were prepared to provide for the undertaking. Together with the 25,000 pounds, which the Legislature had appropriated in 1815,[2] to assist the long-forgotten British plans for a Lachine Canal, they set aside an additional 10,000 pounds. Thus, including the 10,000 pounds which the British government was prepared to offer, in return for the free passage of its boats through the canal, a total of 45,000 pounds was available to the Commissioners. This capital was sufficient to get the project under way. Once the negotiations with the Company were completed, and its claims settled by the special committee of Clarke,

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[1] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 1 Geo. IV, c. 6 (1821), An Act for making a Navigable Canal, from the neighbourhood of Montreal to the Parish of Lachine, and to appropriate a sum of money for that purpose, and to repeal a certain Act therein mentioned.

[2] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 55 Geo. III, c. 20(1815).

Sewell and de Lothbinière, the Governor could appoint a group of Commissioners to supervise construction and work could finally begin.

By the end of May, the Company passed out of existence and ten Commissioners had been selected[1]: the Honourable John Richardson, David Ross, Thomas Phillips, George Garden, François Desrivières, Thomas Porteous, Robert Gillespie, Toussaint Pothier, Charles W. Grant and Colonel John Ready. Generally this was a well-chosen team, most of them businessmen, including several from the old Company's Board of Management. They were men of affairs, accustomed to getting full value and more for every shilling spent and even if they knew little about canals, the Province should have had little fear of incompetent direction with these men at the helm. This implicit confidence, however, proved later to be somewhat ill-founded.

One of their first tasks was the appointment of a team of contractors, to assume the job of excavating the canal. The lowest bid was submitted by a group composed of Stanley Bagg, Oliver Wait, Andrew White and Thomas Phillips (who had resigned his appointment as Commissioner)[2]. They were awarded the contract, not only on the grounds of price, but because they offered to dig the whole canal, whereas others offered to excavate only sections[3]. The Phillips group began assembling work crews on the site of the canal almost immediately and all that was needed now was the official celebration to launch the

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[1] Commissioners Minutes, 26 May, 1821.

[2] ibid., 20 June, 1821.

[3] ibid., 9 July, 1821.

project on its way.

b) The ceremonial beginning took place on July 17th, 1821, at Lachine. The recently-appointed Commissioners with wives and friends, the contractors, engineer and several hundred onlookers were present, perhaps wives and children of the labourers whose shanties huddled nearby, along with inhabitants of Lachine, supported by a few Indians from Caughnawaga across the river. The representatives of the newspapers were there. They wrote lengthy accounts of the proceedings, providing the source material[1] for the narrative that follows here.

Shortly after one o'clock, Richardson, the chairman of the Commissioners, strode commandingly out from the little knot of officials assembled inside the two files of labourers, who had been posted to signify, for the edification of the onlookers, the future line of the canal. The chattering crowd quickly hushed, for the Honourable John Richardson's presence usually induced at least a temporary silence from both friend and foe. With a brightly-ribboned new spade handed to him by the engineer, Richardson solemnly gouged a bit of earth from the intended canal bed, followed by his fellow Commissioners and each of the contractors. When the last participant in this symbolic rite had put down the spade, Richardson spoke to the gathering:

> "Mr. Engineer and Gentlemen Contractors for the Lachine Canal,
> "May the completion of this great undertaking be as auspicious as its commencement; and may it, when finished, be found to answer the expectations formed of its utility, and lead to other improvements in the

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[1] See Canadian Courant, 21 July, 1821; Quebec Gazette, 23 July, 1821; Montreal Herald, 21 July, 1821.

> "internal navigation of the Canadas.
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> "After proceeding with your labour for a short time, you will then stop and allow your workmen to partake of the refreshments provided by the Commissioners, who pray that every success may attend your efforts, and enable you to execute the work in a manner perfect in its kind and creditable to yourselves."[1]

The band of the 60th Regiment, recently arrived from garrison duties in Quebec, exploded into the national anthem, followed by the sprightly air "Off She Goes" as hands were shaken, congratulations exchanged and hopes expressed. The two files of pickets came to life instantly and began tearing up more earth to gratify the spectators, the contractors and Commissioners, who had just dignified the work with a little of their own sweat. But within minutes, as Richardson imperiously suggested, the contractors called a halt to the work and the whole throng converged on the refreshment table, where Thomas Porteous wielded a huge scimitar to divide six immense pies[2] into enough wedges to satisfy the hungry crowd. Meanwhile, four large puncheons of beer were being quickly emptied, especially by the labourers, most of whom were internally reinforced with rum, for sale nearby.[3] The bright summer afternoon, the food and beer went down well and before long everyone was enjoying himself in boistrous bonhommie.

The Commissioners and their friends, after a token participation

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1 Quebec Gazette, 23 July, 1821.

2 The Commissioners had promised to roast a whole ox in honour of the occasion, but substituted pies because of some unforeseen difficulty in roasting so large a carcass. Canadian Courant, 21 July, 1821.

3 From Stanley Bagg's Lachine store.

of this plebeian fare, adjourned to Connelly's Inn followed by the red-coated military music makers. There, in the best Beaver Club tradition, they offered toasts, each followed by an appropriate air from the band, to the King, the Governor-in-chief, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, the Lachine Canal, the Agriculture and Commerce of the Canadas, the Navy and Army, the Militia of the Canadas and Lady Dalhousie and the Canadian (lady) fair. These were the official toasts, a preliminary to the homier, more 'folksy' shouts that followed as excuses, if any were needed, for the imbibing that continued long into the afternoon and evening.

Down at the sod-turning site, the party had gotten out of hand and a well-lubricated Irish fighting machine had locked horns with an equally drunk and equally pugnacious Canadien contingent. In the absence of police, the donnybrook[1] continued for some time until it eventually broke up and the combatants disappeared to their shanties.

So ended the day that marked the ceremonial opening of work on the Lachine Canal, one attended by speeches, toasts and general gaiety for all that were present. What thoughts had run through the minds of those watching the sod-turnings and listening to Richardson's simple and hopeful words: the Indians, whose ferocity had, on this very ground,ended the first efforts to bypass the Rapids, and were now completely emasculated

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[1] One exuberant journalist, no doubt delighted at his recollection of some highly appropriate poetry, gleefully inserted a quotation in his description of the day's events: "And discord dire and disaray, Mark'd the fair form of festal day", Canadian Courant, 21 July, 1821.

and confined to but a patch of what was formerly theirs? The immigrant Irish labourers, what did they think, remember or hope as they watched the Commissioners initiate the work of canal digging in this raw, unfriendly land, where they and their successors would toil on this and similar canals? The Commissioners, some of them, like Richardson, remnants of the brash crew of Nor'westers who had only yesterday dominated the interior of more than half a continent, were they thinking of the old days when Montreal was the"seat of the mighty?"Did they believe that they could retain what remained of that power by building this canal, in itself virtually meaningless unless others followed in swift succession?

Surely this small undertaking, this attempt to spark the building of more canals by cutting one eight and a half miles between Montreal and Lachine, must have seemed to them an empty gesture. The Erie Canal was already one third finished and operating. It appeared to them that the cannonading, which announced the completion of its sections, heralded also the ominously impending triumph of New York for commercial control of the West. Upper Canada was still only investigating the cost of improving its portion of the St. Lawrence and had not yet decided to dig at Welland. There was some conflict over the best route between the two Provinces, the St. Lawrence or the Ottawa-Rideau. This difficulty concerned the clash between imperial defense policy and commercial interests. It was as yet unsolved, because the British government had neither committed itself to building the Rideau Canal, nor seemed willing to force one, or both of the Provinces to build it. Even the work on the Grenville Canal was moving very slowly.

Were the Commissioners, the Legislators and the government not aware of these problems? Was it not clear to them that New York had won the race before they had even left the starting block? Perhaps, but they seem to have regarded the situation differently and, despite their wailing and beating of breast, somewhat more optimistically. If there was a chance of salvaging some of Montreal's fast-falling commercial position by increasing its attraction to Upper Canadian and American exporters, the Lachine Canal was a beginning and there were encouraging reminders that the situation was not hopeless. There was still preference, although its days were numbered, for Canadian grain in Britain, and so long as the preference was high, American produce would still be attracted to Canadian ports, in order to reach British markets, and benefit from it. In spite of efforts in London to cut down these Canadian privileges, Montreal had many friends who could be prevailed upon to lobby on her behalf. In March, 1821, it had been urged on the Assembly of Upper Canada to authorize surveys of the St. Lawrence River[1] and it was possible that more British financial aid could be secured, if not to improve the St. Lawrence, then at least to build the Kingston-Ottawa route. The Lachine Canal would prove successful once in operation (within three years, it was hoped) and would, therefore, serve as an inspiration to other promoters. There had been dark days before and, by a show of courageous perseverance, Montreal had somehow survived and prospered. They must try.To them there were no such things as unalterable

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[1] Upper Canada, Assembly Journals, (1821), (Report of the Bureau of Archives of the Province of Ontario, 1913), p. 434.

facts of life, economic or otherwise, to be faced and, if adverse, submitted to in despair. The "natural highway" to the interior was the St. Lawrence and with very little improvement it could effectively compete with New York's artificial waterway, even though the Erie Canal would feed a year-round port.

Although the "natural highway" phrase had been missing from newspaper editorials of late, the conviction underlying those words was firmly embedded in the thinking of these Lower Canadian men of affairs. So deep was their faith in the greatness of their River, and its superiority over all other waterways, that much of the prophesying about the future dire effects of the Erie Canal fell on partially deaf ears. The business leaders of Montreal were by no means unaware of their own best interests and understood that transportation facilities from the Great Lakes must be improved. Otherwise, the position of Montreal, as the important entrepot between Europe and the interior, might be threatened. But they were confused over the best route to follow, puzzled as to what action the British government would adopt and frustrated by their inability to secure co-operation from Upper Canada. Finally, it is doubtful whether they, or their competitors under De Witt Clinton, realized the full significance of the Great Lakes region and of the immense wealth to be gained there. The area to the south of the Lakes that the old fur traders remembered as uninhabited would soon be settled and farmed, once that region was made more easily accessible. In the absence of this understanding and the facilities to compete effectively, the efforts of Lower Canada were brave; they were hopeful, but pathetically inadequate.

As their celebrations continued, the Commissioners grew increasingly oblivious to the sounds of the summer night: the shouts of the combatants and the noise of the band drowning out the barely audible wash of the St. Lawrence below. Their happy libations over, they tripped to the waiting carriages and journeyed back to Montreal in a comfortable trance past orchards, clearings and darkened houses, as they jogged along the dusty turnpike into the city. It had been a grand day,[1] much like those that initiated work on all canals in Britain and America. For two years or more, Montrealers had been reading about such festivities occurring at frequent intervals, in the buoyant towns south of Lakes Ontario and Erie: Utica, Rome, Syracuse, Lyons, and Rochester, as "Clinton's ditch" moved inexorably westward to its destination.

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[1] Hadfield, British Canals, pp. 46-48.

PART II THE CANAL ABUILDING

Chapter 7 Beginning the Canal: 1821 - 1822

The most serious and persistent difficulties encountered in the construction of the Lachine Canal, were, in themselves, neither unusual nor insoluble. Difficult terrain and flooding had been encountered often before by the engineers who had been building canals in Britain for more than sixty years. In Lower Canada, however, these essentially technical problems assumed particular importance because they became endowed with financial and political attributes as well. The need for more funds, necessary to excavate the unforeseen rock near Lachine and to curtail flooding, resulted in three appeals to the Legislature. The desire to change the route of the canal, for reasons of economy, touched off a barrage of protests from opponents.

The same formation of extremely hard igneous rock that lay beneath the Lachine Rapids sweeps north in a wide arc encompassing much of the western portion of Montreal Island.[1] During excavation of the canal, this rock was encountered from Lachine eastwards for nearly three miles, or practically one third of its entire length. Most of the rock had to be blasted lose with gunpowder. The damage done by flooding became the most serious problem of all difficulties hampering construction, for the breakup of ice on the St. Lawrence in the spring resulted in the flooding of a considerable area around Lachine. Moreover, much of the annual spring runoff from melting snow on the Island, in the absence of

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[1] T.H. Clark, Montreal Area: Laval and Lachine Map Areas, Quebec Department of Mines, Geological Report 46 (1952), p. 92.

effective drainage, collected in the south western portion between Montreal and Lachine. Under these conditions, the ground was all but impossible to dig and it was usually mid-July, before the lockpits and canal beds were dry enough for the crews to begin work. Usually, the dry mild season, when excavation could most effectively be carried on, and the only time when masonry was possible, lasted little longer than three months, until autumn flooding and frost forced a cessation of work.

When the Legislature assumed responsibility for the project, the Legislators recognized that the canal would terminate at the Port of Montreal, rather than at the Cross,[1] to which the Company had been committed to build it. This decision was probably based largely on the belief that the cost of purchasing property through the town of Montreal would be considerable. The members of the Assembly had also to consider the opposition of many Montreal businessmen to extending the canal to the Cross. They were afraid that their commercial importance would be undermined by a canal which terminated a considerable distance downstream from their Port. But even if the canal were built to the Port, it would be necessary to cross the St. Anne's suburb, where the intersection of many roads and the removal of buildings, would occasion great expense. Between the rival proposals of the Port and the Cross, as the eastern terminus of the canal, considerations of cost seem to have led most to favour the former plan. There is no direct evidence

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[1] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 1 Geo. IV, c. 6 (1821).

from the Journals of the House of Assembly or contemporary newspapers that economy was the factor which the Legislators had in mind when they changed the route.[1] However, in the light of the Assembly's later authorization to alter the eastern terminus of the canal, from the Port to a place upriver known as "the Windmills", out of concern for cost, it is possible that they were motivated by the same considerations in 1821.

a) The Lachine Canal was to be of only modest length, eight and one half miles, in contrast to the three hundred and fifty-three mile Erie Canal. Only six locks were needed to overcome a descent of forty-four and three quarters feet, whereas in building the Welland Canal, engineers were presented with the problem of a difference in levels of more than three hundred feet, over a distance of twenty-six miles. At first glance, then, there were no obvious problems of any seriousness to confound the experienced British engineer, Thomas Burnett, who was responsible for building the Lachine Canal.

Most of Burnett's work plans seem to have been lost, but a complete picture of the canal under construction can be fitted together from information found in the Minutes of the Commissioners for the Lachine Canal[2] and the Commissioners' annual reports[3] to the Legislature.

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[1] In a letter-to-the-editor of the Montreal Gazette, 2 Jan., 1822, one who signed as "AN OLD ENGINEER", in his thoughts on the route controversy, mentioned briefly that the debate on this in the Assembly in 1821 had been lengthy.

[2] P.A.C., Public Works Series, Vol. 13, Commissioners' Minutes.

[3] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXI - XXXVI (1822-1827), Appendices.

Essentially, his plans were unchanged from those which he presented to the old Committee of Management of the Company. Under the new legislation, I Geo. IV, c. 6, section V, the canal was required to be of the same dimensions as those called for in the former Company's enabling Act:[1] forty feet wide, on the surface of the water, and twenty-eight feet wide, at the bottom. The canal would be five feet deep and was meant to accommodate the largest Durham boats[2] used on the St. Lawrence and to some extent, on the Great Lakes. The main reason for its generous width, was so that boats going in opposite directions could pass each other, without having to wait at special passing places. Although many Durham boats had sails as their main source of power, the narrow confines of a canal made the use of sail propulsion impractical. Draft animals, usually horses, were the best means of moving boats up and down canals in the quickest possible manner.[3] The Commissioners and Burnett naturally assumed that towing would apply to the Lachine Canal as well and made provision for a towpath, along the top of the canal's northern embankment.

In addition to the six locks to raise and lower boats, a regulating lock, designated as the first, to control the admission of water into the canal, was built near Lachine, one mile from its entrance. The second and third locks, of six feet fall each, were placed together, near the junction of the canal and Côte St. Paul, about 4.6 miles

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[1] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 59 Geo. III, c. 6 (1819).

[2] Bouchette gives the weight of the average-sized Durham boat as fifteen tons, The British Dominions in North America, I, 158. The Lachine Canal was designed to accommodate boats of over sixty tons.

[3] Hadfield, British Canals, p. 54.

(8100 yards) from the regulating lock. The fourth was situated 1.7 miles (3100 yards) from the previous two, in the south-west corner of what was then called the St. Joseph, or Récollet suburb. Although the outcome of the canal had been only generally fixed as the Port, three more locks were known to be necessary. They were eventually built of seven feet, eight inch fall each, at the Windmills.

Altogether this was not a large number, considering that seventy-seven locks were required on the Erie[1] and forty on the Welland.[2] But the locks on the Lachine Canal were significant in that they were built entirely of stone. They were also important in that nowhere else in North America,[3] or even Britain (with one exception[4]) had locks, as large and as solidly built as those on the Lachine, ever been constructed. To save expense and time, secondary considerations to the Commissioners of the Lachine Canal, the promoters of the Welland Canal saw the wisdom of building wooden locks and those on the Erie were smaller, with wooden floors.[5] But the Lachine Commissioners made up their minds from the very beginning that "ultimate economy" would result, if the locks were firmly constructed of stone.

Burnett's design of these traditional pound locks was not unlike those which he had seen in Britain, except that they were considerably

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[1] Whitford, "The Canal System and Its Influences," p. 314.

[2] Aitken, The Welland Canal Company, Appendix, IV, p. 147.

[3] MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, I, 166-167.

[4] The Forth-Clyde Canal in Scotland.

[5] Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 797.

larger. The stone walls were six feet thick and 'grouted,' or coated on the outside with thin fluid mortar, to seal off any apertures. They were slightly convex in shape, so that the boats would not be dashed against the sides of a lock, as it was being filled with water.[1] A layer of 'puddling,' a mixture of clay, sand and water was put behind the stone masonry, as an added insurance against water seeping into the locks. Their floors were also of stone, convex in shape to protect against buckling, from the effects of water which might seep below the stones. These inverted arches rested on a layer of thick wooden planking. Sluices of masonry opened close to the floor of each lock, so that they could be filled or drained speedily, without the damage that might result to the cargo of boats, if water was poured in from the top of a lock.[2] Bye-washes or overshots were set into the top of each lock to drain off any unnecessary water in them.

Thirteen bridges were eventually built by the Commission: three imposing bridges of stone, two at Lachine and one over the sixth lock, at the Windmills. The others appear to have been no more than foot bridges (the term "accommodation bridge" was used in I Geo. IV, c. 6) of wood, placed between Montreal and Lachine, for the convenience of farmers who owned property on both sides of the canal. The "Little River" or River St. Pierre, flowing south-east through the Island from the "Little Lake," intersected the canal on the St. Gabriel farm, two thirds of the way

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[1] P.A.C., Q Series, Q 184 -1 -2 -3 -4, p. 459, Richardson and Grant to Neilson.

[2] ibid.

down the canal. A tunnel, five feet in diameter, lined with stone, was built under the canal, to allow the course of the stream to remain unimpeded.

After the letting of contracts early in July, operations began almost immediately. Agreement was quickly reached with the proprietors of land through which the canal was to be dug, between Grant's property at Lachine and that of Nicholas Roland, where the second and third locks would be built.[1] In addition to the contract for excavation, that for the quarrying, cutting and delivery of stone for the locks was awarded to Thomas McKay.[2] Very little in the way of physical progress was achieved that year, since work began very late, and both Commissioners and contractors took most of the season to organize themselves. Serious work had to wait until next season, although some excavation and stone cutting, at Caughnawaga, continued over the winter.[3]

b) Upon the arrival of spring in 1822, the contractors for excavation, Phillips, White, Bagg and Wait, were presented for the first time with the difficulty that was to haunt their operations each succeeding year. The lowlying lands of the canal's upper reach, from the regulating lock to its entrance at Lachine, was flooded by the swollen St. Lawrence River. Work on that portion of the canal, as well as on

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[1] Arbitrators for proprietors, on the one hand, and Commissioners, on the other, were appointed. Commissioners' Minutes, 11 June, 1821; for agreement see ibid., 9 July, 1821. Examples of arbitration bonds exist in Superior Court, Notarial Archives, Montreal, Thomas Bedouin: 1236, 1305, 1577, 1654.

[2] ibid., 10 Dec., 1821; 21 Jan., 1822.

[3] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXI (1821-1822), Appendix (I), Report of Commissioners for 1821.

the section east of the regulating lock, up to the second lock, was held up until mid-summer.[1] Moreover, the Commissioners found that their funds were being unexpectedly and swiftly exhausted. Early in September, they estimated that 12,726 pounds, 4 shillings and 11 pence would be required, in order for them to continue operations to the end of the season and over the winter.[2]

Burnett's estimated cost of a canal in 1820, from Lachine to the Cross and a branch to the Port, had amounted to 78,000 pounds.[3] The Legislators and Commissioners seem to have assumed that the considerable shorter canal, which they had in mind, would cost in the vicinity of 45,000 pounds, or at least very little more than that original appropriation. Neither the Legislators, the Commissioners, or Burnett himself, could have known how inaccurate either estimate was, because the extent of rock and the seriousness of spring floods were largely unknown. Moreover, since the final eastern terminus of the canal was changed in 1824, from the Port to the Windmills, they took no account of the cost of digging a channel and building a wharf, at the Windmills. Nonetheless, all the above parties, might have been expected to foresee that an estimate, that blandly ignored the cost of buying land, building fences and numerous small items, which in the aggregate amounted to an appreciable sum, was a completely unreliable basis on which to proceed. Burnett should have been ordered

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[1] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXII (1823), Appendix (D), Report of Commissioners for 1822.

[2] Commissioners to Cochran, Commissioners' Minutes, 9 Sept., 1822.

[3] Committee Minutes, 8 Jan., 1821, Report of Engineer.

to make an entirely new estimate of cost,[1] which would have taken careful account of changes in the price of labour and materials, the cost of land, fences, bridges, locks and, above all, the cost of carrying the canal through swamps and the "Little River", blatantly obvious problems. Instead, the Commissioners, and more surprisingly the Legislature, seem to have been content with Burnett's obsolete 1820 estimate and a new "plan of operations".[2] As the construction season of 1822 was drawing to a close, the Commissioners were beginning to discover that their pragmatic approach was not the most trouble-free way of carrying out their responsibility. They now saw that the 45,000 pounds fund at their disposal would not be sufficient, but they were still unable to calculate the ultimate cost of the canal.[3]

It was partly for this reason, the shortage of funds and the desire to conserve what they still had left to spend, that the Commissioners requested the Legislature to allow them to alter the canal's route.[4] Instead of swinging north across the Lachine Turnpike Road

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1 There is some slight evidence that Burnett made a new survey of the line of the Canal; see Petition to Legislature, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXI (1821-1822), 120-121.

2 This "plan of operations" was not found in any of the archives or museums which were investigated.

3 In their Annual Report of 1822, the Commissioners "estimated" that (besides the 45,000 pounds originally given them) 25,000 pounds would be sufficient for them to complete the Canal to the Port, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXII (1823), Appendix (D).

4 ibid.

(a continuation of Notre Dame Street), east of the fourth lock, the Commissioners argued that, if the canal kept south of the Turnpike and proceeded through the St. Gabriel farm and St. Anne's suburb to the Port at Munn's (shipyard), much money would be saved. Since January, 1822, a debate over the canal's route had been raging in Montreal newspapers. The controversy[1] had been touched off by the Commissioners' annual report for 1821[2] in which they requested permission to change the canal's route, so that it would enter the St. Lawrence at the Windmills. This plan was supported by a petition[3] of a Montreal group, presumably businessmen. A counter petition was presented to the Assembly by an opposing group eight days later. Their plan was to have the canal's route moved further north, apparently to ensure that it would eventually be extended to the foot of the Current St. Mary. However, one year later, the Commissioners made renewed and more urgent suggestions for altering the eastern terminus of the canal. By the end of 1822, the first round of debating on the matter had burned itself out under heaps of grandiloquent verbiage. In their report for 1822, the Commissioners studiously clarified their position

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[1] The dispute was over the eastern terminus of the Lachine Canal, one party favouring the Windmills, west of the Port, and the other favouring the Cross at the foot of the Current St. Mary. See Canadian Courant, 2 Feb., 1822, signed "A CITIZEN" whose arguments in favour of the Windmills were labelled by "A Friend to Public Improvements," writing in the Montreal Herald, 9 Feb., 1822, as "the grovelling ideas of an interested citizen." See also Montreal Herald, 16 Feb., 1822, and especially Quebec Gazette, 15 Apr., 1822, for an interesting piece of writing, on the route, entitled "Extract from an Historical Description of Canada, to be published in the year...."

[2] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXI (1821-1822), Appendix (I), Report of Commissioners for 1821.

[3] ibid., 120-121.

as being motivated entirely by "public interest" and that their only wish was to save unnecessary expense.[1] The canal could still be taken to the Cross eventually, they maintained, but since this was only an eventual possibility at best, the canal should be built now in conformity with the utmost frugality, within the bounds of reason. This very matter was at the heart of the route controversy, each side having claimed that their favourite terminus for the canal was, not only the best, but the cheapest.[2]

In March, 1823, the Assembly came down hard on the Commissioners, pamphleteers, letter writers and editors, after a lengthy hearing on the route question, in a Special Committee of the House of Assembly. The Commissioners were ordered to build the canal according to the plan and route already agreed upon, i.e. to the Port,[3] and for the time being the matter subsided and was largely forgotten, as the protectors of "public interest" became enamoured of much more dramatic causes, such as the Union Bill. The House also accepted the Special Committee's recommendation that an additional 12,000 pounds be appropriated for the canal.[4]

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[1] ibid., XXXII (1823), Appendix (D), Report of Commissioners for 1822.

[2] See Remarks on the Lachine Canal, (Montreal: 1822) James Brown; Theodore Davis, Reply to Remarks on the Lachine Canal, (Montreal: 1822) Nahum Mower. Both pamphlets also printed in French (location : P.A.C.).

[3] As a sop to the Cross advocates, the Assembly also ordered the Commissioners to find the cost of land over which the canal might, in future, be taken to the Cross, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXII (1823), 150.

[4] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 3 Geo. IV, c. 23 (1823), An Act to appropriate a certain sum of money therein-mentioned, towards continuing and completing the Lachine Canal.

A good deal of work was begun, and much completed, in 1822.[1] Some stonecutting had been carried on over the winter, at Caughnawaga, and considerable excavation as well, but most of the progress was made during the late spring and summer. Some of the masonry on the regulating lock and adjoining basin was finished, and the section from there to Côte St. Paul, was also partly completed. Much of the five thousand yard section adjacent to Côte St. Paul, running up to the second and third locks was finished, and the excavation from there to the fourth lock was begun. By and large, the contractors fro excavation had proven to be satisfactory to the Commissioners and, aside from a minor dispute, over the measurement of excavation in rock,[2] for which they were paid extra, relations between them were good.

c) To the credit of the Commissioners, they successfully avoided most of the bitter charges and recriminations that clouded the air during the route controversy. It might be argued that the debate could have been avoided altogether, had they been more farsighted. But it is probable, on the other hand, that the route laid down in 1 Geo.IV, c. 6, was a compromise solution, reached after a lengthy debate on the matter in the Assembly. Thus it would have been difficult for the Commissioners, and certainly untactful of them, to have recommended, at the outset, changing a decision that had been arrived at only with

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[1] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXII (1823), Appendix (D), Report of Commissioners for 1822.

[2] Commissioners' Minutes, 12 Aug., 1822. The Commissioners found it necessary to chide the contractors for not working fast enough, ibid., 7 Oct., 1822; 13 Jan., 1823.

difficulty. In the light of this view of the route question, the Commissioners' handling of the volatile situation was wise. Their early suspicion that the Port would be an unimaginably expensive terminus for the canal, was not taken seriously by the Assembly, until it was clearly shown that the Commissioners' fears were well-founded. By the end of the 1821 construction season, the Commissioners believed and, one year later, the Legislators were also beginning to realize that the canal would cost more than they had originally thought. By the same time in 1823, the latter were largely convinced that one method of curtailing the soaring costs of the project, was to change its direction to a, perhaps less desirable,[1] but less expensive destination.

The Commissioners cannot be commended, however, on the way in which they managed the planning and financing of the project. Although neither dishonest or indifferent in carrying out their responsibility, they are blameworthy for not securing a more accurate estimate of the canal's ultimate cost. The unforeseen and unavoidable expenses would have made any estimate inaccurate and the Commissioners would have been compelled to appeal to the Assembly for more funds. Nonetheless, any itemized estimate would have been closer to reality than the rough guessing and rule of thumb, which they seem to have used. A more sizeable initial grant might have been forthcoming, or, at least later assistance from the Legislature might have been more unhesitatingly secured. In either case, operations during 1823 and 1824 would probably have proceeded

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[1] A Canal to the foot of the Current St. Mary would, without doubt, have been of great assistance to boats or ships bound for Montreal from Quebec, because of the St. Mary's Current.

in a less impeded, more consistent manner. Nonetheless, when Legislative financial aid for the canal all but ceased during 1823, Richardson and his fellow Commissioners commendably sought temporary assistance elsewhere.

The Commissioners were, up until the end of 1822, indeed throughout the five years of the canal's construction, possessed of obvious and sincere devotion to their duties. Their Minutes abound with instances of special meetings being called to deal with new and unforeseen difficulties. They were drawn almost entirely from the Montreal commercial class, whose interest in seeing the completion of a Lachine Canal has been dealt with in previous chapters. In spite of their mishandling of some aspects of the project, their concern for the commercial prestige of Montreal ensured a high level of diligent direction for the canal.

Chapter 8 Completing the Canal: 1823 - 1826

During 1823, the Commissioners were not only faced with the usual construction problems, but also with a shortage of funds. Work on the canal during the construction season proceeded at a slower pace, and the normally extensive stonecutting at Caughnawaga, during the winter, ceased altogether.

a) Although the Legislature had appropriated 12,000 pounds for the canal in March, the money was not forthcoming from the government.[1] Its finances were in a seriously depleted condition following Caldwell, the Receiver General's, embarrassment in 1822. Only about 8,500 pounds, of the original fund of 45,000 pounds, was left[2] and unless more money came into the hands of the Commissioners soon, they would be compelled to reduce or suspend payments to the various contractors, as well as to the workmen employed by the Commission itself. Operations would slow down, or halt entirely, and if the latter, the organization built up over the past three years would almost certainly disintegrate. Temporarily, at least, some means had to be found to keep the project moving, however slowly, and in the absence of government aid, Richardson used his "good offices" to secure money from an unexpected source. The Bank of Montreal accepted the personal notes of Richardson, its president, for sums

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1 Ryland to Commissioners, Commissioners' Minutes, 7 May, 1823.

2 Commissioners to Ryland, ibid.

amounting to 3,500 pounds.[1] Toward the end of the season, in September, when it had been made clear to them that none of the 12,000 pounds appropriation from the Legislature would be sent that year, the Commissioners negotiated further loans from the Bank of Montreal.[2]

Because the suggestion of the Commissioners to alter the line of the canal had been refused, they had been obliged to conduct negotiations with proprietors of land in the St. Anne suburb, through which the canal was meant to proceed. During the course of these discussions, the Commissioners realized that the cost of building the canal there would be immense.[3] Not only would it be expensive to remove buildings, construct several road bridges and compensate property-owners for damage, but the whole process would be time-consuming and annoying. The hearty daymen, employed to do the pick and shovel work of digging the canal, were not as respectful of fences, gardens and farm animals as the law required, and the Commissioners justly suspected that this scavenging would get out of hand, in the densely populated suburb of St. Anne. They again beseeched the Assembly to authorize a change in the canal's route, so that St. Anne's and Munn's shipyard might be avoided completely.[4] This

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[1] ibid., 21 July, 11 Aug., 25 Aug., 1823.

[2] These loans amounted to 8,000 pounds, apparently in addition to the money secured by Richardson earlier. Both Richardson and George Garden signed notes for this larger amount, renewable after ninety days, Minutes of Directors of Bank of Montreal, 12 Sept., 1823, Summarized Extracts in possession of Mr. Merrill Denison, historian of Bank of Montreal.

[3] Thomas Munn is supposed to have demanded 10,000 pounds for a piece of land for the canal through his shipyard to the St. Lawrence, P.A.C., Q Series, Q 184 -1 -2 -3 -4, p. 419, Richardson and Grant to Neilson.

[4] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1823-1824), Appendix (D), Report of Commissioners for 1823.

could be accomplished by keeping the canal well south of the Turnpike and through the St. Gabriel farm, to the Windmills on the St. Lawrence above the Port.

There was not much progress on the canal during 1823, and what was achieved, came about only after much haranguing and threatening of the contractors for excavation, by the Commissioners. The former had subcontracted to another group, the job of digging the canal from the regulating lock to the entrance at Lachine, but as late as the end of July, the job was being entirely neglected.[1] High floods that year along with annoying procrastination by the contractors,[2] prevented the removal of the remaining rock formations, in the section immediately east of the regulating lock. However, several more communication or foot bridges over the canal were finished and the final touches were put to the imposing stone bridge over the regulating lock. The swampy land east of the second and third locks had been removed and replaced, by a three hundred foot long embankment of earth, taken from higher ground in the vicinity. The location of the canal entrance at Lachine was altered, by shortening the mile-long stretch, which bordered the river at Lachine, and carrying the canal into the deep water of the St. Lawrence, in an earthen pier of one hundred feet.[3] Excavation below the second and third locks was continued

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[1] Commissioners' Minutes, 28 July, 1823.

[2] ibid., 19 May, 1823.

[3] The Commissioners decided, that this change would not only save them 1,000 pounds, the cost of purchasing land along the river, but the embankment would serve as a shelter for a basin created between the acute angle of the embankment and the river bank, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1823-1824), Appendix (D).

and much of it completed, before funds were exhausted in the late fall. All work appears to have ceased by the first of December.

b) When construction began in 1824, much of the gloom and frustration of the previous year had been dispelled. The Commissioners were authorized to borrow 20,000 pounds, to continue on the work by special Act of the Legislature, 4 Geo. IV, c. 16.[1] The loans to the Commissioners from the Bank of Montreal were repayed by the government. Thus, for the time being, there was no shortage of funds, hence no financial impediment to vigorous efforts to complete the canal.

Also in sharp contrast to the previous year, was the removal of doubt and discussion about its route. Not only were the Commissioners free, to decide on and build over the least troublesome, most inexpensive route to the St. Lawrence, but they were no longer badgered by controversy about the desirability of eventually building to the Cross. The House of Assembly accepted the recommendations[2] of a Special Committee, which studied a special report[3] of the Commissioners, on the value of lands between the existing line of the canal and the Cross. In 1823, the Commissioners had been ordered to make this survey, for the idea in the minds of the Legislators then, was, that even if the canal could not be extended to the foot

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[1] Lower Canada, Provincial Statutes, 4 Geo. IV, c. 16 (1824), An Act to authorize the Commissioners appointed for the Completion of the Canal between Lachine and Montreal, to effect a Loan for that purpose, and to establish rates of Tolls to pass thereon. The Commissioners were thereby allowed to borrow from lenders offering between 1,000 and 5,000 pounds.

[2] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1823-1824), 295.

[3] ibid., Appendix (D), No. II.

of the Current St. Mary immediately, at least the land might be acquired. But the Commissioners estimated that the cost would be nearly 16,000 pounds and the Special Committee recommended that "it would be proper to wait until experience shall have shown how far the completion of the first part of the Canal would be advantageous to the Trade of this Country, before coming to a decision whether it ought to be continued out of public revenue."[1] Thus the Cross, as the ultimate destination of the Lachine Canal, was abandoned, permanently as it turned out, for even when it was rebuilt in 1848, the existing route was closely followed.[2] Long before this the public argument and editorializing of the winter of 1822 had disappeared, and the once vociferous proponents of the Cross accepted the Assembly's decision with not a whimper of protest.

In spite of comparative freedom from financial difficulties, work on the canal in 1824 proceeded at a pace little better than the painfully slow shuffle of the previous year. Much of it remained to be completed in 1825, and even some in 1826. The weather and recurring spring floods were partially to blame for the delay, but since these problems were met with every year, they cannot really be an adequate explanation for the lack of accomplishments in 1824. The slow progress of the work were explainable by two developments: serious damage to the

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[1] ibid., 121.

[2] M.J. Paton, "Shipping and Canals," in Industrial Expansion, Vol. X of Canada and Its Provinces, eds. Adam Shortt and Arthur G.Doughty, (22 vols.; Toronto: Glasgow, Brook and Company, 1914), 510.

canal, where it was intersected by the "Little River", and a major disagreement between the Commissioners and the contractors for excavation. Normally a shallow meandering creek, the "Little River" had swollen that spring into a sizeable river which, on reaching the canal, swept away much of the painfully built earth embankment. The damage would have been catastrophic had the fifth, sixth and seventh locks at the Windmills been under construction, for the barges loaded with stone would have been unable to use the canal. Nonetheless, considerable time and money were expended in repairing the banks and in constructing a basin, on the north side of the canal, where it was hoped surplus water would collect, during future spring floods.

The particular problem that year, which made for the greatest loss of time, was the disagreement between the Commissioners and contractors, over the price of excavating the channel between the Windmills and the Port.[1] Most of the work was to be done during the winter. Since the job had not been part of the original contract between them, the two parties carried on separate negotiations on the matter, in September. They failed to reach an agreement and the Commissioners decided to wait until the following year, in the hopes of receiving a more acceptable tender. However, because no one else seemed to be interested in the work on the Commissioners' terms, they were obliged to hire workmen themselves, rent the contractors' equipment and hire Andrew White, a member of the Phillips'

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[1] Commissioners' Minutes, 3 Sept., 1824.

group, to supervise the job.[1] The Commissioners refused to give the work to the Phillips group, the contractors for excavation because they felt the latter's tender was too high. Relations between them had shown signs of strain in 1823, and there is evidence of some vindictiveness on both sides when the channel and wharf job was discussed.[2] Nonetheless, at this late date, the Commissioners should have been prepared to make some concessions, or at least swallow their pride, in an effort to get the canal completed. This would have been a wise decision, in view of the fact that the contractors were the only ones with the equipment, trained men and administrative experience immediately available.

By the middle of the season, seven miles of the canal had been completed and it was opened in mid-August to commercial traffic, down to the fourth lock.[3] The Commissioners cruised down the length of the canal in the "Jane,"[4] a replica of the boats that plied the British canals. Excavation between the fourth lock and the three at the Windmills was continued during the construction season and was completed by the fall. All that appeared to be done the following year was the completion of the locks, the excavation of the channel and the construction of the wharf at the Windmills.

The Commissioners borrowed, as they had been permitted, 20,000

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[1] ibid.

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid., 11 Aug., 1824; Canadian Courant, 18 Aug., 1824.

[4] The "Jane" belonged to Mr. Greenfield of Montreal and took passengers up and down the canal for several years.

pounds from various sources, during the summer. But by the end of the year, most of it had been expended and, in their annual report, they asked the Legislators for authorization to borrow 30,000 pounds more. They explained to the Legislature that "there was no practical guide for them in this country in a work of the like magnitude, and the nature of this climate required precautions which are not needed in one more temperate,"[1] and went on to explain how important it was to build "with a view to duration."

The Special Committee of the Assembly, which dealt with the Commissioners' report, considered their new financial plight and, in a report to the House, recommended that the Commissioners be permitted to borrow and additional 30,000 pounds.[2] However, the Special Committee couched its recommendation, in the form of a mildly critical observation, that, the cost of the canal had already assumed unexpected proportions. The Committee expressed the hope that with these funds, it would at last be completed. Their words amounted to a guarded, but unmistakable, chiding of the Commissioners, for their conscientious, but unplanned and unorganized direction of operations.

c) Construction during the winter and summer of the following year, brought the canal to virtual completion. Operations were confined largely to the masonry, on the three lower locks, the excavation of the channel and the construction of the wharf at the Windmills. The channel

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[1] Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIV (1825), Appendix (C), Report of Commissioners for 1824.

[2] ibid., 259-261.

was protected from the damaging wash of the river, by a low embankment of earth, taken from the fifth, sixth and seventh lockpits. Stone houses for lockkeepers, at each series of locks, were begun.

This year the Commissioners attempted to solve the annual problem of flooding at the junction of the "Little River" and the canal, by deepening the channel of the creek above and below the canal.[1] This would, they hoped, increase its rate of flow thus making it easier for the water to run off, in the spring. Attempts to secure the co-operation in this endeavour, of other property-owners bordering the creek, met with determined resistence. Several of them filed suit against the Commissioners, for alleged damage to their property, due to the seepage of water from the canal.[2] Most of the difficulties facing the Commissioners that year were minor.[3]

Out of a total of 107,000 pounds received by the Commissioners up to that time, all but 2,079 pounds had been spent by the end of the 1825 construction operations.[4] However, since the canal was now virtually completed and could expect to be earning tolls, no additional appropriations, or authorizations for loans, were necessary.

d) Throughout the almost six years of the canal's construction,

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[1] Commissioners' Minutes, 11 July, 1825.

[2] These actions, filed by Messrs. Chapman, Jackson, Hurtibise, Pigeon and Finlay, were dismissed on 18 Feb., 1825; see Commissioners' Minutes, 25 March, 1825, but Finlay won his action on appeal, ibid., 20 Nov., 1826.

[3] A dispute with McKay, the contractor for stone, over his final statement to the Commissioners, was settled by arbitration; see Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXV (1826), Appendix (A), Supplementary Report of Commissioners for 1825.

[4] ibid., Report of Commissioners for 1825.

the work had been unexpectedly delayed, by flooding from both the St. Lawrence and spring runoff on the Island itself. It is doubtful whether any useful precautions could have been taken against this problem. The inexperience of the contractors for excavation and their workmen, in this kind of work, was also an essentially unpreventable difficulty. It was also virtually impossible to avoid the rock formation in the eastern section of the Island, no matter how expensive or time-consuming the work became. Another factor which contributed to the eventual high cost of the canal (per mile and per lock), was the steadfast determination of the Commissioners to build a "lasting work." Finally, presuming that all the contractors were "honest" (or that the engineer and various overseers were sufficiently astute to compel them to be so), the eventual cost of the canal can be explained. Although a shallower canal with wooden rather than stone locks, would have been much less time consuming and less expensive to build, most of the expense and loss of time was legitimately incurred under these circumstances.

After more than five years of tiring labour, the Commissioners, contractors, labourers, carpenters, masons and Burnett's memory,[1] were honoured by the superbly constructed canal. Visitors to Montreal admired the work, especially the locks, which served as models for those on the Grenville[2] and Rideau[3] Canals. The Lachine Canal was a monument to the

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[1] He died, of an unknown illness, perhaps aggravation, before the work was finished in November, 1824; see Commissioners' Minutes, Nov., 1824.

[2] Bouchette, The British Dominions in North America, I, 155.

[3] MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, I, 165. The locks of the Rideau, although planned to be the same size as of the Lachine, were made large enough for steamboats, Legget, Rideau Waterway, p. 44.

skill and perseverance of all directly connected with it, especially the long-suffering Commissioners who can only be criticised for not making better provision for the detailed planning and financing of the project. The canal graced the countryside and town through which it flowed.[1] Along its landscaped banks, the people of Montreal promenaded on a Sunday afternoon, or went aboard the "Jane," for a pleasant two hour excursion from the town to Lachine.[2] Those who knew of the construction of the Erie Canal, could justifiably look down their noses at that shallower affair with smaller locks, which was completed in 1825.[3] But, if any were able to make a closer comparison between the Lachine and Erie Canals, their self-satisfaction would have been rudely dispelled as they counted the number of boats and took rough note of the volume of traffic moving down the Erie.

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1 Canadian Courant, 9 Aug., 1826.

2 Leo-Paul Desrosiers, M.S.R.C., "Mes Tablettes," Les Cahiers des Dix, Vol. 12, pp. 75-92. See p. 85, extract from Journal of Mr. Romuald Trudeau, a Montreal apothecary, who wrote in 1826:" l'entrée du canal de La Chine [est] la plus belle et la plus agréable promenade de tout Montréal. On y jouit tout à la fois de la fraîcheur de l'air, de la perspective d'une grande étendue du fleuve St. Laurent, et de l'aspect de la cité qui l'avoisine!! On the stone bridge over the sixth lock he wrote, "vous avez un des plus beaux points de vue possible."

3 P.A.C., Q Series, 184 -1 -2 -3 -4, p. 419, Richardson and Grant to Neilson.

Chapter 9 Labour

Although the source material which directly pertains to working conditions on the Lachine Canal is sparse, a brief statement on labour has its place in this thesis. Much of the information used here was taken from the business records of Stanley Bagg,[1] one of the contractors for excavating the canal.

The labour employed to dig the canal was composed almost entirely of Irish immigrants. Many of them were Ulstermen but the vast majority have names which suggest southern Irish origin.[2] There were Canadiens in the excavating crews, but they never formed a sizeable segment of that group,[3] although they probably were more numerous in stonecutting, at Caughnawaga. McKay, who supplied the stone for the locks on the Rideau Canal, employed mainly Canadiens[4] and probably moved many of his workmen from Caughnawaga up to his new work.

Mechanical means of removing earth from a canal bed were not available in those days, so that large numbers of men were needed to dig the canal with pick and shovel. Ploughs and horse-scrapers were used to loosen earth, but the bulk of the work was performed by men removing

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[1] McCord Museum, McGill University, Bagg Records.

[2] ibid., Time Books and Pay Lists.

[3] See H.C. Pentland, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada," C.J.E.P.S., Vol. XXV, (Nov., 1959), p. 458.

[4] MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, I, 251.

the earth and rock.[1] Where solid rock was encountered near Lachine, gunpowder was used, with much danger to life and limb of the workmen.[2] In Britain, these men carried the name of "navvies," short for navigators, a term attached to them because of the significance of canals or river improvements to inland transportation.[3] The work of digging the Lachine Canal was organized in much the same way as it was in Britain. The contractors appointed foremen to supervise the day labourers and many of the latter were promoted to these more responsible positions, between 1821 and 1825. A number of the foremen were subcontractors to whom Phillips, White, Bagg and Wait gave out certain sections of the work.

In Britain, the men attracted to this kind of work were mainly itinerant agricultural labourers, displaced small farmers and immigrants. In Canada where most of the population were engaged in sedentary agricultural pursuits, there was, up till the end of the War of 1812-1814, no sizeable group whose existence would render them likely to accept the conditions of employment imposed by canal construction.[4] As late as 1815, a serious suggestion was made to recruit a special mobile force

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1 Primitive machinery for felling trees and grubbing roots was used by contractors on the Erie Canal, Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 91. A machine designed by Phelps, a contractor on the Welland Canal, was used to raise loaded carts out of the canal pit; Aitken, The Welland Canal Company, pp. 61, 157 n. There is no evidence that either machine was used in digging the Lachine Canal.

2 Several serious accidents to workmen are recorded, Commissioners' Minutes, 14 June, 1 Nov., 1824; 31 Dec., 1825.

3 Hadfield, British Canals, p. 37.

4 Pentland, op. cit., p. 458.

of one thousand men, to build all canals needed in the Canadas, as a solution to the problem of finding sufficient trained men, in the various sections of the Provinces.[1] However, in the years immediately following the War of 1812-1814, a growing tide of immigration came to British North America from Britain.[2] Landing first at Quebec, most of these "emigrants" moved on to Upper Canada or the United States to take up farms. But the westward flow left behind a residue of people financially less fortunate, less skilled[3] and perhaps more bewildered by their new conditions, than the others who were moving on to the West. Without skills or useful trades and without capital to start farming (and often with little inclination to do so), these immigrants were attracted to the type of work offered by canal construction. It required no tools, or other investment on their part, little skill, and paid immediate, if not large, returns. Many immigrants were in need of work to earn subsistence soon after arrival, and had neither time, nor funds to search out better jobs, or travel far from the port of debarkation. Thus, many of them were prepared to accept day labour employment, such as that offered on the Lachine Canal. The impoverished circumstances of many immigrants had motivated editors of Montreal newspapers, during the years immediately preceding the commencement of the canal, to write articles asking for their employment

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1 Montreal Gazette, 23 Dec., 1815.

2 A.R.M. Lower, "Immigration and Settlement in Canada 1812-1820", C.H.R., Vol. III, (March, 1922), pp. 46-47, gives figures for 1816-1819.

3 Marcus L. Hansen, The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples, (2 vols.; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Division of Economics and History; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), I, 99.

on public works.[1] These proposals were motivated by humanitarian feelings, although the plight of the "emigrants" was an additional argument, which could be used periodically, to urge the immediate construction of canals. However, it was a valid argument, for the apparent alacrity with which immigrants took up employment opportunities on the canal, and the fact that they formed a large proportion of the labour force, indicates their need for employment.

The pay of canal workmen varied, depending on the nature of the work performed, on the danger attending certain jobs and the skill, or training, needed to perform them. The contractors for excavation seemed to have followed the customary hierarchy, set up on construction projects, where large numbers of men were involved. To perform the pick and shovel work and push loaded wheelbarrows, were the common labourers, or daymen, and over them were the foremen, or heads of parties, into which the daymen were grouped. Much depended on the foremen, the man immediately in charge of the work, since he was responsible for organizing his party and getting the most work possible out of the men in it. A third small category of workmen were the blacksmiths, carpenters and their assistants. They number few, in comparison with the large numbers of daymen that were employed; their wages were approximately double those of the daymen, whose pay varied between 2 and 2 shillings 6 pence per day.[2] Foremen received 6 pence per day more than their subordinates, as did another group called

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[1] Montreal Herald, 15 Aug., 29 Aug., 1818; Montreal Gazette, 12 Jan., 1820; also Quebec Mercury, 29 July, 1817.

[2] Bagg Records, Pay Lists.

"drillers" or "drillmen," those engaged in the onerous work of cutting holes in the rock to insert gunpowder for blasting.

The masons, labourers and carpenters employed directly by the Commission to build the locks worked under an overseer, who was responsible directly to the Engineer. The pay of Commission employees was supposedly similar to the above although a strike for higher pay on August 5th, 6th and 7th, 1825,[1] by carpenters may be evidence to the contrary. In any event, this strike like the other for shorter hours, by masons and labourers on the regulating lock, two years earlier,[2] was harshly dealt with by the Commissioners: the men were warned or dismissed.

An interesting feature of the system of payment used by the contractors for excavation, was the establishment of what seems to have been a "company store" at Lachine, where the men could take part of their pay in goods.[3] The store sold the men a good deal of rum and beer, along with some food. Many men were provided with shelter and board by Bagg and his associates, presumably with appropriate deductions from their pay. While these practises may seem, at first glance, to constitute profiteering, it should be pointed out that payment in goods does not appear to have been compulsory, as it was later during the enlargement

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1 Commissioners' Minutes, 15 Aug., 1825.

2 ibid., 22 May, 1823.

3 Bagg Records, Men's Store Account Books and Pay Lists.

of the canal in 1843.[1] Moreover, this form of payment was only about twenty percent of the total payroll and never went above twenty-five percent. In view of the amount of clipped and "sweated" coinage circulating in those days, it was perhaps helpful to the labourers to be paid partly in goods.

The season for most efficient excavation usually lasted from mid-July to the end of September, and, though some digging was carried on over the winter, it was not as extensive as during the summer season.[2] Masonry on the locks could only be executed during the summer and after the first frost, the uncompleted stonework was covered with straw, until the following spring. By present day standards, the working day of the labourers was long. It lasted fourteen hours, from five in the morning until seven in the evening. However, in view of the short construction season, especially for masonry work, these hours were perhaps necessary. In any case, this was the excuse used by the Commissioners in refusing the demands for a shorter working day.[3]

The employees of both McKay, the contractor for supplying stone, and the contractors for excavation lived on their respective work sites, the former at Caughnawaga and the latter in the vicinity of Lachine. The members of the digging crews who could not be accommodated in the bunk-house built by the contractors,[4] appear to have put up their own tents

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[1] See Pentland, "The Lachine Strike of 1843," C.H.R., Vol. XXIX, (Sept., 1948), pp. 255-277.

[2] Bagg Records, Pay Lists, 1821-1822.

[3] Commissioners' Minutes, 22 May, 1823.

[4] Canadian Courant, 6 Oct., 1821.

and shanties or have secured room and board with local inhabitants. Single men were probably housed in the bunkhouse, whereas those accompanied by their families inhabited the makeshift dwellings. Accommodation at the work site was necessary because of the total lack of fast transportation facilities to and from the closest urban settlement, Montreal.

Those who worked on the canal, particularly the daymen, held true to the colourful traditions of their British counterparts. They were an earthly, hard-drinking, brawling crew, whose behaviour elicited, on more than one occasion, uncomplimentary editorials from Montreal newspapers. In addition to the good-natured donnybrook which occurred at the opening ceremonies, there were more battles, particularly between the Hibernian and Canadien members of the work crews.[1] Their habits of scavenging through the countryside for firewood, to keep their transient pots boiling, left many angry property-owners without wooden fences, outbuildings and part of their orchards.[2] The quarrymen and stonecutters at Caughnawaga nearly caused a complete stoppage to lock construction, when they allegedly passed some of their rum ration to the Indians (in exchange for what, one can only guess). When Sir John Johnson, Superintendant-General of Indian Affairs, got news of these incidents, he

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[1] Canadian Courant, 8 Sept., 1821; see also chapter 6 supra. The followers of "King Billy" did battle with both of the above groups on the subject of religion. One of these religious wars lasted intermittently for a week, Montreal Herald, 12 Oct., 1822; see also Canadian Courant, 29 May, 1824.

[2] Two petitions to the Assembly were presented by landowners seeking redress for damages caused by the labourers, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIII (1823-1824), pp. 41-42. These were in addition to the complaints made to the Commissioners, Commissioners' Minutes, 15 Apr., 4 May, 1822.

brought them to the attention of the Governor-in-chief who instructed the Military Secretary to admonish the local Indian Agent, N.B. Doucet. The latter communicated to the Commissioners the extreme displeasure of the abovementioned chain of command and threatened to withdraw quarrying priviliges, unless this illicit traffic in rum ceased.[1] Not only the governmental but the religious authorities as well, were indignant that their Indian charges were being furnished with spirits.[2]

Although this incident quickly subsided and no serious repercussions resulted from the destructive foraging of the workmen, the latter, both on the worksite and at Caughnawaga, were a continuous source of worry and exasperation to the Commissioners.[3] When the canal was being dug through the St. Gabriel farm, the Commissioners forbade the consumption of spirits by the men working there for fear of offending the "reverend gentlemen".[4] However, in spite of these "irregularities", there is no evidence that the inexperienced immigrant labourers were

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1 Commissioners' Minutes, 10 Sept., 1823.

2 E.J. Devine, S.J., Historic Caughnawaga, (Montreal:Messenger Press, 1922), p. 334.

3 See Reports of Commissioners for 1825 and 1826, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXV and XXXVI (1826 and 1827), Appendices (A) and (C). In fairness to the reputation of the Lachine Canal workmen, it should be mentioned that the Commissioners strongly believed that much of the damage was deliberately done by the farmers themselves, ibid., 1826.

4 Commissioners' Minutes, 24 May, 1824.

unwilling and incompetent workmen.[1] No widespread strikes or work stoppages were occasioned by the fighting and foraging, which seemed to be mainly extracurricular' activities. The work on the canal was fortunately not held up by the swamp fever, which killed many workmen on the Rideau,[2] seriously hampered operations on part of the Welland during one season,[3] and on the Erie as well.[4]

The relationship of labour on the Lachine Canal to the flow of immigration into Canada was not unique, for there is strong evidence that many of these same men or their successors built the Rideau Canal.[5]

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1 MacTaggart, one of Colonel By's assistants on the Rideau Canal where many Irish were employed, considered them to be careless and awkward. According to him, the Canadien workmen were much more competent and compliant, MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, II, 242-254. On the other hand, James O'Donnell, the architect of Notre Dame Church, Montreal, seems to have had a poor opinion of Canadien workmen, "Not a man of them appears the least interested in the building; all they care is to get their pay, and to do as little work for it as they can," Olivier Maurault, P.S.S., La Paroisse, Histoire de l'Église Notre Dame de Montréal, (Montréal: Louis Carrier, Les Éditions de Mercure, 1929), p. 90.

2 MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, II, 14.

3 Aitken, The Welland Canal Company, p. 90.

4 Whitford, History of the Canal System of the State of New York, I, 92.

5 MacTaggart, op. cit., II, 242-254.

PART III ASSESSMENT

Chapter 10 Conclusion

The operation of the Lachine Canal cannot be understood without a close examination of the factors surrounding its construction. It is with these elements of promotion, finance, construction and labour that this thesis has been most concerned.

The enterprise of the merchants of Montreal in demanding improvements to navigation on the St. Lawrence, indicates their fear-filled awareness of the potentially severe New York competition facing them after the War of 1812-1814. The merchants were the chief proponents of the Lachine Canal because, more than any other distinguishable group, they stood to benefit from this project and the other St. Lawrence canals which they hoped would follow. Led by their dean, John Richardson, they formed the short-lived Company of Proprietors of the Lachine Canal, a venture in which the experienced business acumen of these men did not show up well. The Company found it impossible to emulate the success of the companies that financed and built many canals in Britain without government aid. The absence of sufficient capital, in Montreal, for such a venture, and the strange reluctance of the promoters to solicit funds elsewhere, forced the close of that aspect of the canal's promotion.

After the Company surrendered its charter, many of its Committee of Management became members of the government-appointed Commission delegated to build the Canal with Legislative finances. Then the post War (1812-1814) years of agitation for the Lachine Canal were over and the process of physical construction began. The Commissioners built the canal according to the most exacting engineering standards, in the belief that it should

be a "lasting work". The experience of Thomas Burnett, the British engineer whose technical knowledge was invaluable, assisted the Commissioners and contractors to build impressive locks and bridges. The project took much longer to construct and cost much more money than had been expected; flooding, the route controversy and the shortage of funds seriously delayed operations. By 1825, however, the canal was very largely finished and by 1826 the last work was done. The Legislature's unstinting, indeed generous, financial support, coupled with a considerable contribution from the British military, had provided the Commissioners with the 107,000 pounds necessary to complete the project.

Besides these strategic, promotional, engineering and financial elements, the term construction, as it is used here, would be incomplete without some treatment of labour. No canal, with the dimensions of the Lachine, had ever been built in Canada before, except for the small works undertaken by the Royal Engineers, at Côteau and the Cascades, between 1779 and 1783. Most of the labour on those works was performed by small groups of soldiers. The manpower problem presenting itself to the Commissioners and contractors of the Lachine Canal, however, was the recruitment and management of hundreds of men, for the Lachine Canal was the first large project in Canada employing such large numbers. Not only were gangs of unskilled workmen needed to dig and move the earth, but numerous masons, stonecutters and carpenters were required to build the locks. Gangers or foremen had to be found to manage the men and direct their operations on the worksite. Immigrant labour, mostly Irish, proved amenable to the strenuous work and makeshift living conditions attending canal construction. There were no major strikes or recorded labour-management disputes and,

aside from a little good-natured brawling, work generally progressed at a rate satisfactory to the hard-driving Commissioners. The competence of the engineer, foremen, labourers and skilled hands in building a substantial canal is attested by the fact that it lasted for more than twenty years. No major repairs or alterations were necessary and the Lachine Canal proved adequate for handling the growing volume of traffic to and from the Great Lakes region. Even after the second canal was completed in 1848, the first remained in service for barge traffic for several years.[1]

Although operation of the canal is beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief glance at its use following 1825 indicates how successfully construction was carried out. In the ten years following its completion, a period for which figures of traffic are available, a steadily mounting volume of commodities used the canal.[2] After a temporary setback in 1829, due to the crop failure in Upper Canada in 1828, traffic leaped upwards to a much higher level between 1830 and 1835. However, during these five years, the flow of important commodities: grain, flour, ashes, timber, firewood, salted pork and beef, instead of increasing, declined slightly. Toll collections reached a peak of 7,154 pounds in 1833 and then decreased for the next two years. Although tolls on upriver traffic amounted to little more than one third of the total, in any single year, a steadily mounting volume of commodities passed through the canal for the interior. By 1839 collections

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[1] Glazebrook, History of Transportation in Canada, p. 419.

[2] See Appendices 1 and 2, supra, pp. 116, 117.

were more than 6,000 pounds[1] but in 1840, 11,589 pounds in tolls were paid[2] and the year following the rate of commodity movement soared to almost double.[3]

Passenger movement along the canal was almost entirely upwards. Though it mounted from three hundred and seventy-seven in 1825 to five thousand two hundred and seventy-one in 1835, the number of passengers in 1831 and 1834 were almost double that figure. The largest part of that upbound human traffic would probably be made up of immigrants. The proportion of them who used the Lachine Canal in their westward migration rose from roughly one sixth in 1827[4] to somewhat less than one half in 1833 - 1835.[5] In contrast to this, the Erie Canal carried a huge volume of passengers, immigrants bound for the new west and many of them for Upper Canada.[6]

Although steamboats were not used on the first Lachine Canal, increasing numbers of them plied the lower St. Lawrence between Montreal and Quebec since 1809. As early as 1819, the Ottawa commenced navigating the Ottawa River above the Long Sault and on the upper St. Lawrence, the

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[1] Lower Canada, Journals of the Special Council, I (1840), Appendix, Public Accounts and Statements of the Income and Expenditure for the Year 1839, No. 1.

[2] Province of Canada, Assembly Journals, I (1841), Appendix (D), Report of Commissioners for 1841.

[3] ibid.

[4] See Appendices 1 and 2, cf. figures of immigrants for 1827, 1829, 1830, 1831 in Creighton, Empire of the St. Lawrence, p. 259.

[5] See Appendices 1 and 2, cf. Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XLIII-XLV, (1834, 1834-35, 1835), Returns of Emigrants from the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, arrived at Quebec... Appendices (I), (I), (I.I) respectively.

[6] Hansen, Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples, I, 111.

steamboat Perseverance began its run between Lachine and the Cascades in 1821.[1] When the Rideau Canal was completed, a steamboat service carried many immigrants from Hull to Kingston.

As the decade of the 1830's drew to a close, certain features of the Lachine Canal were showing signs of inadequacy. At both Lachine and Montreal, the old basins were crowded with bateaux and Durham boats. The harbour of Montreal was encumbered with these vessels and an increasing number of steamboats. Since the union of the Canadas, there was a renewed movement for building canals along the St. Lawrence from Montreal to Kingston for steamboats. In its existing size, the Lachine Canal could not accommodate them and would have to be enlarged. A completely new canal was built alongside the old between 1843 and 1848.

Finally, two additional aspects of the first Lachine Canal may be considered. Neither is directly connected with the main argument of this study. Both, however, are of great interest, and are pertinent to the subject. A brief treatment of them is offered by way of a conclusion.

a) The canals built during the period between the War of 1812-1814 and the second period of the 1840's, were few: the Lachine, Grenville-Carillon, Chambly, Welland and the Rideau. The immediate motivation underlying the construction of all of them appears to have been fear of the military and, more often, the economic strength of the United States. Creighton's Empire of the St. Lawrence stresses the economic rivalry and there is no value in summarizing it here. It is sufficient to say that the

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[1] Glazebrook, History of Transportation in Canada, p. 80.

author is in general agreement with the thesis developed in that work. However, insofar as that economic competition resulted in canal building, the almost complete absence of unified planning of canals in Canada must be emphasized.

There were startling differences in the dimensions of the above-mentioned canals and in the way they were constructed. The standards and specifications for locks employed on the Welland, built for sloops, differed widely from those of the Lachine and Grenville-Carillon, which were much shallower. Although at first modelled on the Lachine, the dimensions of the Rideau were changed to accommodate steamboats. Both the latter and the Grenville-Carillon Canals were financed and built under the supervision of the British military authorities. The Lachine and Chambly Canals were the responsibility of the Legislature of Lower Canada whereas, during construction, the Welland Canal remained under the control of a private company.

However, the real planning, discussion and co-ordination of effort were required on the matter of locating the canals. Over this question two distinct points of view arose, both of them vitally concerned with improving communications between Montreal and the Great Lakes. The British government, represented by the military authorities in Canada, was concerned with defense of the Canadas. Military officers were convinced that the St. Lawrence could not be defended, and paid little attention or encouragement to suggestions to build canals along such a vulnerable route. Despite obvious economic criteria favouring the St. Lawrence, the Rideau Canal, was built. Nonetheless, John MacTaggart, an engineer on the Rideau, wrote in 1829, that "The St. Lawrence being the shortest, most direct line

of communications with the Atlantic, will, by removing a few natural obstructions, ever be the highway for commerce, notwithstanding improvements in any other quarter."[1] (my italics).

However, the St. Lawrence was not improved because, as Stacey[2] points out, prevalent economic and military considerations required different routes for canals, in contrast to the United States where the Mohawk-Hudson route was useful from both standpoints. The St. Lawrence, the economic waterway to the interior, suffered because of the absence of encouragement and financial assistance from the British military authorities and the poverty of the Provincial Legislatures. The Lachine Canal, however, was at first glance outside this controversy because, no matter which route to the interior was improved, the St.Lawrence or the Ottawa-Rideau, a canal around the Lachine Rapids was mandatory.[3] The Lachine Canal would, however, directly benefit or suffer, depending on the economic feasibility of shipping by way of the Rideau Canal from Upper Canada and the United States. It proved to be uneconomic, so that the Commissioners for the St. Lawrence Canals were able to report in 1846 that "scarcely a single barrel of flour descends the Rideau Canal, because the St. Lawrence proves to be the cheapest route";[4]

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[1] MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, II, 67.

[2] Stacey, "The Myth of the Unguarded Frontier," p. 7.

[3] Gilbert N. Tucker, The Canadian Commercial Revolution, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 44.

[4] Province of Canada, Assembly Journals, V (1846), Appendix (D.D.D.), Report of the Select Committee to which was referred the Return to an Address for the amount expended on the different cuts of the St. Lawrence Canals, and the amount of Tolls received thereon.

The success of the Erie Canal testifies as to the comparative advantage of shipping by way of it, rather than down the St. Lawrence.[1] However, the tantalizing question that remains, is whether the immense sums spent on the Rideau, if expended on the St. Lawrence, would have made shipment so economic on the latter that it would have been a more effective competitor of the Erie.

b) The relationship of the Lachine Canal to contemporary Lower Canadian politics might well be the subject of further investigation. The ease with which funds, far in excess of those originally thought necessary, were granted for the Canal by the Canadien-controlled Assembly is significant, because of the picture that has been presented of Canadien opposition to expensive internal improvements.[2] It does not jibe with the fact that the Assembly rescued the Company from collapse and undertook the heavy burden of financing the project. Even after feelings had been considerably embittered between the latter and the English during the Union Bill controversy, the Assembly continued to support the Lachine Canal project. Had there really been deep-seated Canadien opposition to the Canal, why would their representatives in the Assembly have passed bills appropriating more money in 1823 and have authorized extensive loans in 1824 and 1825, on its own behalf? Why, if that contention is valid, would the Assembly in 1825 have appropriated 25,000 pounds for the purchase of stock in the Welland Canal Company, which, like the Lachine Canal, would be of direct benefit to the commercial

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[1] For an interesting comparison of toll collections on the Welland, Oswego and Erie Canals, see Aitken, Welland Canal Company, Appendix, Table V, p. 146.

[2] Creighton, Empire of the St. Lawrence, p. 225; Glazebrook, History of Transportation in Canada, p. 77.

group of Montreal?[1] Members of that group had been some of the strongest proponents of the Union Bill and one of its most disliked members, Richardson, was at the helm of the Canal project. He was not even slightly criticized personally for his direction of it, when there were legitimate grounds for doing so. The available evidence gives no indication that the Lachine Canal was directly or indirectly involved in the mounting antipathy after 1822. It may have been that Louis Joseph Papineau, the leader of the Canadiens in the Assembly, was not unsympathetic to improvements, for the benefit of the commercial strength of his native Montreal, and that he was able to stifle any opposition among his followers. Although a full consideration of this question lies outside the realm of this thesis, the author offers his suggestion as a possible answer to the puzzle of the Lachine Canal in the politics of Lower Canada.

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[1] Aitken guardedly endorses Dalhousie's suggestion that the grant was "passed in order to demonstrate 'a spirit of liberality in the Assembly while the odium for rejecting such grants would fall upon the Council or upon His Majesty's Government,' " Welland Canal Company, p. 85. The author agrees with him that the opinion of a Governor-in-chief, whose encounters with the Canadien Assembly were usually bitterly unsuccessful, should be accepted with considerable reservation.

APPENDIX 1

Traffic and Tolls on the Lachine Canal 1825 - 1829

	DOWNWARD					UPWARD				
	1825	1826	1827	1828	1829	1825	1826	1827	1828	1829
Boats 5 Tons Number	52	198	209	555	226	77	317	571	743	435
" 5-20 " "	46	2	97	150	475	48	2	100	181	503
"20-60 " "	362 237	614 350	1062 531	1305 552	1156 426	355 230	686 367	1253 579	1478 553	1354 414
" 60 " "	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
Rafts or Cribs "	27	64	225	48	29	-	-	-	1	2
Timber Tons	366	333¾	895	906¼	323½	10	-	22	9	54
Firewood Cords	194	1258½	3263¼	4445½	4275	-	-	-	-	-
Merchandise & Liquors Tons	112½	304½	529½	695	350	386¾	1521¾	3851¾	5711¾	6598
Ashes Barrels	23727	19227	13058	18739½	19189	-	-	-	-	-
Flour "	17112	62683	95672	78453	56732	24	-	107	345	75
Flour ½ "	-	-	1205	303	295	-	-	-	-	-
Pork & Beef "	6507½	6428	9984½	14169	15477	4	10	4	193	45
Butter "	79	125½	350¼	362	294	-	-	-	-	-
Grain Bushels	19536½	57657	148514½	124207½	53211½	-	-	298	200	230
Passengers Number	157	283	385½	634	397½	377	713	1833	2720½	1548½
Hogs & Sheep "	-	187	784	1956	1448	-	-	2	2	11
Shingles M.	-	-	6	38	-	-	-	-	5	24
Staves	-	-	-	42¾	25¾	-	-	-	-	-
Salt Tons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	76	66	365
Tolls (pounds)	1089.14	1571.2	2433.19	2496.19 #	1884.15	190.15	458.16	818.16	1014.1 #	1040.15

Source: Report of the Commissioners for the Lachine Canal for 1829, Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XXXIX (1830), Appendix (D).

6 Geo. IV, c.3, which set toll rates, expired 1 Dec. 1827. Thus figures for 1828 are only estimates of what whould have been collected had the act remained in force.

APPENDIX 2

Traffic and Tolls on the Lachine Canal 1830-31-33-34-35
(Figures for 1832 not available)

	DOWNWARD					UPWARD				
	1830	1831	1833	1834	1835	1830	1831	1833	1834	1835
Boats Number	1,711	2,005	2,049	1,735	1,600	1,814	2,111	2,160	1,779	1,659
Timber Tons	804½	547	1,419	514	3,372	26	34½	32	17	72
Merchandise & Liquors Tons	402	435½	619¼	666½	816½	8,262½	11,046½	13,267¼	12,598½	15,754¼
Ashes Barrels	26,207	30,534	21,129	12,378	16,166	-	-	-	-	-
Flour "	130,147	128,097	156,955	144,778	114,081	69	71	-	90	-
Pork & Beef "	16,400½	16,959	30,836½	26,370	13,670	39	91	-	402	10
Grain "	279,556	428,858	392,660	359,998	52,010	-	661	1,935	247	6,012
Passengers Number	341	364	368	272	420	4,086	10,663	7,869	11,689	5,271
Firewood Cords	4,490½	5,302	10,140	7,983½	11,432	-	-	-	-	½
Butter Barrels	206	463½	763½	700½	723	-	2	-	-	-
Hogs & Sheep Number	2,189	2,622	2,460	3,117	2,085	-	-	32	-	39
Staves M.	3½	10	34	158¾	377¼	-	-	-	-	-
Salt Tons	-	-	-	-	-	405	334	449	463¾	112½
Lime & Sand	83	504	254	83	183	-	-	-	35	-
Shingles	-	12	47	-	111	-	-	-	-	-
Tolls (pounds)	3708. 3	4461.12	4844. 0	4308. 6	3233.16 #	1604.17	2171. 5	2310. 3	2222.15	2264.2 #

Sources: Lower Canada, Assembly Journals, XL - XLV (1831-1835), Appendices, Reports of Commissioners for the Lachine Canal.

2 William IV, c.23 which re-established the tolls of 1829, expired in April, 1835. These sums are estimates of what would have been collected had they remained in force.

APPENDIX III

Amounts and Sources of Money Loaned to the Commissioners of the Lachine Canal.

Statute	Amount	Interest (%)	Lender
(1823)	11,500	6	Bank of Montreal (Montreal Bank)
4 Geo. IV, c. 16	7,540	6	John Jamieson
(1824)	2,000	5	Robert Dunn
	1,500	6	" "
	8,960	6	Samuel Gerrard

Total: 20,000 pounds

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5 Geo. IV, c. 19	2,000	6	Alexander Harvey
(1825)	1,200	6	Amos Lister
	2,500	6	Samuel Gale
	500	6	Charles Eliot
	1,250	6	William Macrae
	1,500	6	Miss M.A. Johnson
	1,500	6	James H. Lambe
	1,400	6	John Tabor Prentice
	4,300	6	Executors of T. Dickson
	1,200	6	Mrs. Archange Dickson
	580	6	Miss Ellen Hoyle
	5,000	6	William Torrance
	1,200	6	James Gordon
	3,500	6	Samuel Gerrard

Total: 27,630 pounds

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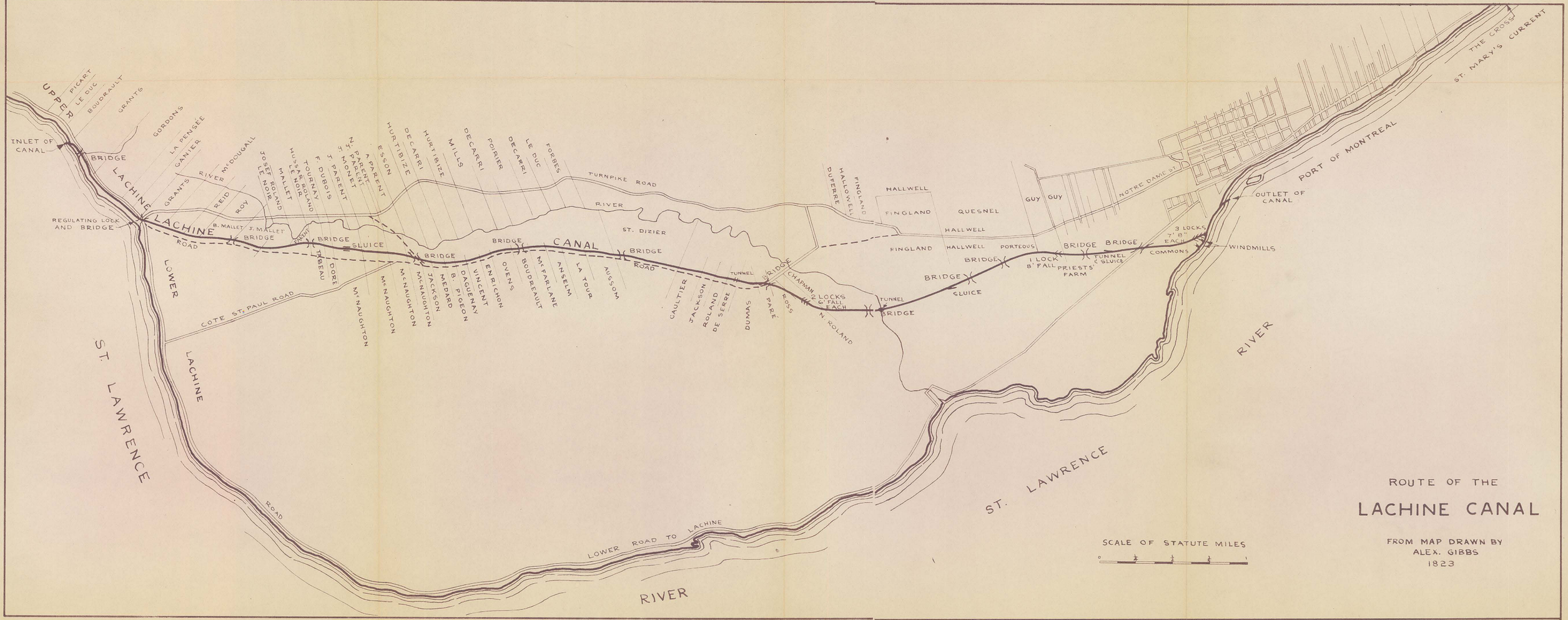
FIGURE I

Entrance of Lachine Canal at the Windmills, showing stone bridge over sixth lock and lock keeper's house. (From Viger's Sketch Book, P.A.C.).

FIGURE II

Map of the Lachine Canal (recopied from Map by Alexander Gibbs, 1823, P.A.C.).


ROUTE OF THE
LACHINE CANAL
FROM MAP DRAWN BY
ALEX. GIBBS
1823
SCALE OF STATUTE MILES
INLET OF CANAL
BRIDGE
REGULATING LOCK AND BRIDGE
LACHINE
ROAD
LOWER
ST. LAWRENCE
LACHINE
ROAD
RIVER
LOWER ROAD TO LACHINE
COTE ST. PAUL ROAD
UPPER
PICART
LE DUC
BOUDRAULT
GRANTS
GORDONS
LA PENSÉE
GARNIER
GRANTS
RIVER
McCOUGALL
REID
ROY
JOSEF ROLAND LE NOIR
MALLET
HUSSAN ROLAND LE NOIR
TOURNAY
F. DUBOIS
J. PARENT
N. MONET
N. PARENT
A. PARENT
ESSON
HURTIBIZE
DECARRI
HURTIBIZE
MILLS
DECARRI
POIRIER
DECARRI
LE DUC
FORBES
TURNPIKE ROAD
RIVER
ST. DIZIER
B. MALLET
J. MALLET
BRIDGE
PASSAGE
BRIDGE
SLUICE
BRIDGE
CANAL
BRIDGE
ROAD
TABEAU
DORE
McNAUGHTON
McNAUGHTON
McNAUGHTON
McNAUGHTON
JACKSON
B. MEDARD
B. PIGEON
DAGUENAY
VINCENT
ENRICHON
OVENS
BOUDREAULT
McFARLANE
ANSELM
LA TOUR
AUSSOM
CAULTIER
JACKSON
ROLAND
DE SERRE
DUMAS
PARÉ
ROSS
N. ROLAND
TUNNEL
BRIDGE
CHAPMAN
2 LOCKS
6' FALL EACH
TUNNEL
BRIDGE
DUFERRE
HALLOWELL
FINGLAND
HALLWELL
FINGLAND
QUESNEL
GUY
GUY
NOTRE DAME ST.
HALLWELL
FINGLAND
HALLWELL
PORTEOUS
BRIDGE
BRIDGE
BRIDGE
1 LOCK
8' FALL
PRIESTS' FARM
TUNNEL & SLUICE
3 LOCKS
7' 8" EACH
COMMONS
OUTLET OF CANAL
WINDMILLS
PORT OF MONTREAL
THE CROSS
ST. MARY'S CURRENT
ST. LAWRENCE
RIVER