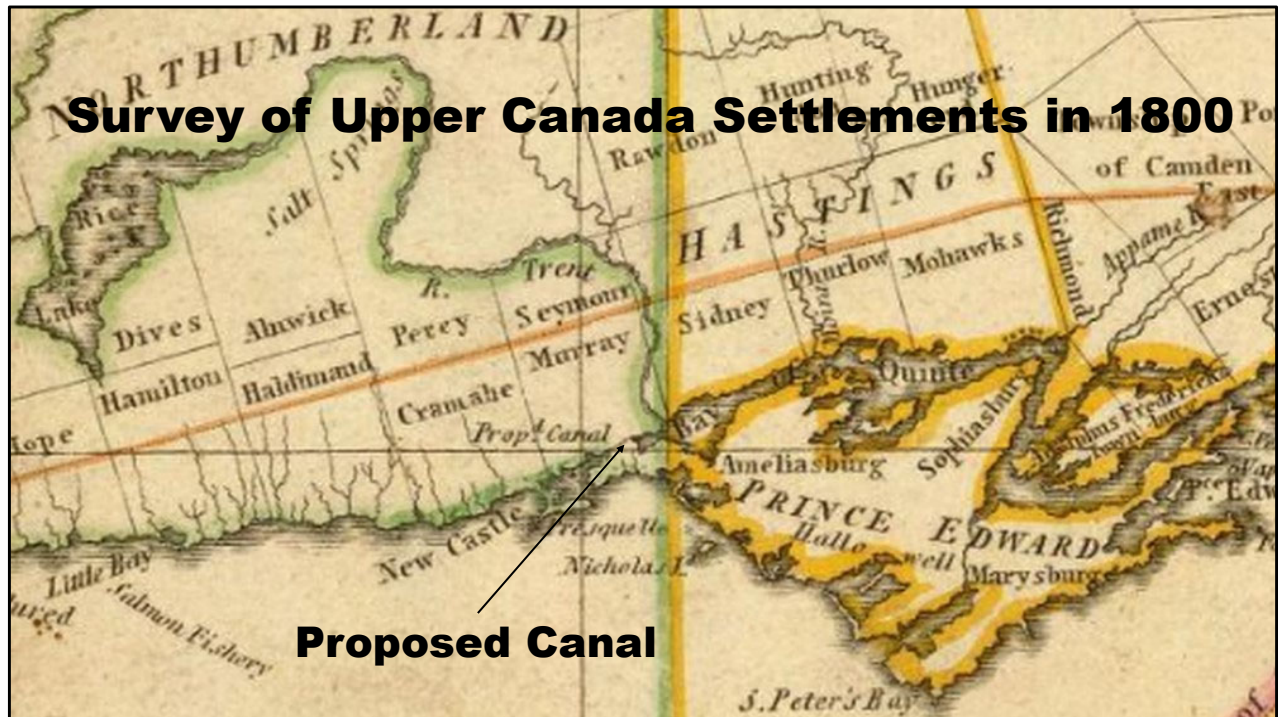


Thank you very much. Good evening everyone. Thanks so much for coming!

Thanks to the Brighton Public Library for hosting this event.

Tonight, the topic is “The Murray Canal”.

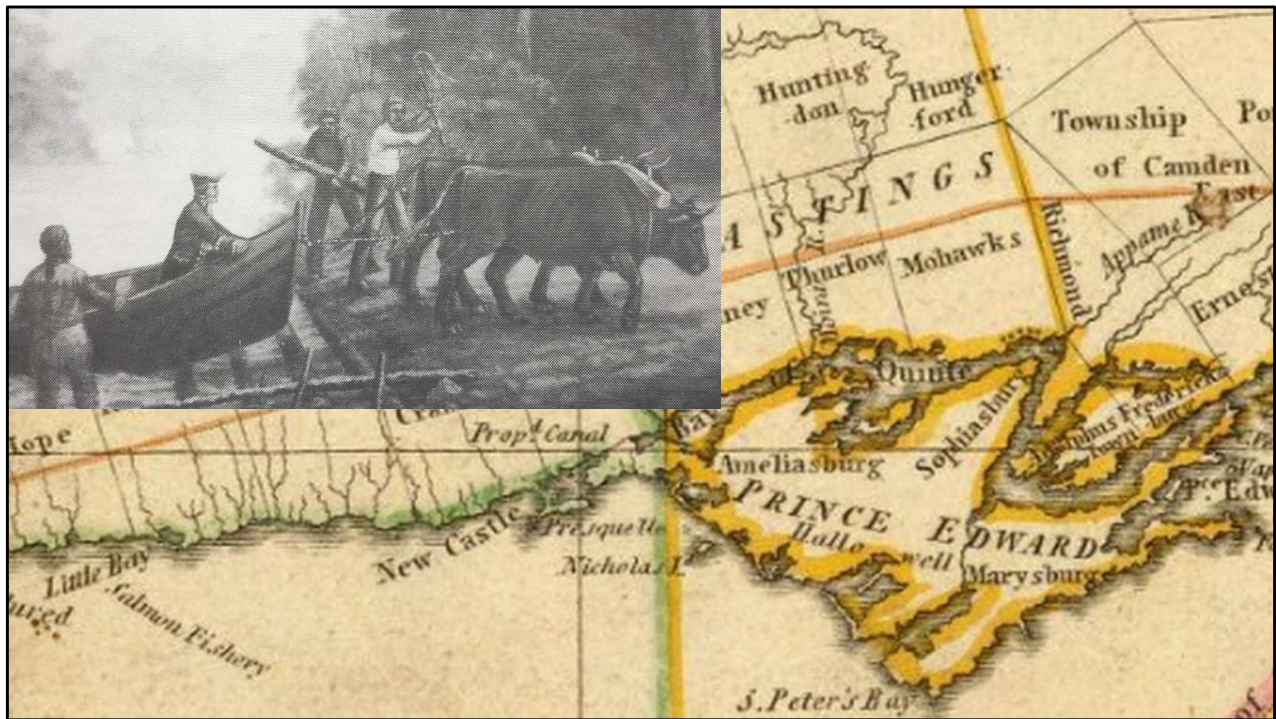
I will talk about how the decision to build the Murray was finally reached, how it was built and how it was used.



The first advocate for a canal was Upper Canada's first Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe who believed strongly that a canal should be built here.

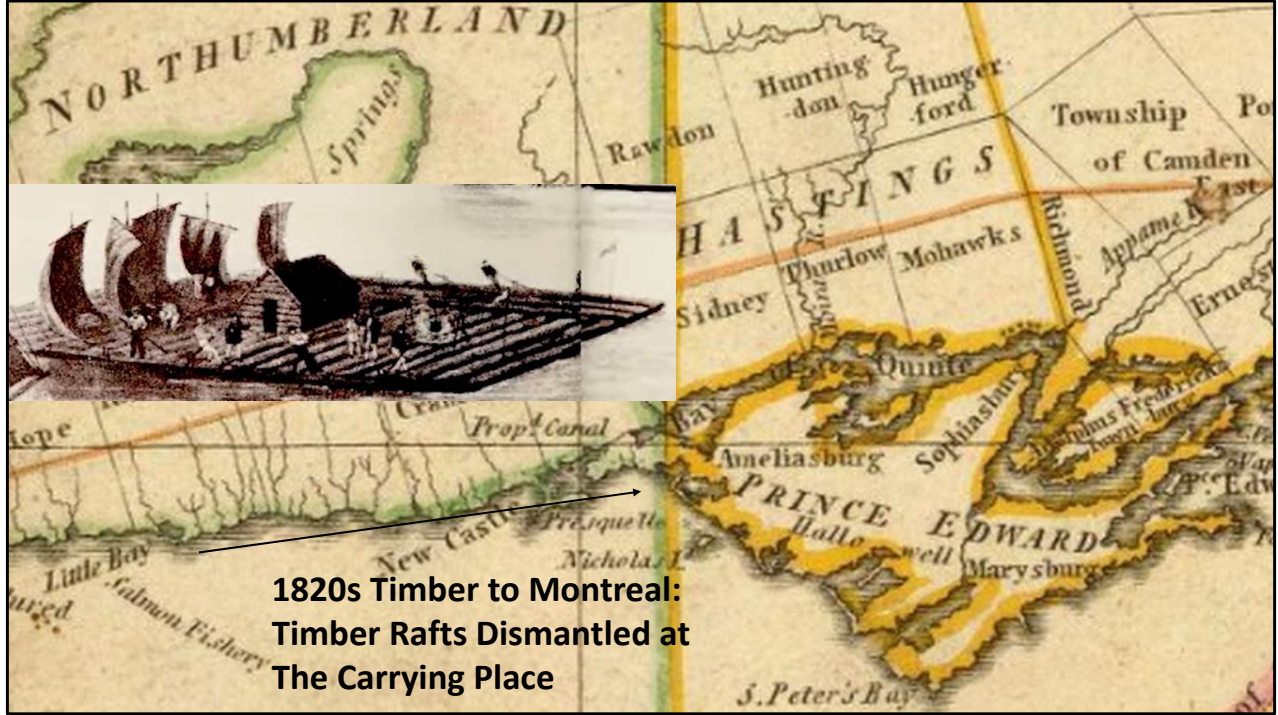
This map of Upper Canada from 1800 shows a "Proposed Canal" and a thin dark line where the Murray Canal is today.

Simcoe left Upper Canada in 1796 and the canal was not built, but, the term "Simcoe's Canal" would be associated with the dream of a canal at this location for many decades to come.



During the War of 1812, the military brass complained loudly about the serious delays and extraordinary costs of moving men and material across the Carrying Place.

Asa Weller did very well with his batteau portage service, but that would have been the right time to have a canal.



**1820s Timber to Montreal:
Timber Rafts Dismantled at
The Carrying Place**

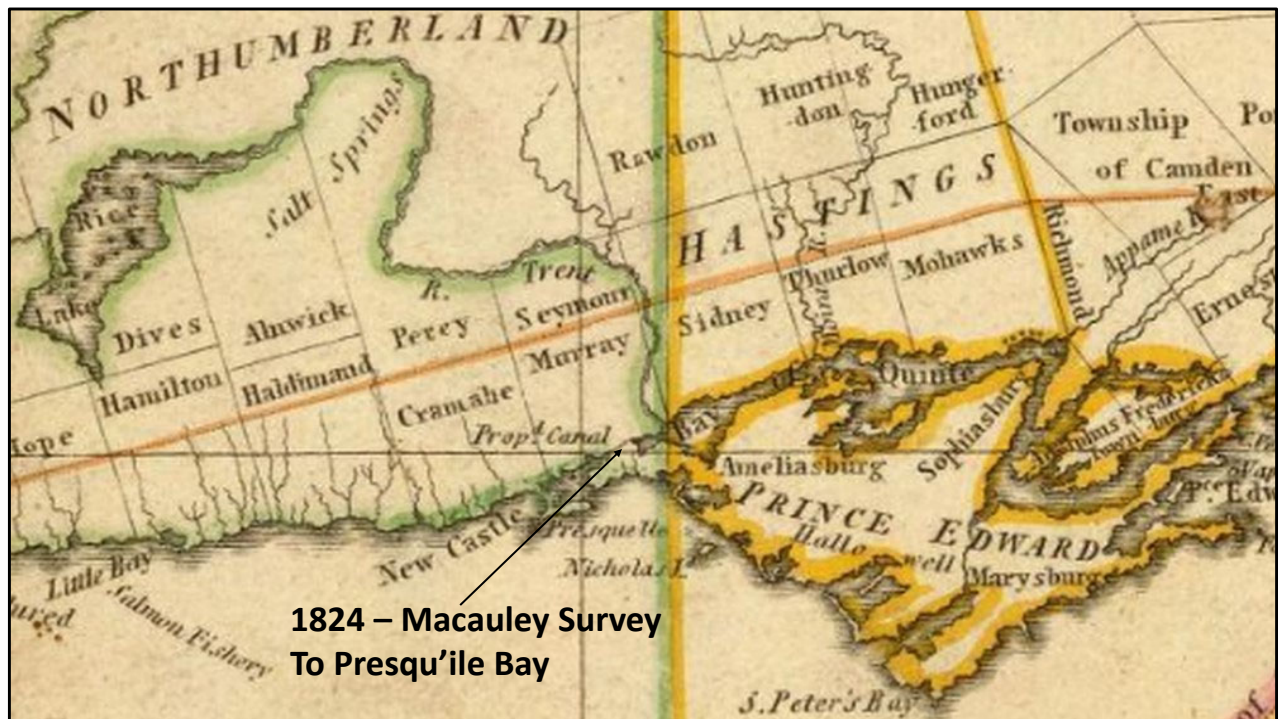
After the War of 1812 was over, those to the west in the Newcastle District who engaged in the lucrative timber trade grumbled at their situation.

They lashed large pieces of timber together to form rafts with the intent of coasting along the shore of the lake and up the St. Lawrence all the way to Montreal.

They dare not sail around the south side of Prince Edward County, because the waters at the east end of Lake Ontario were known to be very dangerous.

Instead, they brought their rafts into Wellers Bay. At the west end of The Carrying Place, they dismantle the raft, dragged each piece of timber across The Carrying Place, then re-assemble the raft to sail on down the bay and on to Montreal.

This process was costly and time-consuming, but much less dangerous than the alternative.



**1824 – Macauley Survey
To Presqu'île Bay**

Henry Ruttan of Cobourg initiated the first formal survey regarding a canal which was undertaken in 1824. It was called the Macauley survey.

It concluded that it would be very useful to have a canal between Presqu'île Bay and the Bay of Quinte.

There was even an Act of Parliament passed, stipulating that a canal should be built there.

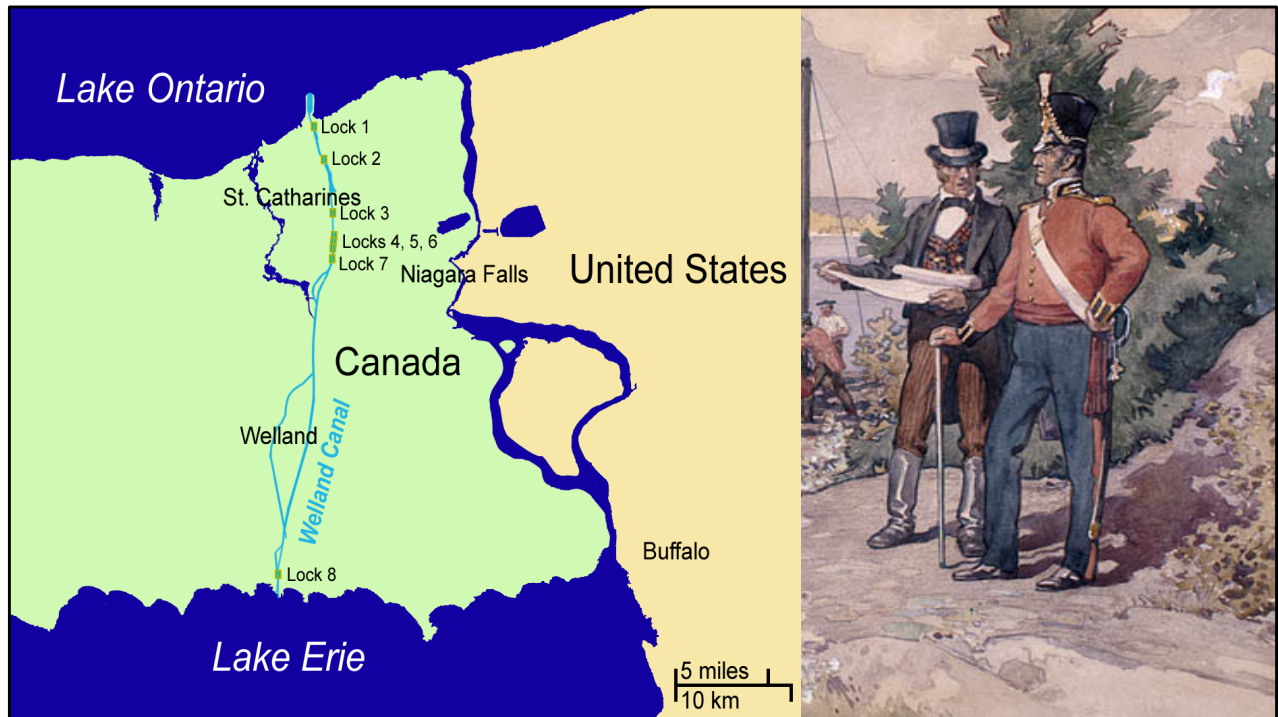
But then nothing was done, providing another example of a theme that will become familiar.



Across the province, major canal projects had been undertaken, such as the Rideau Canal from Ottawa to Kingston.

Here we see Colonel By overseeing the construction of the Rideau Canal during the later 1820s.

The Rideau Canal opened in 1832.

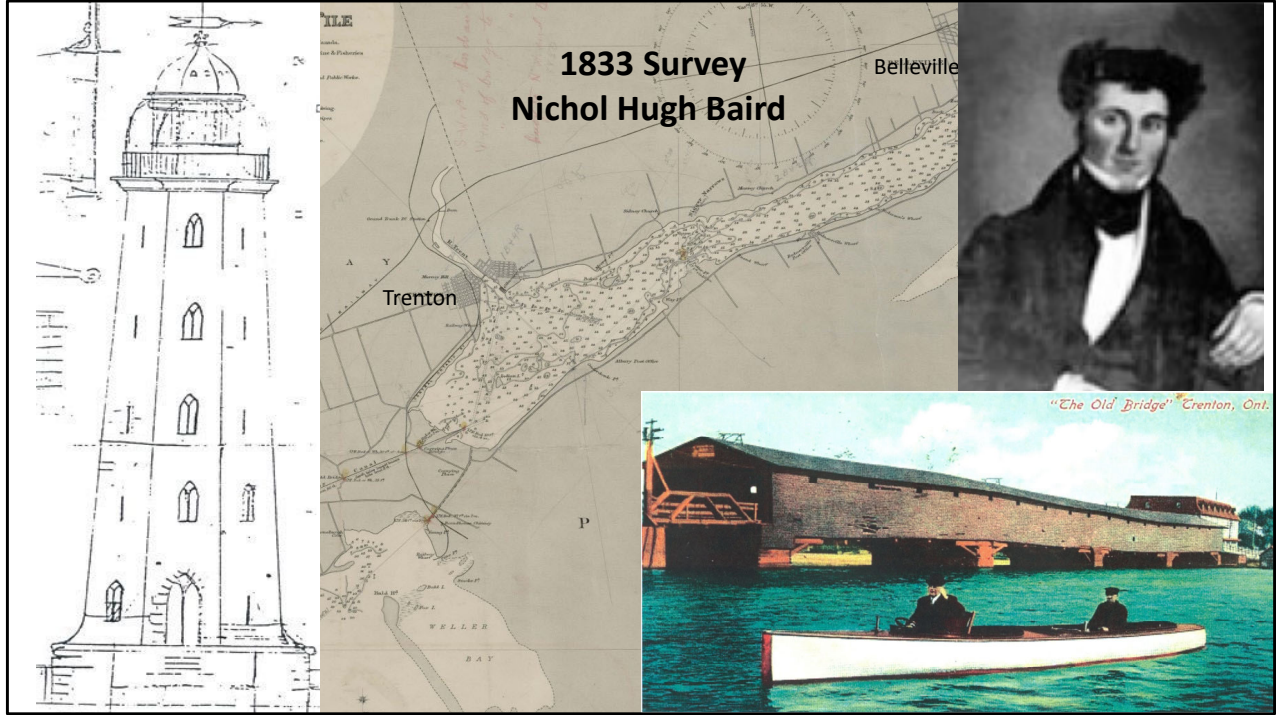


The first Welland Canal had been opened in 1829 and by 1833 major expansion was under way.

These large scale projects were funded by the government because they were considered to have national benefits.

Massive debt was incurred by Upper Canada in pursuit of these large and expensive projects.

In that light, a small, regional situation, like the Murray Canal, was simply not on the minds of the politicians.



In spite of that, in the early 1830s, a group of business people, politicians and interested parties got together and lobbied the government to look at a canal once more.

Their lobbying focused mostly on the need to bolster the economy of the area, but there was also concern for the growing tally of deaths in marine disasters at the east end of Lake Ontario.

A survey was undertaken, this time by Nichol Hugh Baird, a very active civil engineer.

He had worked on the Rideau Canal under Col. By and had designed the covered bridge over the Trent River and the Presqu'île Point Lighthouse.

Baird recommended a canal between 12 O'clock Point on the Bay of Quinte and the north east shore of Wellers Bay.

In spite of Baird's survey, no further action was taken.



Then, the Mackenzie Rebellion froze funding for all major projects and disrupted Upper and Lower Canada through 1837 and 1839.

Up at Cornwall, the Cornwall Canal was 80% complete, and the work just stopped.

For several years, it remained an muddy ditch as the community around it slid into recession.

Reform, Reform, Reform

**John George Lambton
Lord Durham**



**Lord Durham's
Report**

**Reforms to
Government of
Upper and Lower
Canada**

**Charles Poulett Thomson
Lord Sydenham**



After the rebellion was over, the British government sent Lord Durham to talk to Canadians, document their concerns and then report to London.

Lord Durham's report recommended sweeping reforms to the governments of Upper and Lower Canada.

Charles Poulett Thomson was appointed as the next Governor General and he was immediately sent to Canada.

His primary job was to pass legislation in the parliaments of Upper and Lower Canada, reflecting the recommendations in the Durham Report.

The Board of Works



STATUTES OF THE PROVINCE OF CANADA.

ANNO QUARTO ET QUINTO
VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

An Act to repeal certain Ordinances therein mentioned
and to establish a Board of Works in this Province.

[17th August, 1841.]

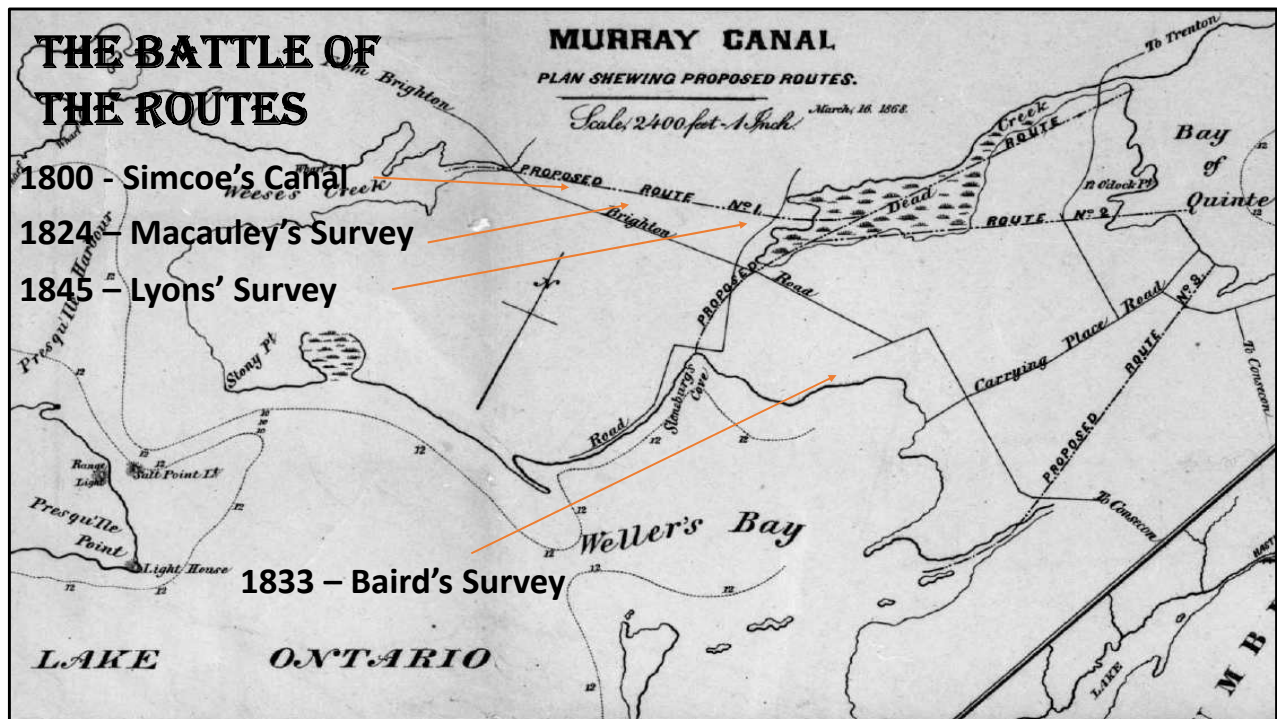
One of the most important changes that came out of these reforms was the creation of the Board of Works.

This new department was responsible for what we call public infrastructure, including roads, bridges, canals and later, railways.

It was made up of professionals experienced with large infrastructure projects.

Also, funding for these projects would be dedicated through the Board of Works.

This was a huge departure from earlier methods, and it was badly needed.



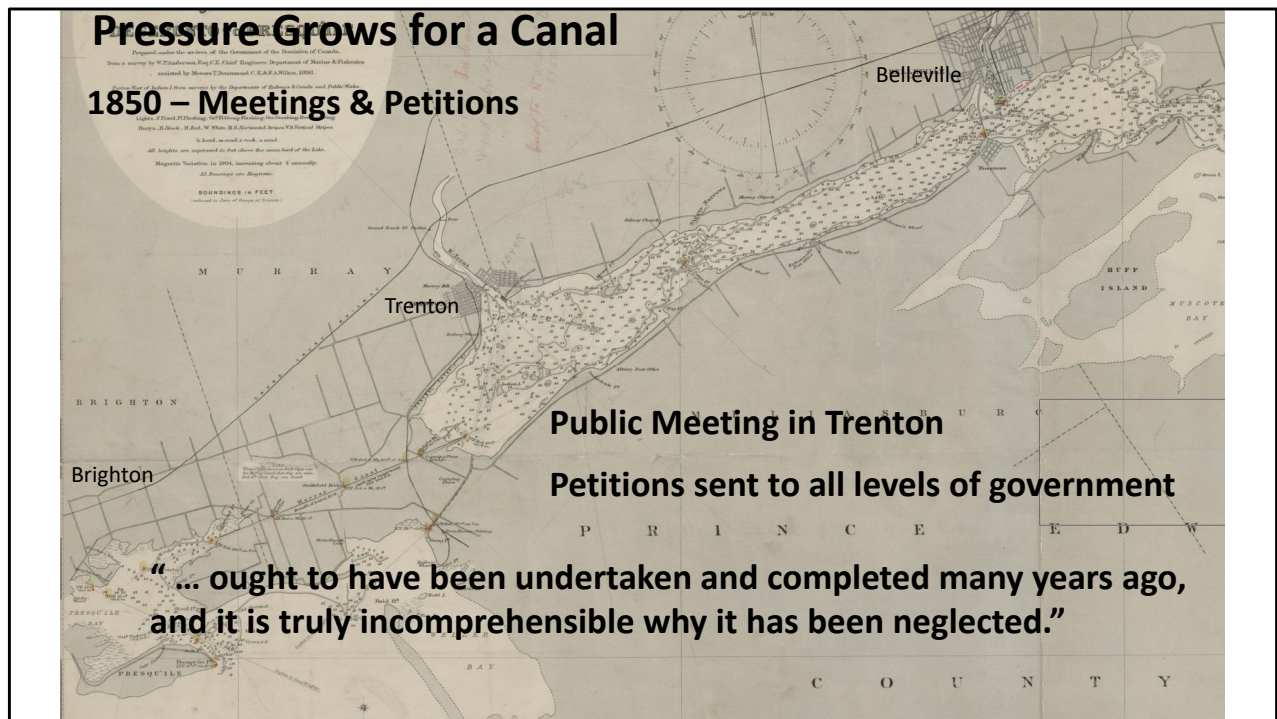
More lobbying for a canal resulted in another survey conducted in 1845 by a Mr. Lyons of the Board of Works.

It found that there were significant deposits of rock just below the surface near Weller's Bay.

This would make Baird's route untenable because of the excessive cost of digging a canal in rock.

Mr Lyons recommended a canal up Dead Creek to Presqu'ile Bay.

As usual, nothing happened after the survey, although the geological findings would be foundational in future surveys.



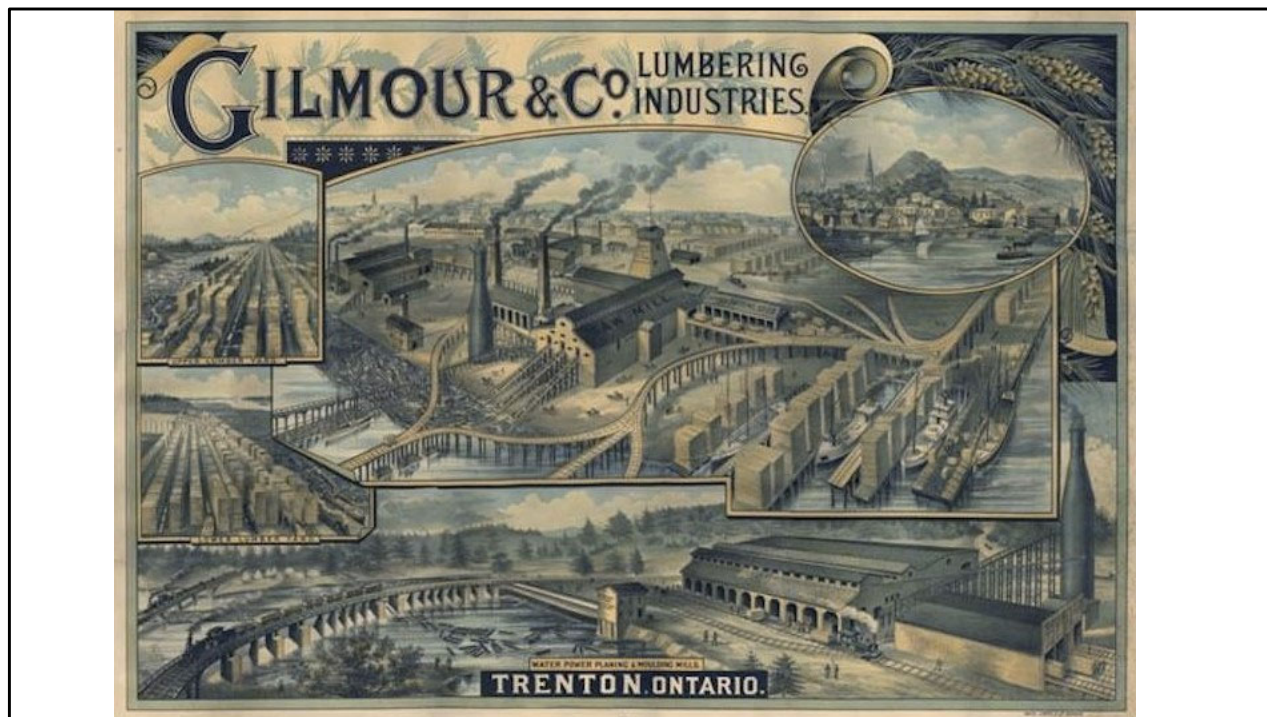
In September 1850 a very enthusiastic public meeting was held near Trenton where many voices were raised in support of a canal.

Folks around Brighton were experiencing a major spurt of optimism after Brighton Township was created on January 1st, 1852.

Employment was sky high with concurrent work on the Grant Trunk Railway and the Brighton and Seymour Gravel Road.

Like their counterparts in Bellefonte and Trenton, they wanted the Murray Canal built as soon as possible.

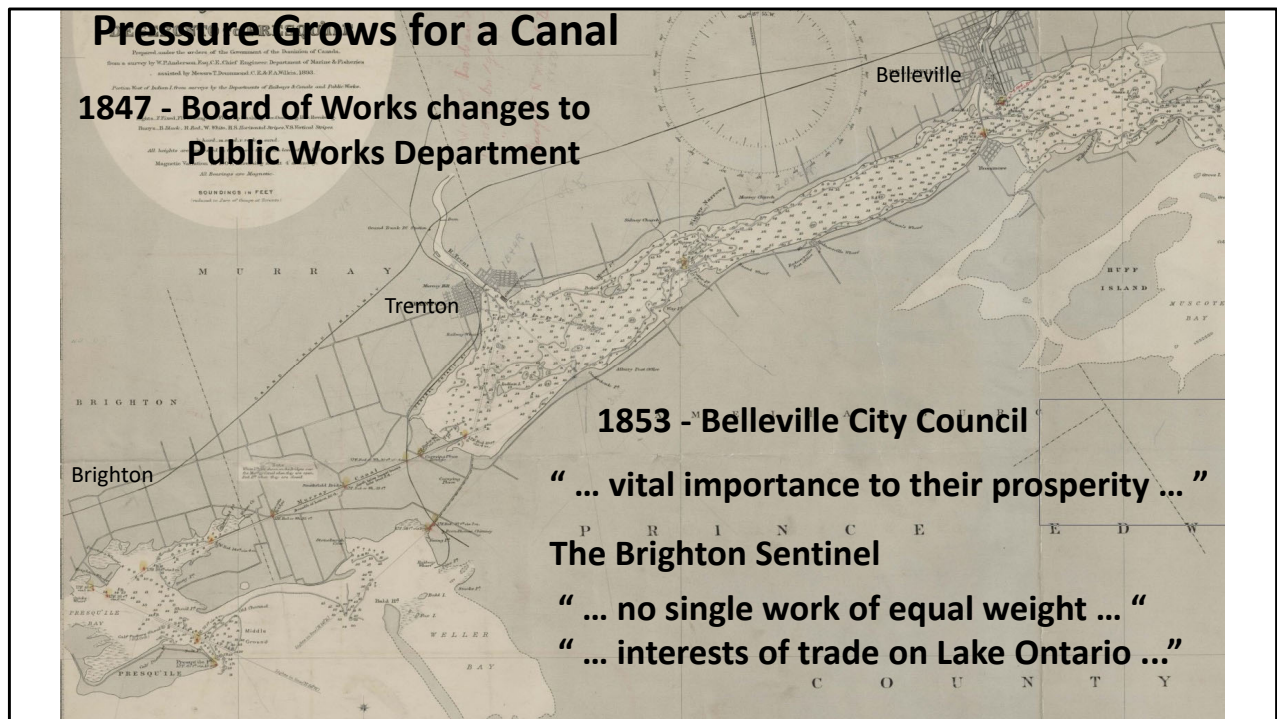
Alex Begg, editor of the Brighton newspaper, minced no words when he said that the canal “ ... ought to have been undertaken and completed many years ago, and it is truly incomprehensible why it has been neglected.”



In 1852, the Gilmour Lumber Company built a saw mill on the Trent River.

This began a half century of employment and industrial activity in the area.

We should not underestimate the strength of the voice of Gilmour's in the lobbying for a canal.



In 1853, Belleisle City Council appointed a committee to look into the issue of a canal.

Their report went to the Ontario Public Works Department, which was the new name for the Board of Works.

It said, in part “The inhabitants of this section of the country look upon this project as one of vital importance to their prosperity.”

The Brighton Sentinel concurred: “There is no single work of equal weight, as regards the interests of the trade on Lake Ontario, and perhaps eventually the defense of Upper Canada, which could be engaged in at the present moment.”

Yes, the military factor was still talked about, but the emphasis in the minds of most people was trade and prosperity.



All of the promotion and lobbying for a canal would eventually have an impact in the Canadian House of Commons in Ottawa.

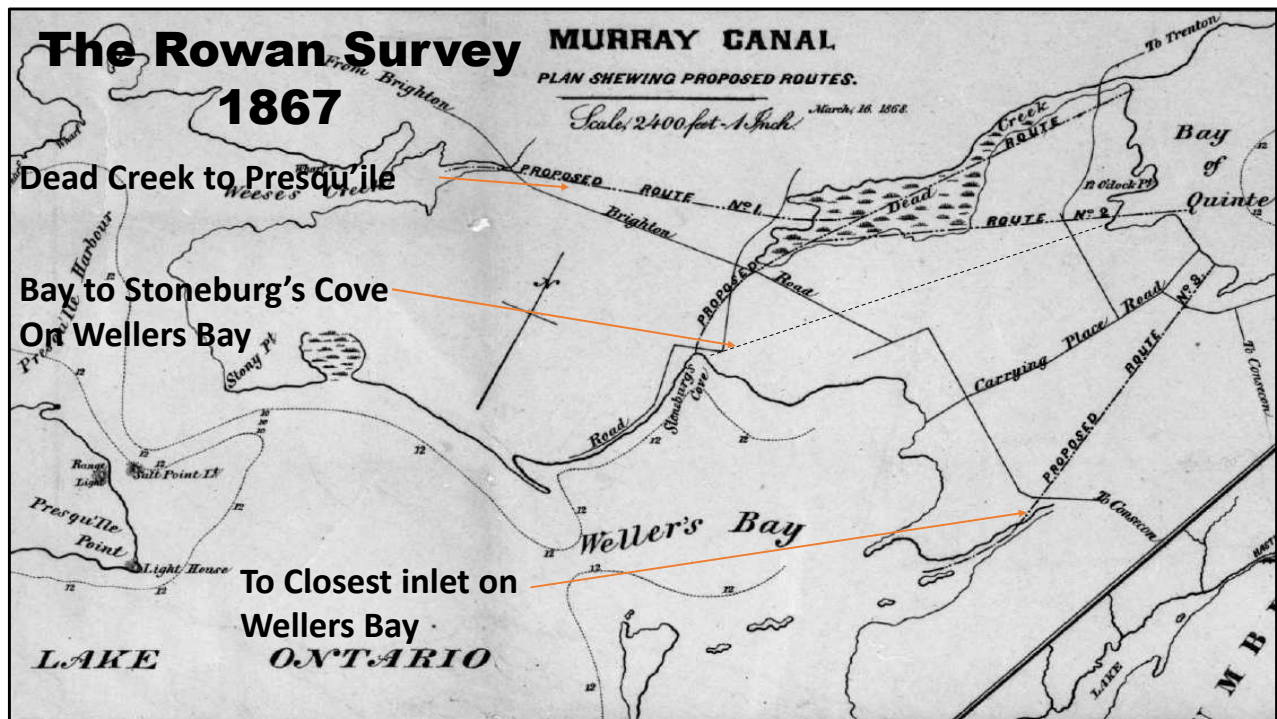
In 1865, a Select Committee reported on the Murray Canal, under the Chairmanship of James L. Biggar.

He had grown up in a merchant family on the east end of the Carrying Place and would be the MP for East Northumberland from 1861 to 1867.

Another avid supporter of the canal in the House was Joseph Keeler III who was from Colborne.

He was member for East Northumberland for several years after Confederation.

These men worked together over several decades to educate, promote and lobby for the Murray Canal among their constituents and in the halls of parliament.



This resulted in another survey, conducted by J.H. Rowan.

Three routes were considered and compared in this survey.

The conventional Dead Creek to Presqu'ile Bay route was studied again.

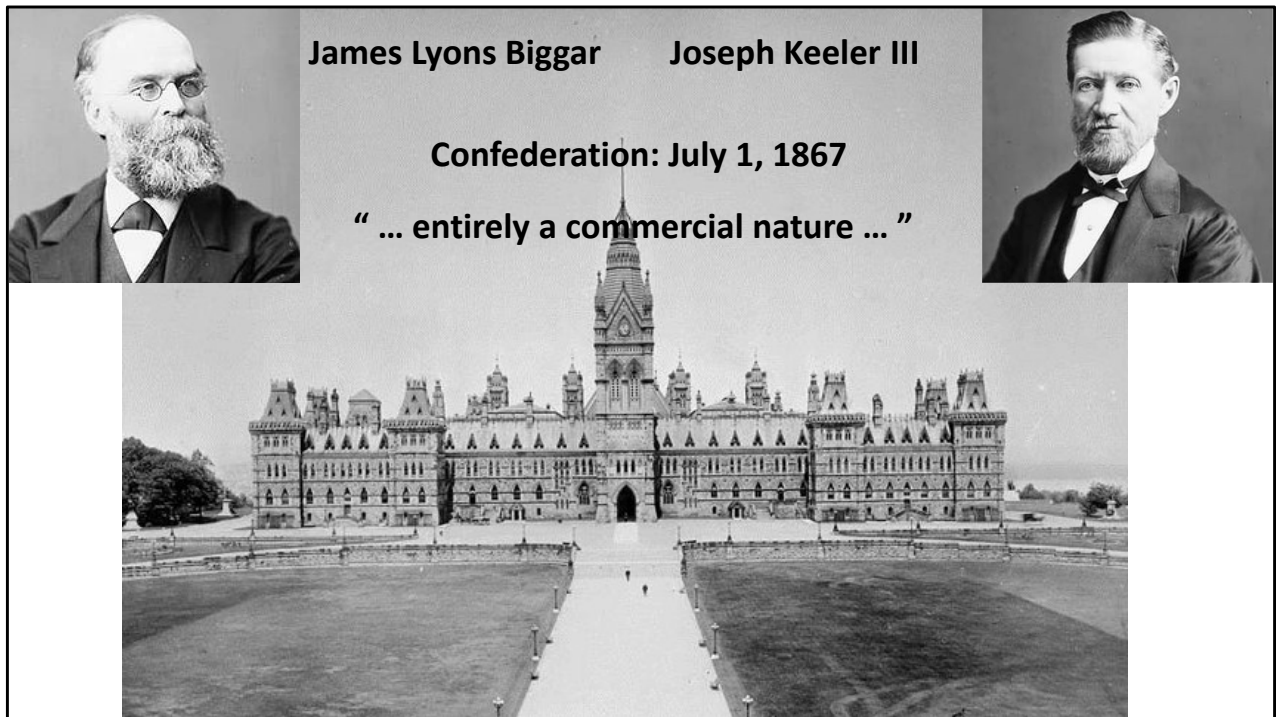
Another route was also considered, from 12 O'Clock Point to Stoneburg's Cove on the north shore of Wellers Bay.

Still another route was identified, south of Portage Road, from the Bay of Quinte to the closest inlet on the eastern shore of Wellers Bay.

The Presqu'ile route was always the longest and therefore, most costly.

Also, now they found evidence of rock under the west end of the route which meant increased cost of excavation.

The battle of the routes became a contentious public debate.



After Confederation on July 1, 1867, there was a re-organization of government departments and a new set of priorities for the federal government.

The report from the last survey and from the Select Committee agreed that any military value was no longer a factor for this canal.

The Chief Engineer specifically stated that the reasons for undertaking this project would be “ ... entirely a commercial nature ... ”.

Also, they were seeing the Murray Canal as having a regional rather than national scope.

Skeptics in the federal government wondered if it was worthwhile for government at that level to allocated significant funds for such a project.

In spite of this, lobbying from commercial and industrial voices around the Bay of Quinte was persistent and increasingly louder.



James Lyons Biggar

**Federal Election 1878
Conservatives Win!**

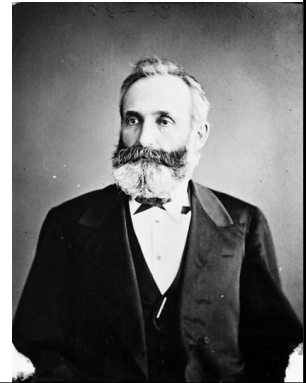


Joseph Keeler III



**John A. Macdonald
Prime Minister**

**Mackenzie Bowell
Minister of Customs**



The Federal election of 1878 changed the playing field for the Murray Canal.

John A. Macdonald and the Conservative Party came back into power. Most importantly, Joseph Keeler was back in the House.

Immediately, Keeler re-established the issue of the Murray Canal in the House and gathered further political muscle.

Mackenzie Bowell, who was from Belleville and had supported the canal for years, was appointed to cabinet and became Minister of Customs.

In the end, politicians motivated by lobbying from powerful voices in their constituencies would tip the balance in favor of the Murray Canal.



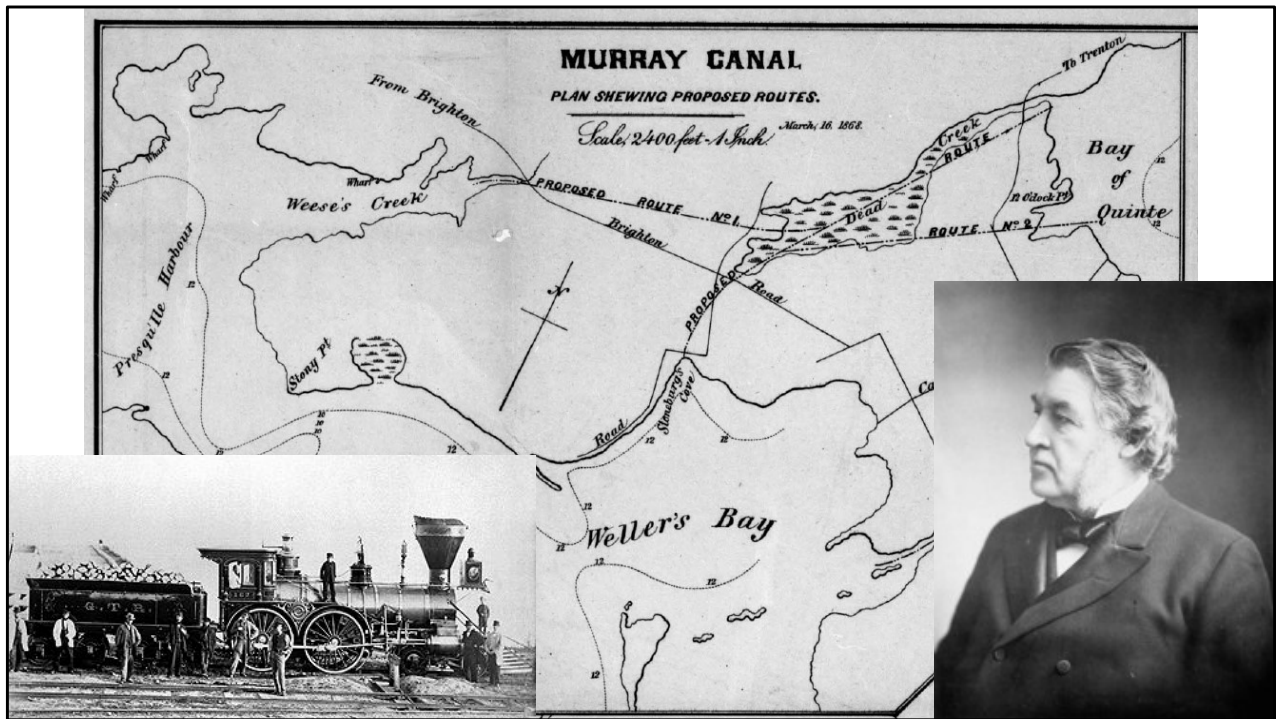
Late in 1879, the lobbyists had another marine disaster to add to the long list of reasons the Murray Canal should be built.

On November 17, 1879, several dredges, derricks, and scows were being towed from Cape Vincent to Oswego when they were caught in a nor'easter.

The result was a terrible disaster. The final count was 6 dead, with several vessels lost.

This event was used in political circles to drive home more urgently the point that the Murray Canal would reduce the loss of lives as well as ships and cargo in this dangerous area.

Certainly, it caused a sensation in the House for a time, and added to the already-building impetus to move ahead.



The budget debates in early 1880 included heavy lobbying for the canal by Keeler and others.

Charles Tupper was the Minister of Public Works, and also of the brand new department called "Railways and Canals".

He responded to the pressure carefully, as a good politician should. He first agreed with the advocates about the need for the canal.

But, his final thought was that the government would not be able to allocate significant funds for the canal in this budget year, due to many more pressing needs.

Of course, he was alluding to the trans-continental railway, which was the highest priority of his government at that time.

But, down in the civil service, the momentum continued. Another survey was ordered, this time concentrating on the Presqu'ile Route.

This survey determined that any concern about rock formations in the Presqu'ile

route were unfounded.

Joseph Keeler III

1822 - 1881



Sadly, advocates for the canal lost their most forceful and effective voice when Joseph Keeler died in Ottawa on January 21, 1881.

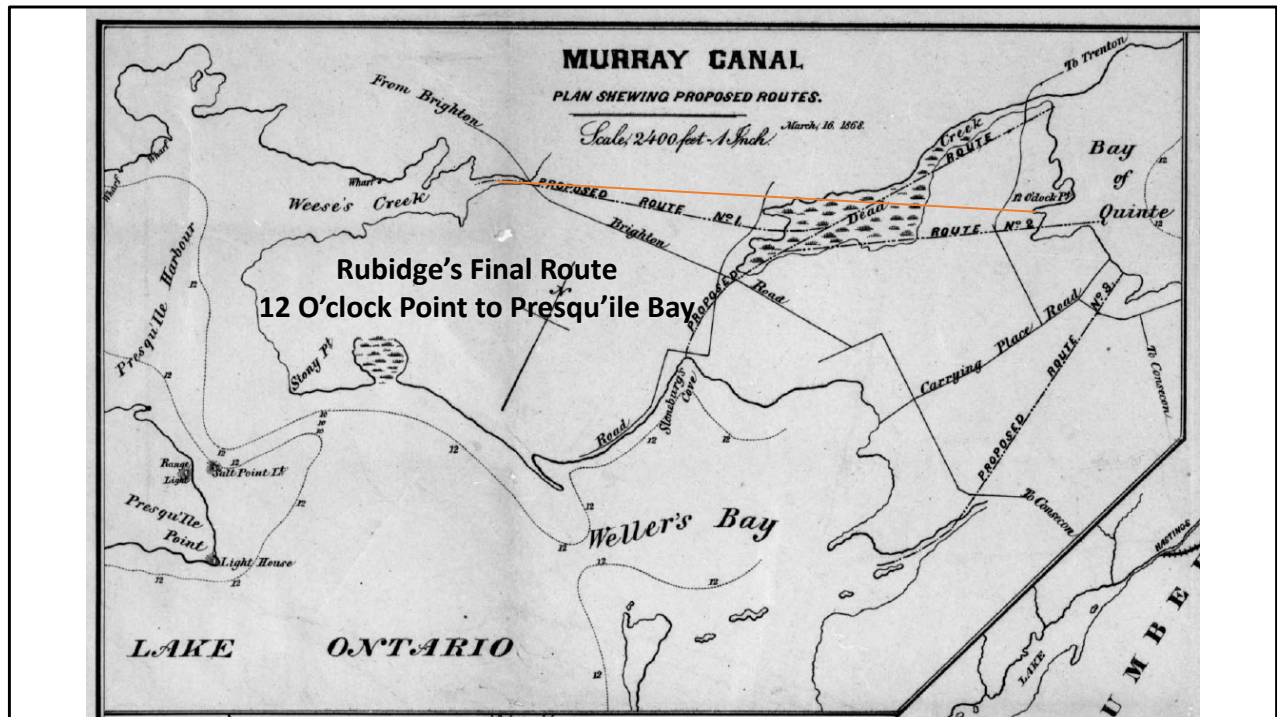
Keeler had pushed hard for the canal all of his political life and was starting to see strong support for the idea.

However, he was tragically denied the pleasure of seeing his pet project come to fruition.

For months, the loss tempered the debate over the canal, but it did not hamper the forward progress.

Mr. Keeler had built a strong and powerful lobbying engine and it would not be derailed by the loss of one man.

I think we can say that Joseph Keeler's legacy is the Murray Canal.



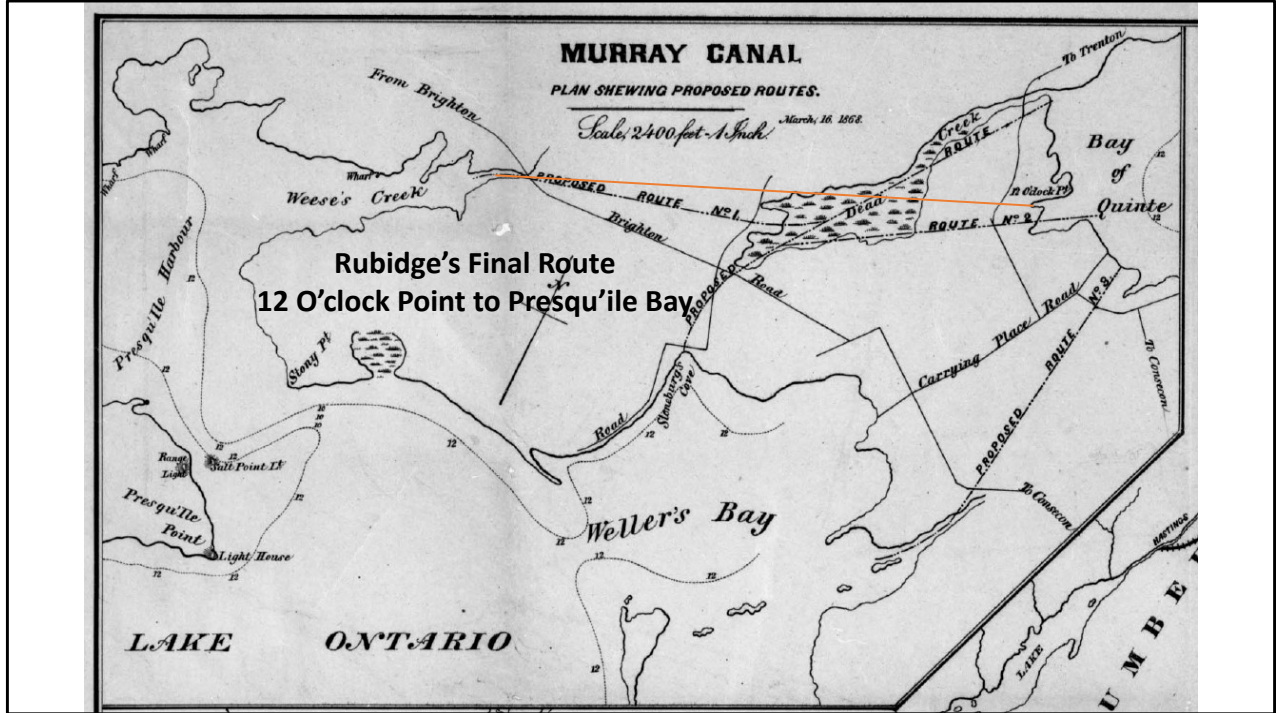
In March of 1881, \$25,000 was budgeted for a final survey and in April an appropriation for \$50,000 was made under the heading of "Canals".

Thomas S. Rubidge was appointed to undertake the final survey and make a recommendation for the route.

Rubidge's report was submitted a year later, February 1, 1882.

It recommended a straight cut from 12 O'clock Point to Presqu'ile Bay.

While this was the longest route, excavation would be easier because it was primarily through sandy and marshy land, thus keeping the cost down.

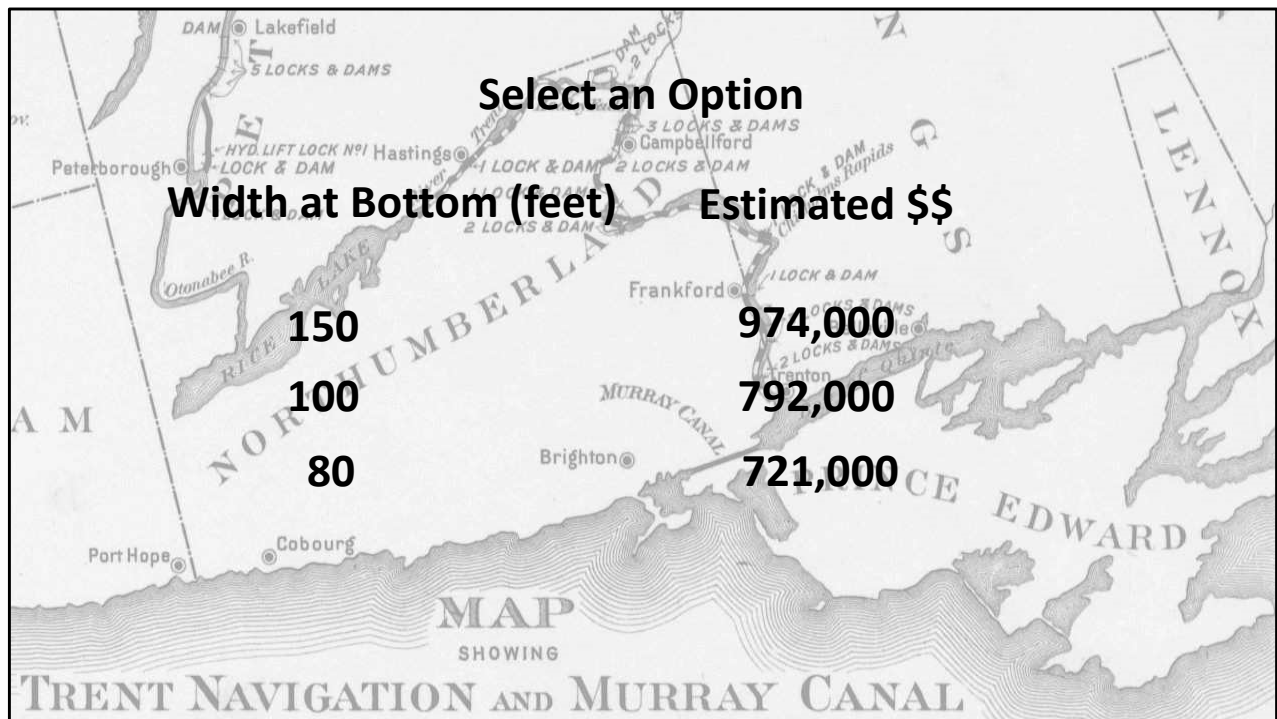


This survey was the first to identify the problem of sand bars at the entrance to Weller's Bay.

The sand bars had been growing for decades, narrowing the entrance to the bay and requiring constant dredging to keep the channel open.

The engineers projected this situation into the future and realized that Presqu'ile Bay would be much better as the western terminus of the canal.

Of course, the folks in Prince Edward County were not happy about this development, putting it down to raw party politics.



On May 23, 1882, Rubidge's proposed route was adopted.

According to common practice, Rubidge provided three options with estimated costs for each. They could build a canal 150 wide at the bottom for 974,000 or 100 feet wide for 792,000 or 80 feet wide for 721,000.

The Department of Railways and Canals picked the least expensive option, so the canal would be 80 feet wide at the bottom.

It is also important to note that Rubidge's report mentions nothing about a 14 foot depth, referring only to 11 feet as the expected depth.

By this time, the folks in the Department of Railways and Canals realized that this canal was only of regional scope and would be built mostly to satisfy political supporters.

Of course, they were always under pressure to minimize the cost of a large public project.

With these simple decisions, at the final moment, the government reduced the usefulness of the Murray Canal – before it was built.

That from such report it appears that of the points examined with a view to their adaptability as a port of entrance from Lake Ontario, specifically the points known respectively as Weller's Bay and Presqu'ile, Presqu'ile is by far the most commodious and best harbor on the Coast, having excellent anchorage and enabling a large number of vessels to lie land-locked, secure from all

The Minister therefore recommends that authority be given for the adoption of the route having its western terminal point at Presqu'ile and for the commencement of the works contemplated in the special vote of \$200,000. for the Murray Canal. the width to be 80 feet at bottom and the cost of such Canal being estimated at \$721,000.

These two snippets from the Order-In-Council indicate, on the left, the superiority of Presqu'ile Bay.

On the right, the recommendation of Mr. Rubidge regarding the route of the canal is adopted.

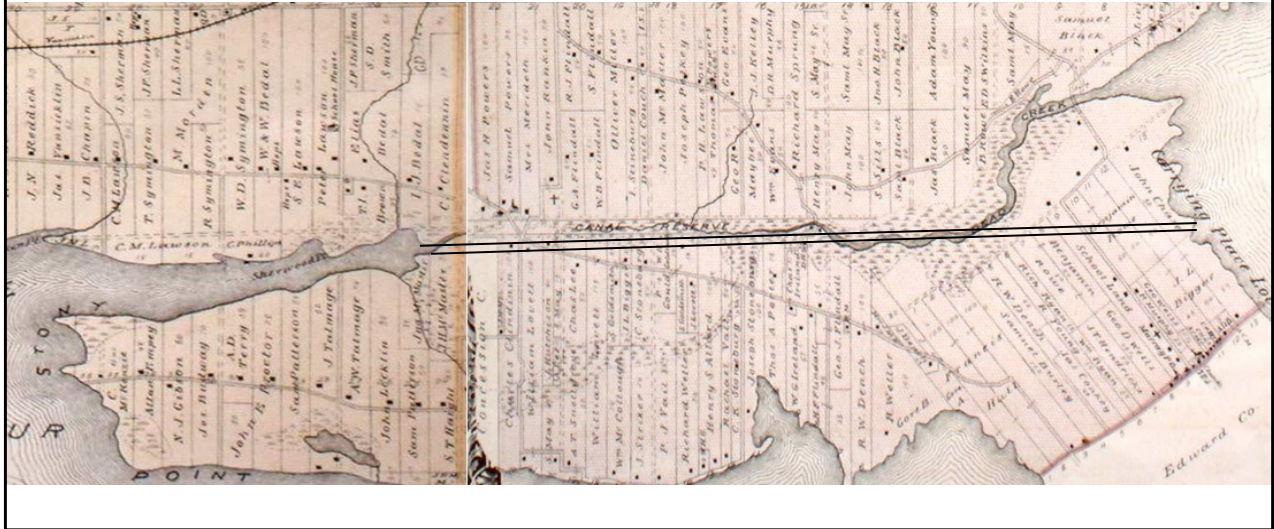
A special vote of \$200,000 is also approved for construction of the Murray Canal.

The total estimated cost was recorded as \$721,000, right from Mr. Rubidge's report.

You might keep that number in mind for later comparison.

Finally, the Simcoe's Canal might be a reality! They were actually voting money for the project!

**Murray Canal
12 O'clock Point to Presqu'ile Bay**

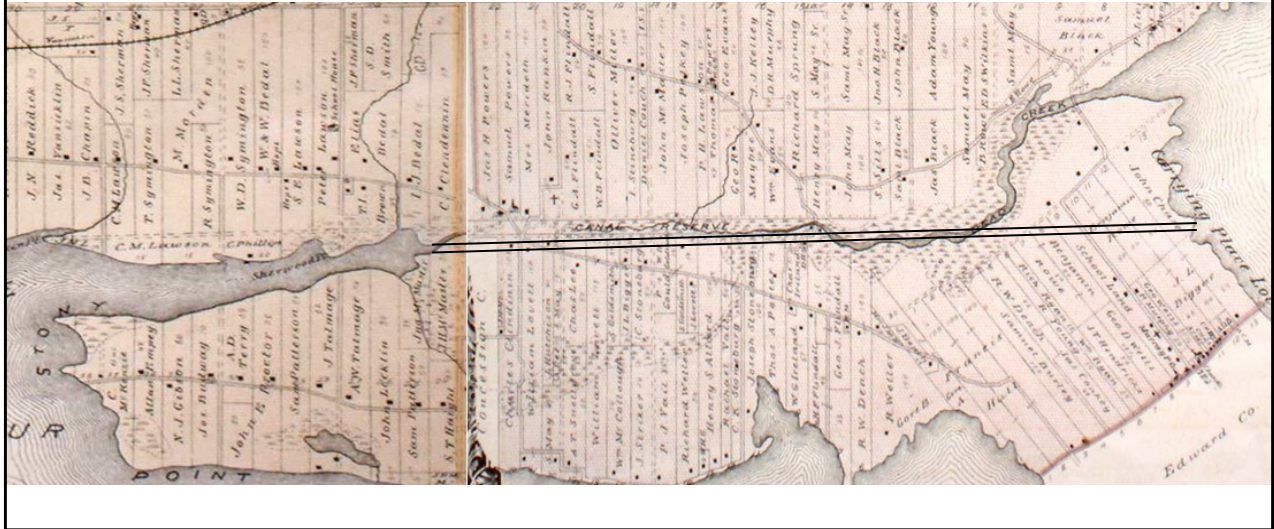


Tenders were opened on June 22, 1882 and the main contract was awarded to the firm of J.D. Silcox and Co. of Welland.

The contract was signed on August 24, 1882 and was to be completed by July 1, 1885.

Keep that date in mind.

Murray Canal 12 O'clock Point to Presqu'ile Bay



Before construction could begin, a very important step had to be taken - expropriation of land.

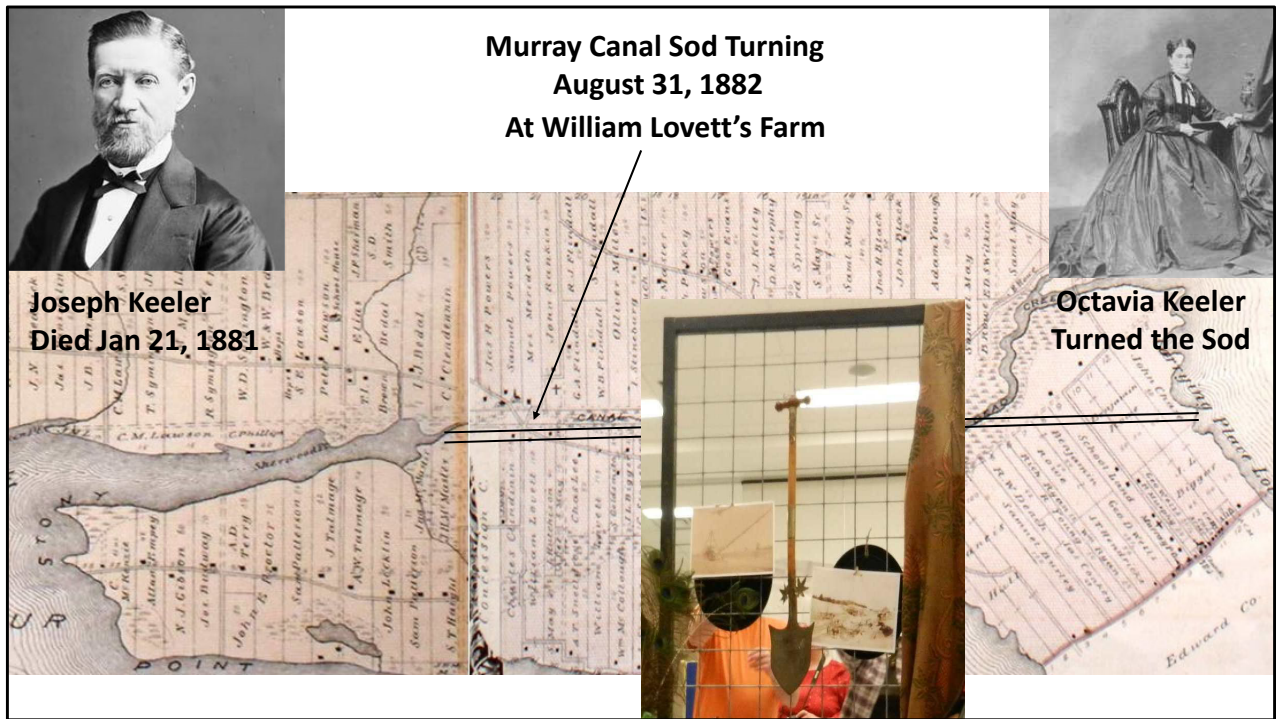
This process began with the approval on August 24, 1882, of two men to act as “land valuator”, and they set to work right away.

The Murray Canal would be cut from the Bay of Quinte near 12 O'clock Point, run across farmland, past the Trenton Road and the railway line from the County.

It would continue through parts of the Dead Creek marshes, past the Smithfield Road and then the Brighton Road, to meet the eastern point of Presqu'ile Bay.

The government had the power to expropriate pieces of land from the various lots along the length of the route and the owners had to comply.

This complex process got under way very quickly.



The Sod Turning ceremony was held on August 31, 1882 at the farm of William Lovett, near the west end of the canal at the Brighton Road.

While it was a celebratory event, there was also a current of sadness to the proceedings due to the recent passing of Joseph Keeler.

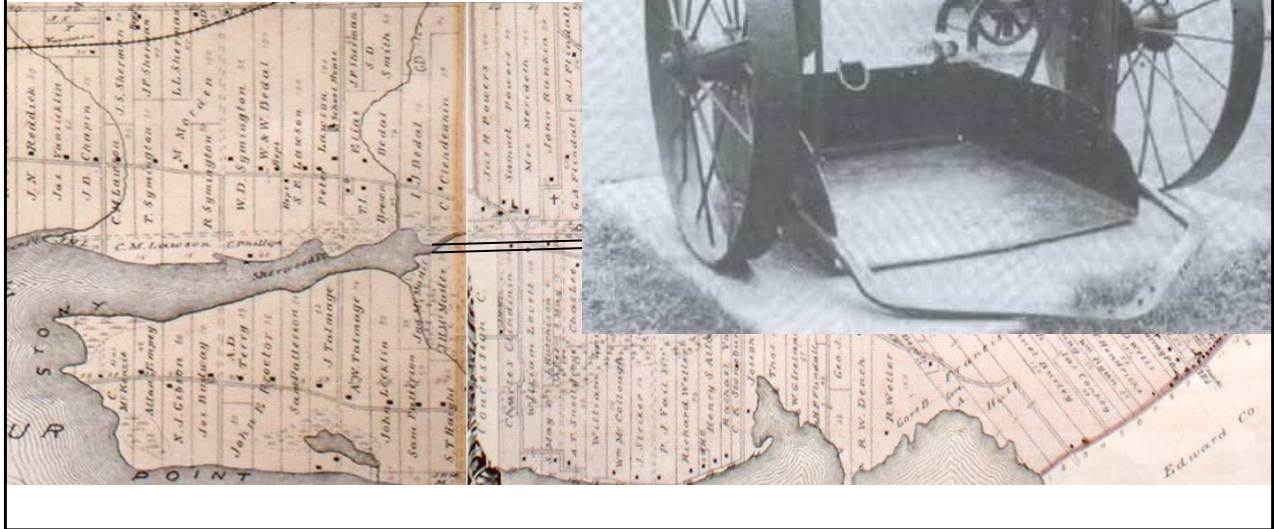
In his absence, his wife, Octavia, was given the honour of turning the sod.

The silver spade that Octavia Keeler used to turn the sod for the Murray Canal was then gifted to Mrs. Keeler and today resides in the collections of the Proctor House Museum in Brighton. Here is the shovel at one of our History Open House events in Brighton.

It was reported that the contractors already had several large wheeled earth scrapers and other equipment on site.

Excavation began the following day.

Preparing the Ground Wheeled Scrapers



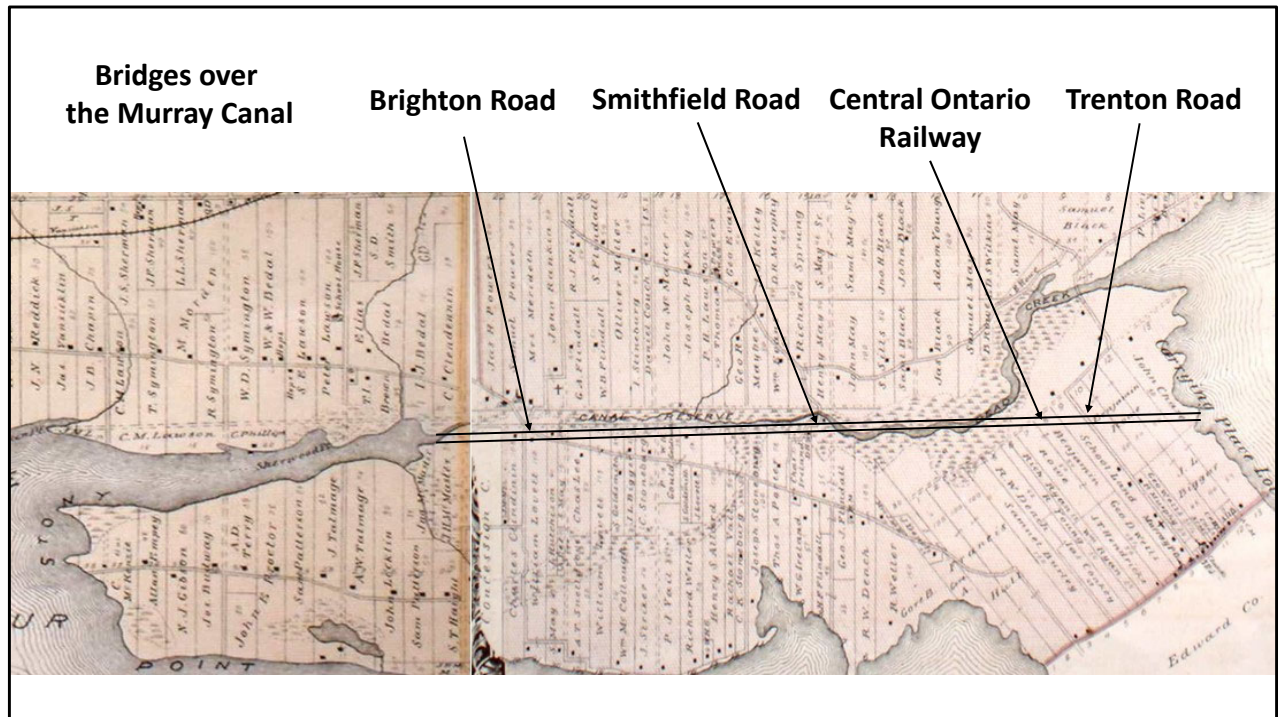
On the ground, the first job to do was to remove the trees and brush and scrape off the topsoil.

This work began in the fall of 1882 and progressed through the winter, completed by the spring of 1883.

For the scraping, dozens of wheeled scrapers were used, such as the example we see here at the Ameliasburgh Museum.

Local farmers were hired with their teams of horses to drag these scrapers.

This was just one of many ways that the building of the canal inserted cash into the local economy.



The Murray Canal would require four bridges in total.

There would be one railway bridge over the canal to support the tracks of the Central Ontario Railway near the eastern end of the canal.

Also, there would be three road bridges over the canal, one for the Trenton Road at the east end, one for the Smithfield Road in the middle and one for the Brighton Road at the west end.

When the substructures of the bridges were well along, contracts were let for their superstructures.

Dominion Bridge obtained the contract for the railway bridge and expected to have the contract for the three road bridges, but, they were disappointed.

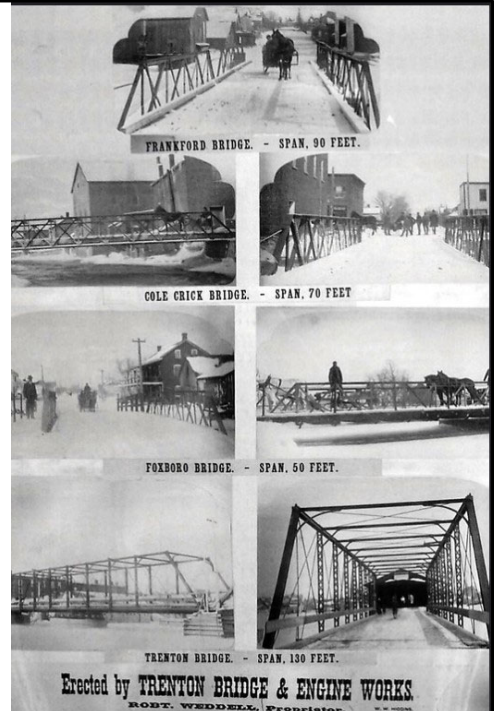
**Robert Weddell Sr.
1821 - 1898**

From Scotland to Trenton 1873

Trenton Bridge and Engine Works 1874

Contract for road bridge superstructures

Contract for replacing piers at ends of canal



The contract for building the superstructures for the three road bridges went to Robert Weddell of Trenton.

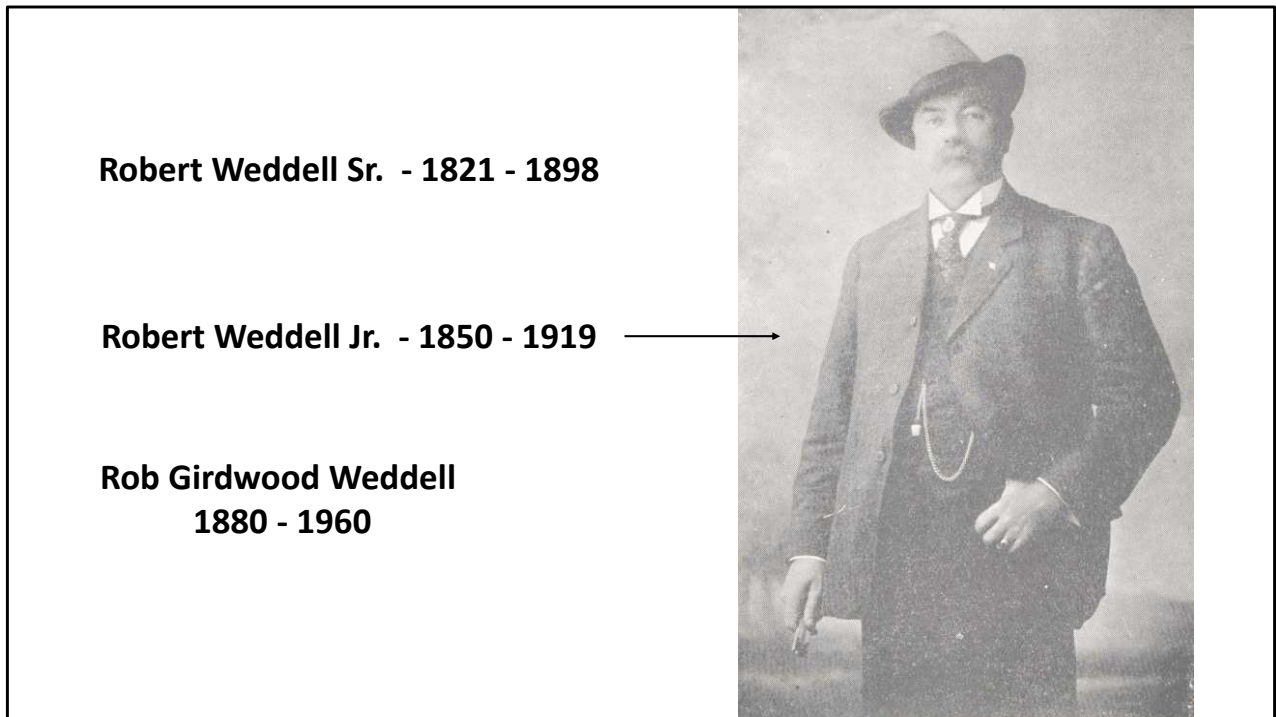
Robert Weddell Sr. had moved his family from Edinburgh, Scotland to Trenton in 1873, where he quickly creating “the Trenton Bridge and Engine Works Company”.

For the next several decades, this company in Trenton would build many of the bridges that span roads, rivers, canals and railways across the area. Only a few of them are shown here.

Robert Weddell Sr. became a strong supporter of Macdonald’s Conservative Party and a member of the Masonic Lodge in Trenton.

Many people felt that Weddell got the contract for the bridges due to his strong political affiliations.

Be that as it may, Robert Weddell’s company had a reputation for doing excellent work and that appears to have been the case regarding this and a few later contracts that it would obtain regarding the Murray Canal.



There is confusion about the name. There were three Robert Weddell's.

Robert Weddell Senior was the immigrant and the one who started the company, and he died in 1898.

He is the person we are referring to regarding the Murray Canal.

Robert Weddell Jr., shown here, is the one we see the most written about in Trenton history books.

However, that is because the writing was done in the 19-teens when this fellow was a primary figure in Trenton.

He had a son often called Robert, but his name was actually Rob Girdwood Weddell.

Keep this in mind when using the name.

The Lumber Industry Insists on Changes



Work on the canal was barely underway when it was found necessary to alter the original swing bridge plans.

The plans called for two channels, both 54 feet wide, separated by the centre pivot pier of the swing bridge.

However, barges used by local lumber interests, were 52 feet wide, and would have trouble navigating a 54 foot channel.

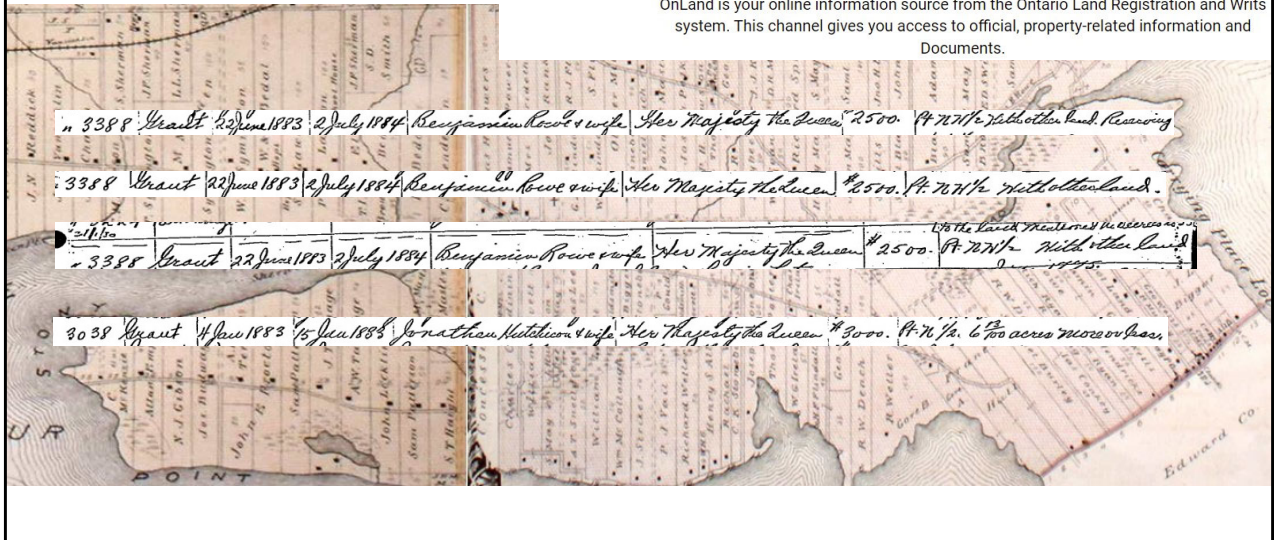
A petition was sent and, in the fall of 1882, the design was changed, placing the pivot pier slightly off centre and making one of channels 60 feet wide.

The barges would now fit comfortably.

Land Expropriation
Source of Land Records

Ontario Land Property Records Portal

OnLand is your online information source from the Ontario Land Registration and Writs system. This channel gives you access to official, property-related information and Documents.



I found 57 land transactions related to the Murray Canal in the land registry records. It is easy to find them because the Grantee is “Her Majesty the Queen”.

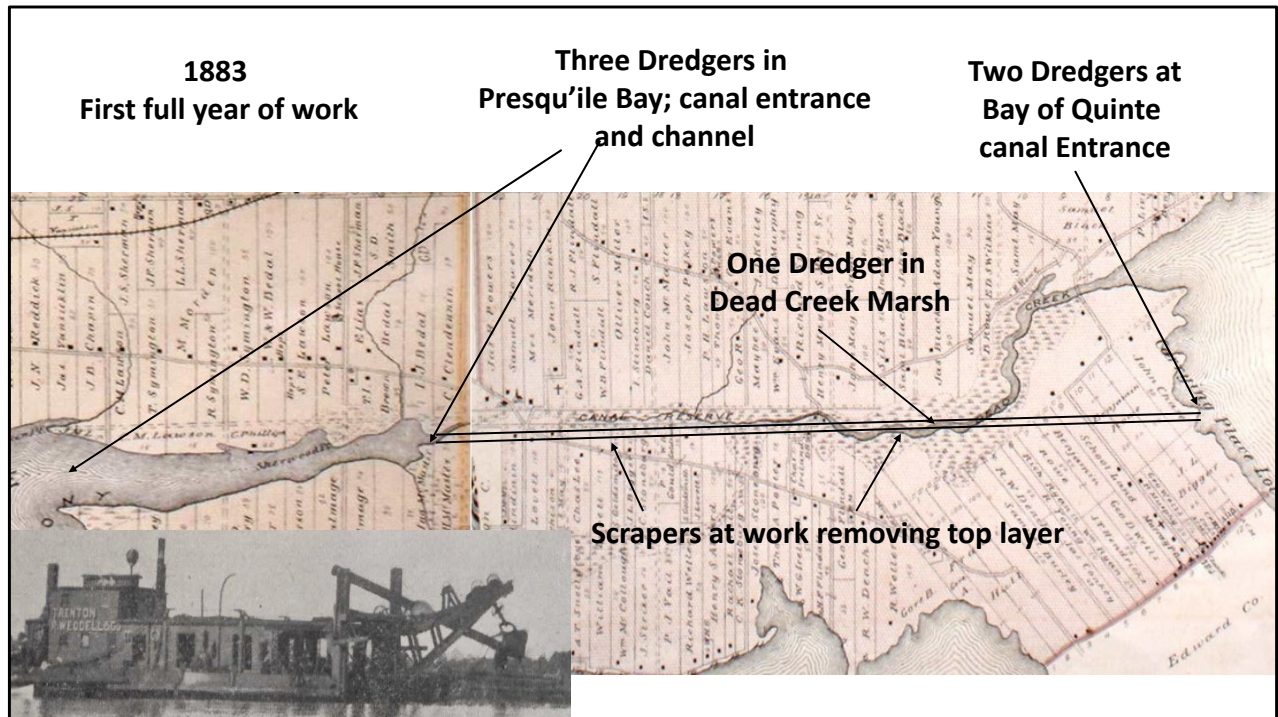
Here are four examples of the transactions I was looking for.

The top three are for Benjamin Rowe who gave up land at the east end of the canal in Carrying Place Lots 10, 11 and 12. He received a total of \$2,500.

The fourth item is the largest transaction. Jonathan Hutchinson gave up 6 and 13/100 acres from lot 20, Conc C, near the west end of the canal for \$3,000.

Most transactions were very small, often just fractions of an acre.

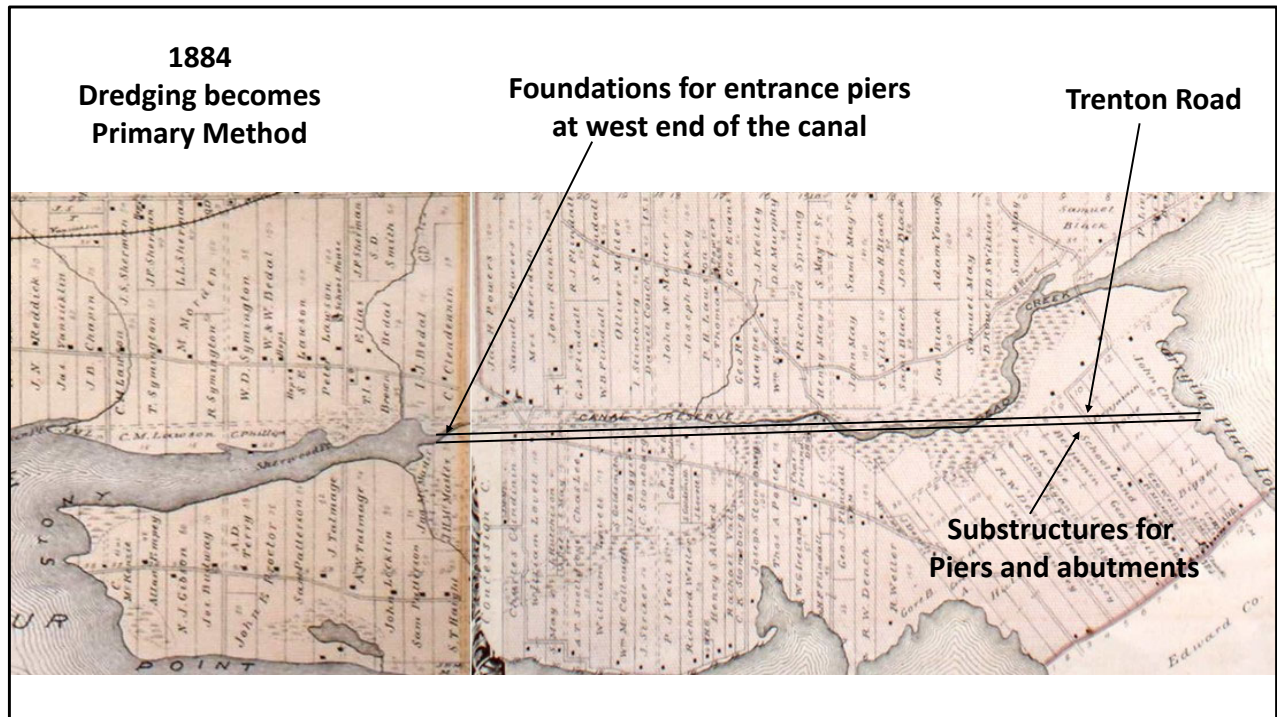
Some residents had their farms cut in half while others lost small bit of swampy land at the north end of their farm.



The first full year of work on the canal in 1883 saw six dredgers working constantly from spring to fall.

These dredgers were large mechanical systems floating on barges and powered by steam engines.

It was slow, methodical work with complex machinery and lots of problems, but the folks involved were experienced and effective, so the work progressed.



Beginning in 1884, dredging would become the primary method of digging the canal.

Temporary dams were built to let water into defined areas so that the dredgers could work without impacting areas where piers for bridges were being built.

There was some speculation about this approach, but it could have been because the dredgers were more efficient and cost effective, requiring a lot less labor.



Even though it was in the 1880s, we do have some pictures taken of the actual work on the canal.

This shows work on one of the piers as a dam holds back the water. A dredger is probably working off the picture to the right.

Notice the extensive use of tracks and temporary rail lines to cart material out of the site.



Here is the site of building a swing bridge pier.

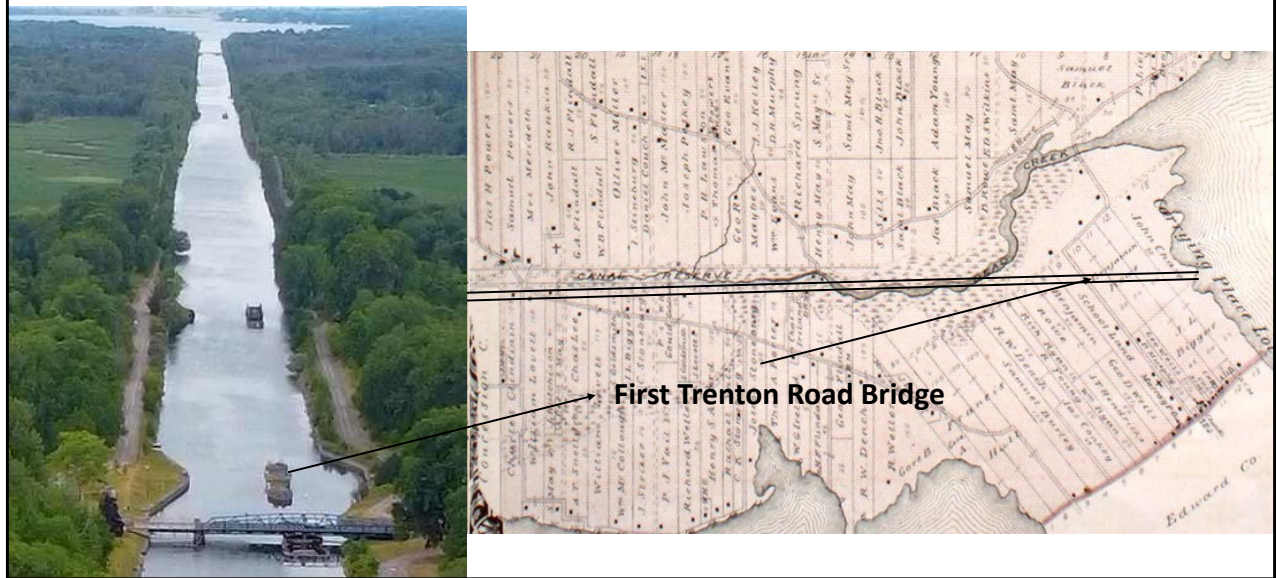
The site was also dangerous. Any time men and machinery are active, there will be injuries, and there were.

My own family includes a relative, named John Buchanan, who died of consumption while working on the canal.

There were hundreds of men working on the Murray Canal. It was one of the largest sources of income for local workers in the 1880s.

The work was done through a combination of steam power, horse power and man power, often unique combinations.

Trenton Road Bridge



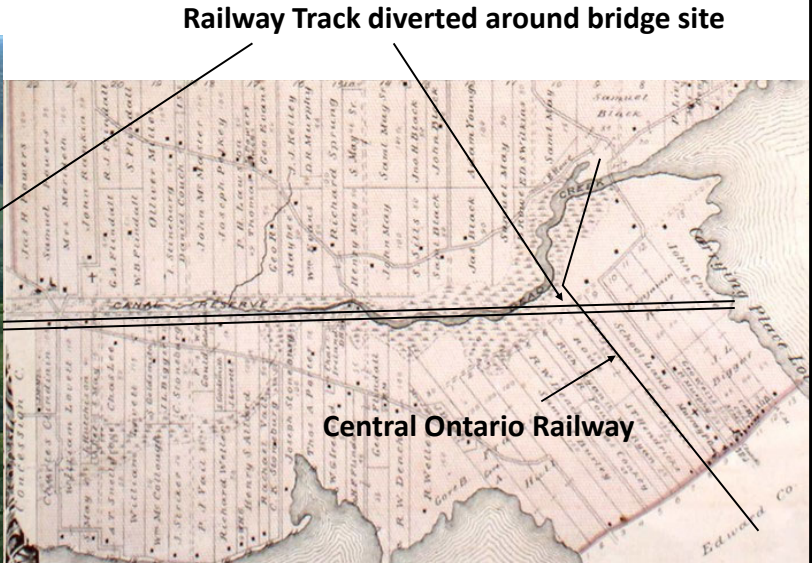
The Trenton Road bridge was considered the first priority of all the bridges.

Work on the substructure was well along by in the middle of 1885.

This aerial photo of the modern canal looks west, showing the remains of that first bridge, just west of the current bridge.

Of course, we call the road No. 33 Highway today.

Central Ontario Railway Bridge



The next priority was the railway bridge that would take the Central Ontario Railway over the canal.

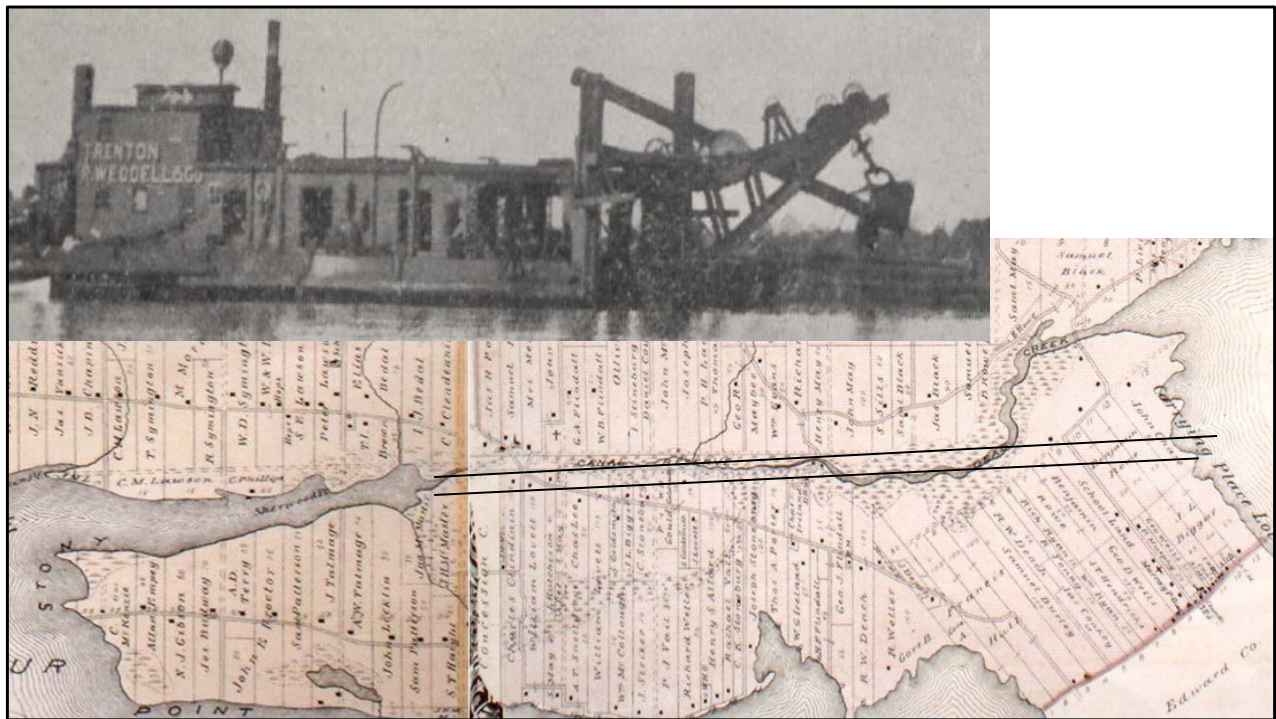
In order to advance work on the railway bridge, the train tracks had to be temporarily diverted around the site.

This would be completed later in 1885.

The railway was able to operate throughout the building of the canal, although there were delays as they had to maneuvered the tight twist and turn of the diversion.

Here we can see the pier and the old railway bridge, farther west from the road bridge.

You can go down road on the south side of the canal to have a closer look.



During the first two years of dredging the canal, a very important but expensive lesson was learned.

Each spring, when they came back to begin dredging, they found that major parts of the canal wall had collapsed.

It was determined that, in some particular places, the sandy soil was not strong enough to form the canal bank.

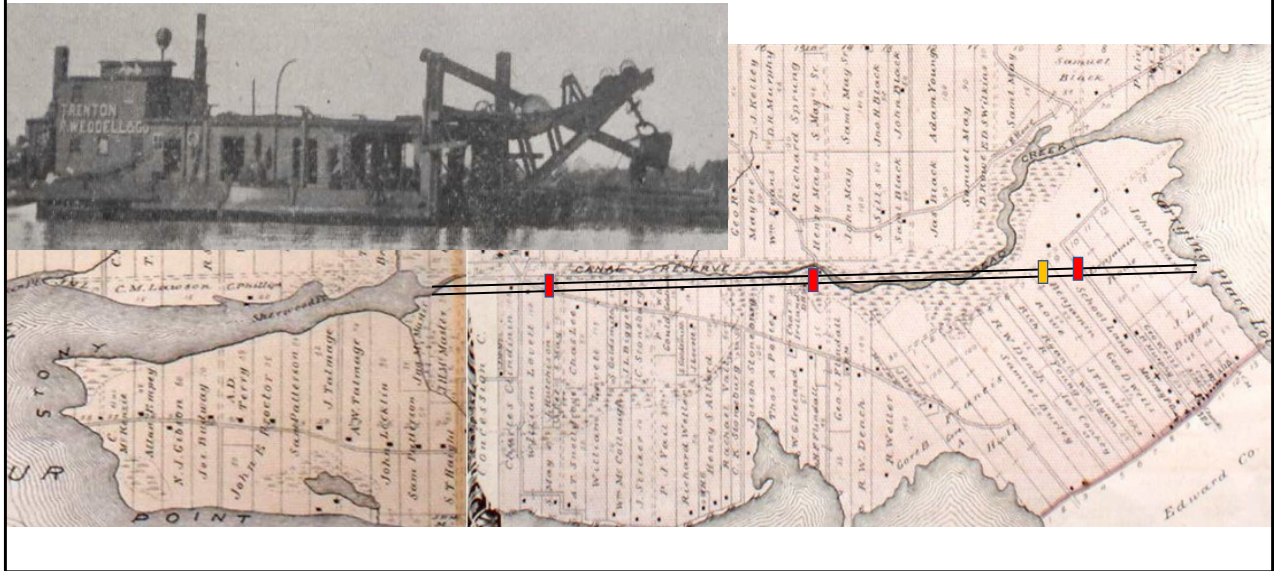
To solve the problem, massive amounts of rock was needed to stabilize the banks.

They were already bringing loads of large rocks into the area, but the scale of rock deliveries had to be increased dramatically to meet this new need.

Much of the dredging that had to be repeated and there were problems acquiring and delivering so much rock for the banks.

This was probably the main reason for the extended time frame.

Six Dredgers Working Through 1886 Waters Meet



During 1886, six dredgers were hard at work to finish the last of the cut, which they hoped to complete later that season.

Right on schedule, the final cut was made and the waters of Presqu'ile Bay met the waters of the Bay of Quinte for the first time.

When it finally it happened, there were lots of horns honking, bells ringing and men yelling.

For the workmen, it was a very satisfying moment.

MURRAY CANAL
Demonstration !

The preliminary opening of the Murray Canal will be celebrated
On WEDNESDAY, Oct. 6th, '86
At Twelve O'Clock Point, near Trenton,
by a grand Demonstration, at which

STR JOHN A. MACDONALD
AND HON. MEMBERS
WHITE, FOSTER & BOWELL
WILL BE PRESENT

Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald and the Ministers will arrive at Brighton on Tuesday evening, and on Wednesday morning will take steamer at Brighton wharf and proceed to Twelve O'Clock Point, where they will arrive shortly before noon, when dinner will be served, after which ADDRESSES will be given.
Such ample arrangements will be made to provide dinner for all who desire it.

EXCURSIONISTS

Both the R.M.T. and G.M. will be booked at the Point. The Grand Trunk Railway will issue tickets to take from Chelmsford and Kingston and all intermediate stations to Trenton at one fare. The Central Ontario Railway will issue Return Tickets to Trenton (O'Clock Point) at the following

RATES :	
From, Hallowell and Hallowell.....	50c
Wellington, Four Corners and Hallowell.....	40c
Cambridge.....	50c
One Mile, Hamilton and Chelmsford.....	1.00
Millerville and Hallowell.....	1.00
Millerville, Malton and Malton.....	1.00
C. P. R. via, Springbrook, Malton.....	40c
M. H. via, Chelmsford.....	40c
Trenton.....	1.00

Special Trains

(Both North and South) will be run on the Central Ontario Railway at the conclusion of the Excursion, using Excursionists' fares as an only fare. The Railway Company will run a number of SPECIALS at the following rates for return tickets:

Back, Trenton's, Adolphustown, Peterborough and Niagara.....	50 cents
Trunk's and Northport.....	50 cents
All other points.....	50 cents

Arrangements are also being made with the C. P. Railway and Grand Junction Railway, of which full particulars will be given in a few days on enquiry at the office of the Company.

G. W. GUYTON, Chairman Executive Committee.
D. H. MURPHY, Chairman Managing Committee.
W. B. ROBERTSON, Secretary.
J. W. JOHNSON, Treasurer.
Toronto Avenue 2nd Floor.)

Richmond, Sept. 27th, 1886.

MURRAY CANAL
Demonstration !

The preliminary opening of the Murray Canal will be celebrated
On WEDNESDAY, Oct. 6th, '86
At Twelve O'Clock Point, near Trenton,

Preliminary Opening of the Murray Canal

This allowed a major promotional event to take place called the “Murray Canal Demonstration”.

This poster advertised it for October 6, 1886 starting at 12 O’Clock Point..

This was called a demonstration because it would be a very choreographed event, geared to impress politicians and dignitaries.

In fact, there was still a lot to do on the canal, and participants in the Demonstration would see clear evidence of that with machines and mud from one end to the other.

by a grand Demonstration, at which

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD

AND HON. MESSES.

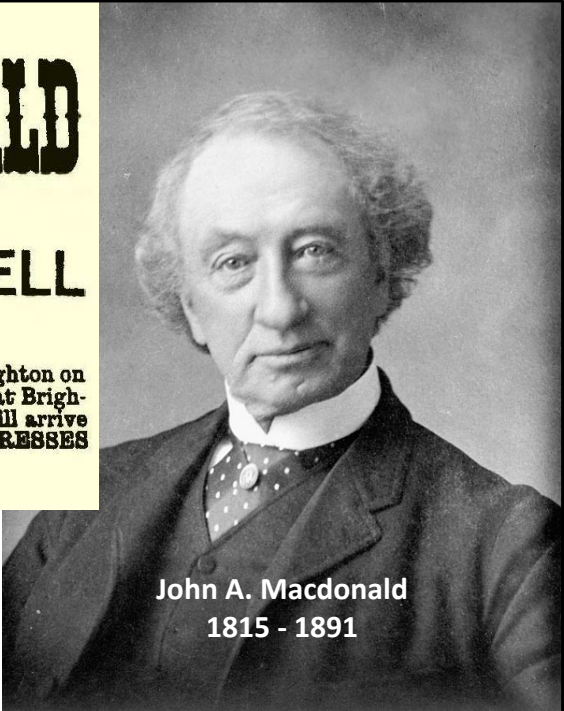
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Guest of Honour at Murray Canal Demonstration



John A. Macdonald
1815 - 1891

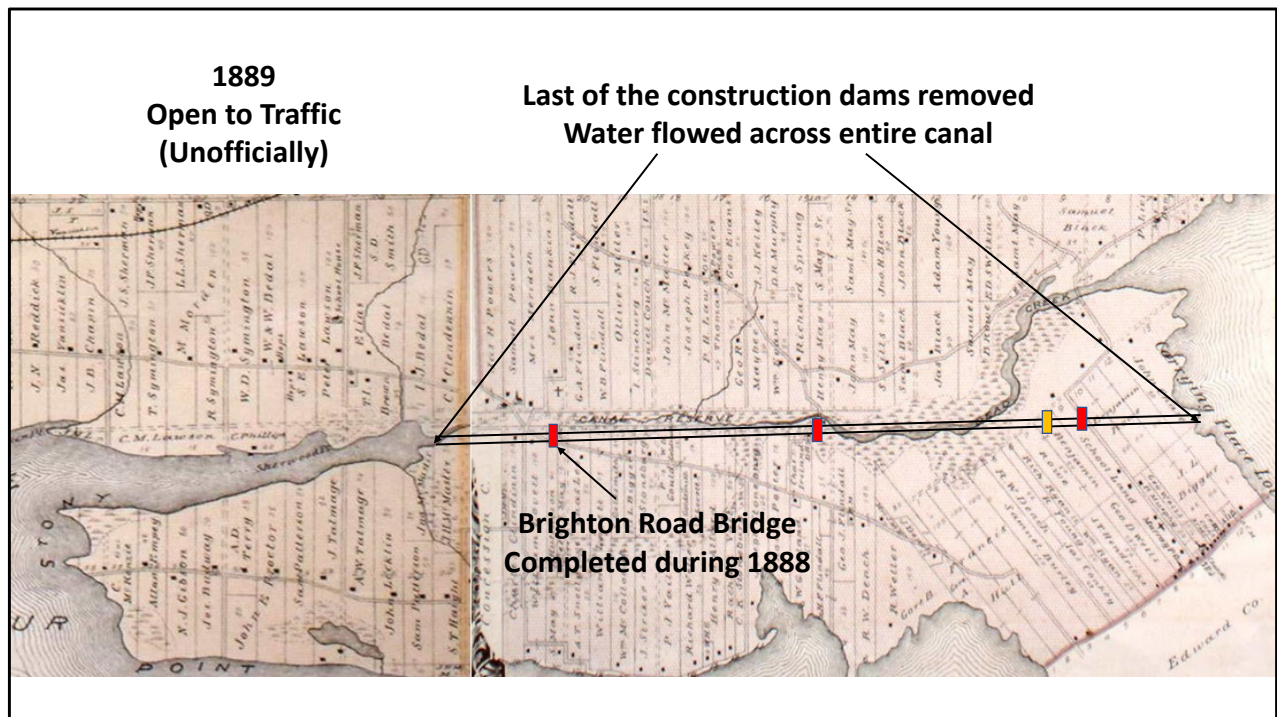
This demonstration would be very special because the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald was in attendance.

Unfortunately, just as he stood up to speak, the platform collapsed, sending the Prime Minister and other dignitaries to the ground.

Nobody was hurt, and Macdonald used the occasion to jibe the other party.

He was heard to say, among other things, "This indicates to you folks the strength of the liberal platform."

Typical John A!



On April 14, 1889, the Murray Canal was unofficially opened to traffic, almost four years later than the original contracted was slated for completion.

There was still work to do on the banks and preparing the swing bridges for full operation.

Later in 1889, Thomas Phillips Keeler was hired as Superintendent of the Murray Canal.

Yes, this was a son of the beloved advocate of the canal, Joseph Keeler III.



Bridge tenders were also hired to manage the swing bridges.

These men became community favorites. They visited with travelers on the canal and on the roads.

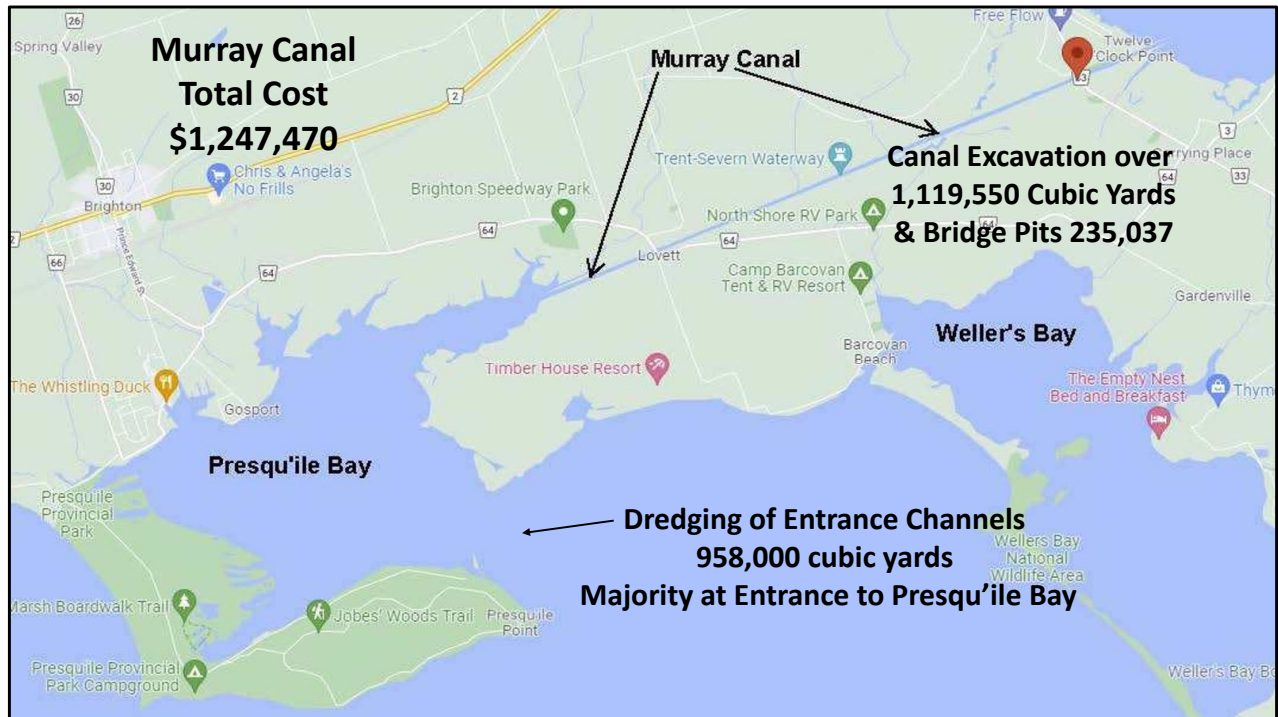
There are personal stories of the bridge tenders teaching kids how to swim in the canal.

After new and much heavier bridges were installed, some bridge tenders hired local teenagers to turn the big handle to swing the bridge.

It was in the 1950s and the process began to electrify this process, which solved the problem of heavy bridges.

On another topic, it is interesting to note that, in the early decades of the canal, boat traffic had a higher priority and land travelers had to wait.

That switched in the 1920s as canal traffic declined and road traffic exploded.



Now that the canal was complete, the accountants could tally up the bill. The cost of building the Murray Canal was pegged at \$1,247,470.

It was a sizable project, to be sure, but small in comparison with the trans-continental railway that had been pushed through the mountains to the west coast.

Finally, the Murray Canal was a reality!



The year 1891 saw traffic on the Murray Canal increase and operations settle into a pattern.

Two major events happened in that year. First, the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald, passed away in Ottawa on June 6th.

The Murray Canal and the trans-continental railway had been built under Macdonald's tenure. These two are not equals, by any means, but they have this in common.

The other event was the opening of the bridge over the Bay of Quinte at Belleville.

This was a huge event for the region. It was thought that this new bridge would work in conjunction with the Murray Canal to boost the economy of the area and improve the lives of the people around the bay.

Sailing ships
Steamships
Barges



In the early decades of the Murray Canal, sailing ships shared the water with steamships.

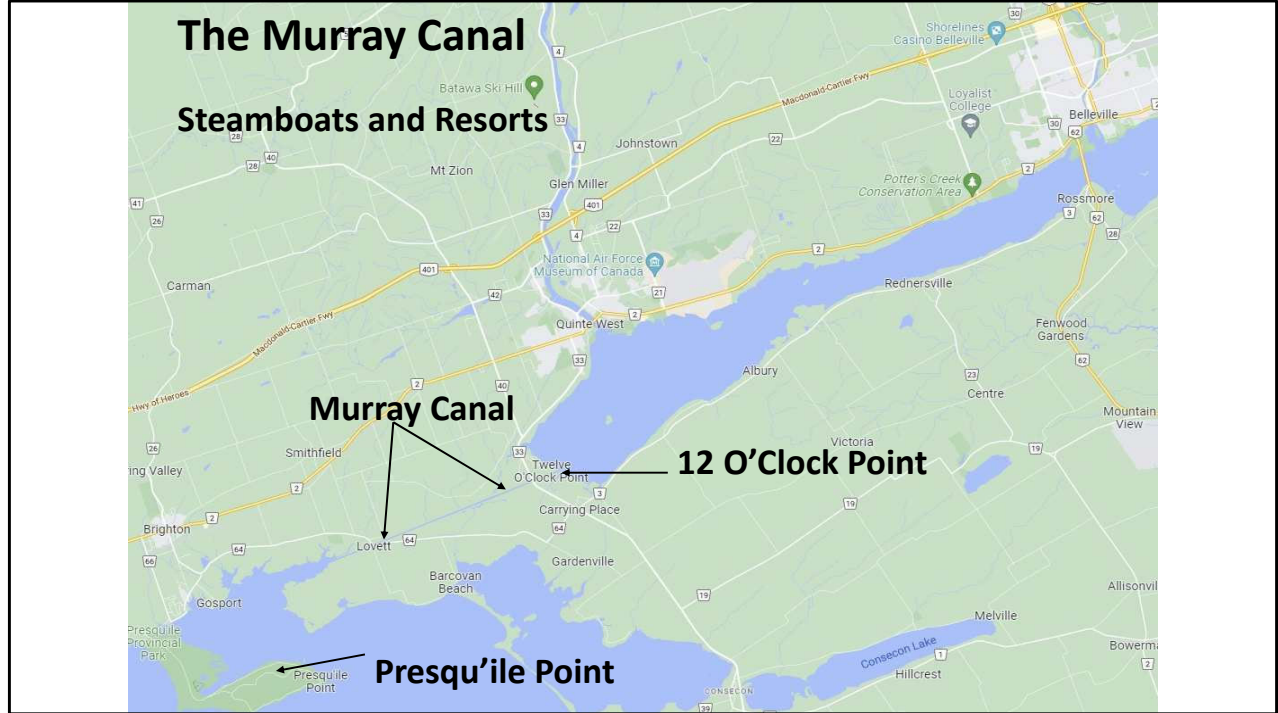
There were also lots of barges. Here we can see the tow path along the side of the canal which was used to pull barges and sailing ships up and down the canal.

The source of power could be either men or horses.

One of the most frequent users of the canal was the cement company near Point Anne. They had lobbied hard for the canal their product represented a high percentage of tonnage through the canal in the first couple of decades.

There were many barges and ships carrying coal, which was in high demand, including to fire the steam engine at the fog station beside Presqu'île Point Lighthouse.

Agricultural products were a common commodity on the canal. Apples became very important in the early 1900s although it was the lower quality apples that were going to the large evaporators in Trenton and Belleville to make dried apples which was a favourite in the grocery stores.



Both Presqu'ile Point and 12 O'clock Point experienced major growth in this period as steamboats brought people from far and wide.

The Bay of Quinte was an ideal highway for folks coming from Kingston, Belleville, Trenton and the County to these resorts.

And the Murray Canal was that perfect extension and convenient path into Presqu'ile Bay.



Here is a steamer moored at 12 O'clock Point.

This place would become a primary resort, conveniently located at the eastern entrance to the canal from the Bay of Quinte.



It was particularly popular for large family reunions.

Here is one example I have worked to identify names.

This was the Valleau Picnic Party at 12 O'clock Point in 1908.

And no, I don't know the names of all these folks.



Here is a common sight at the dock in front of the Presqu'ile Hotel.

This was a very popular place.



Here is a steamboat coming up to the dock at Brighton, after crossing the bay from Presqu'ile.

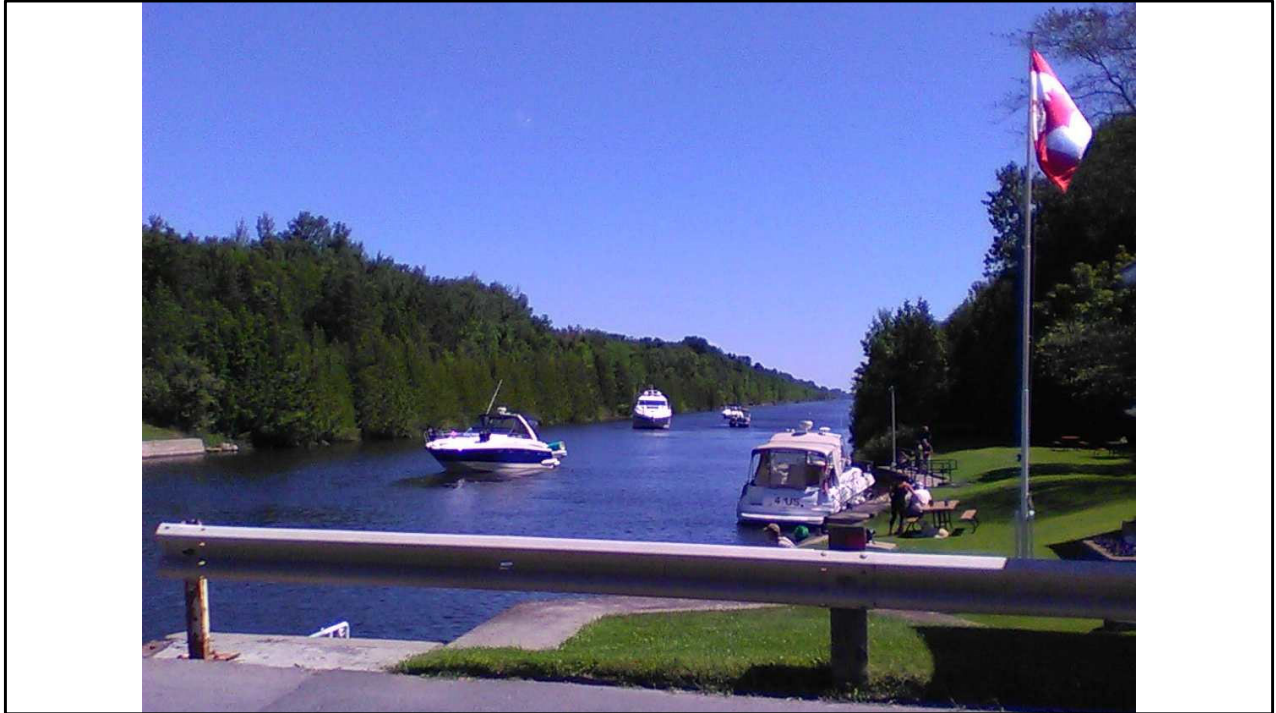
No doubt, this ship had come down the Murray Canal earlier in the day, and would return later.



For several decades, this was a common sight on the Murray Canal.

The wake of the steamboat in the water; the smoke from its stack and the horn or steam whistle warning of its imminent arrival.

These all became part of the landscape of the community.



Through the first half of the 1900s, the alternatives of road and rail gradually reduced commercial use of the canal.

The Murray Canal is now used for recreational traffic as a link into the St. Lawrence River and to the Trent Canal System.

For a few years my favorite bike route was from Brighton, down County Road 64 to Murray Canal and back.

Sometimes, I spoke to the folks on the boats and sometimes ended up recounting some of the history of the canal.

Boaters were from all over, Toronto, Chicago, Montreal, Florida, even Phoenix, Arizona!



In 2017, I recorded the extremely high water that created a lot of damage that year.

Here is the old bridge at County Road 64. It was already showing its age, and the flood did not help.



I also watched and recorded as the old bridge was removed ...



The new bridge was installed, but

.... progress seemed so slow



... but, it came together and now we have this lovely new bridge over the Murray Canal.

I am pleased to note that this bridge is full two lanes with a safe walkway for pedestrians.

Just like the early struggles for the Murray Canal, we can thank the lobbyists and advocates for making the right thing happen in the end.



And I can't resist showing this one picture that came out of the process.

This is from the new bridge, looking east.

The Murray Canal is quiet and serene in its older years. And still beautiful.



Today, the Murray Canal is easily forgotten. We only see it when we drive across one of the bridges.

We might stop to watch the fancy yachts pass through when a bridge is turned.

Yes, the canal was stunted at birth, keeping its impact regional at most.

However, it has played that role very effectively, providing a vital and useful link in the transportation systems of our region.

Today, it is still one of the more interesting and pleasant destinations in our area, especially on a warm summer day.

OK ...

Two points I want to make before wrapping up

A CONSTRUCTION, OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE HISTORY
OF THE MURRAY CANAL

Colin Powles
Canadian Parks Service
Ontario Regional Office
Summer 1991

A large proportion of the information about the Murray Canal in my presentation comes from one document.

That is what I call “The Powles Report”. Here is the title on the front cover.

This report was researched and written by Colin Powles in 1991, when he worked for Canadian Parks Services, which we now call Parks Canada.

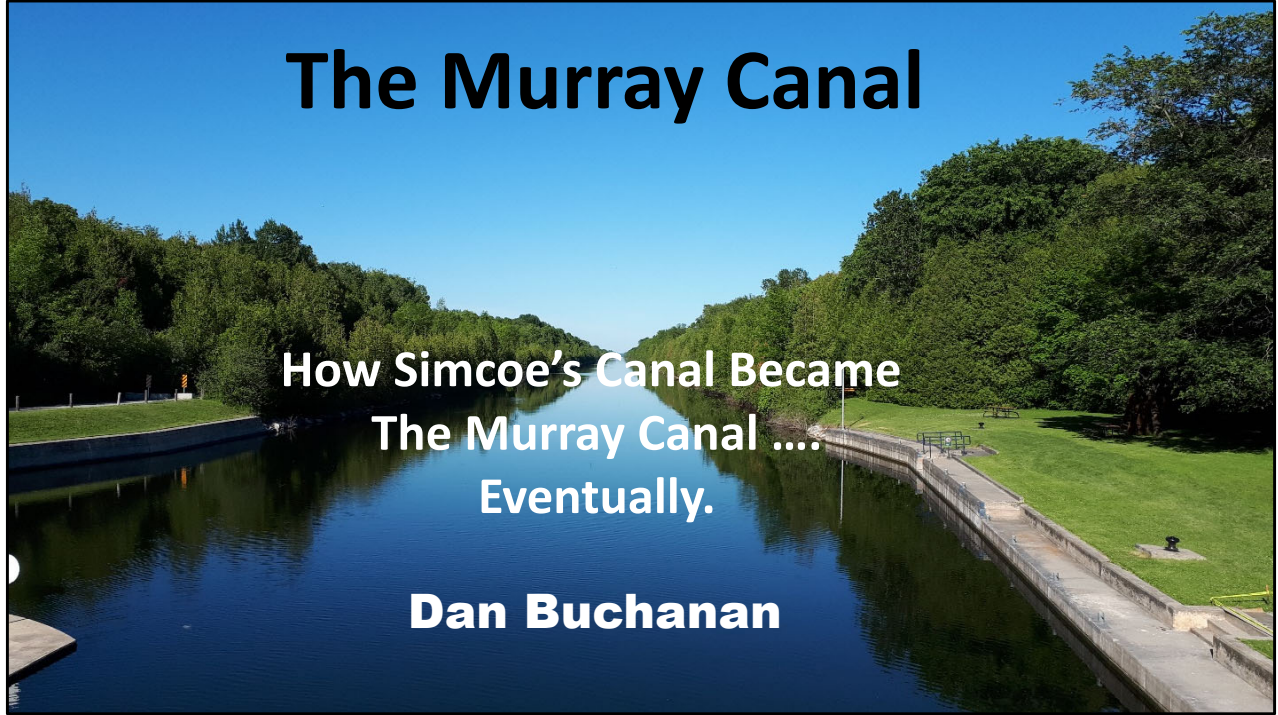
It is an extremely detailed engineering report which is wonderful for my purposes but definitely not bedside reading ... except may for a few.

Hopefully tomorrow, I will add to the History section of my web site a downloadable PDF version of the Powles Report so you can see it for yourself.

Also, I will add a downloadable PDF version of this presentation about the Murray Canal to go with the one I did February 23. This one is slightly different.

So, help yourself to those resources.

And



This may be premature, but, sometime, you can look forward to a book about the Murray Canal.

Here is a mock-up of a potential front cover.

In fact, the content is largely in place and we are discussing options for publication.

I want very much to make this information available to the public, and you know how I love to do history books.

No timetable yet, but something to look forward to.

Thanks so much for your attention folks.

I'll be glad to try to answer any questions you might have.