The Daily Intelligence Thursday August 23 1888

Belleville Newspaper Microfilm Archives: Daily Intelligencer Mar. 1, 1888 – Apr. 9, 1889

IN Microfilm Reel No. 46

OCR of original page image ..

Heading of the article: Daily Intelligencer, Thursday, August 23, 1888.

Daily Intelligencer

Belleville, Thursday, Aug. 23.

The Murray Canal

An interesting description of the Great Work.

"Canalis" of Trenton contributes to the Empire a highly interesting article on the Murray Canal, which is rapidly approaching completion. Setting out with a historical sketch of the project from its inception in 1796 to its commencement in 1882, the correspondent gives to the late Jos. Keeler, M.P. for East Northumberland, and the Hon. Mr. Boswell, Minister of Customs, the credit which they deserve for securing the construction of this great commercial highway, and notes the letting of the contract to Messrs. Silcox & Mowry, and the turning of the first sod by Mrs. Keeler, widow of the energetic promoter, on Sept. 1st, 1882. The correspondent then, commencing at the eastern end, gives the following description of the work:

The cutting here is through a fine sand, like the ordinary beach sand, but further up the work I had heard that rock was met with. The banks are here "rip-rapped" with stone to protect them from the swell caused by vessels passing through and the spring floods. Proceeding westward along the bank I arrive at the first road bridge, of which there are three at different places, and a few rods farther on a railroad bridge, where the Central Ontario railway passes.

The road bridges, two of which are completed, swing on a huge central pier protected on either side by other piers, and are built by Mr. Robert Weddell, Jr., at this bridge works at Trenton; and bear out in their beauty and strength the great reputation which Mr. Weddell has earned by the quality of his work of being one of the foremost bridge builders in Canada. The railroad bridge, a fine structure, reflecting great credit on the builders, the Dominion Bridge Company of Hamilton, is also built of steel and swings in the same manner as the road bridges.

The banks of the canal on both sides of the bridges are protected by massive stone walls, laid up with cement. Further up the cutting is through a large marsh, called "Dead Creek Marsh," where it was supposed to be impossible to find solid bottom, and where the opponents of the present route prophesied the abandonment of the work on account of the quick-sands. But here, strange to relate, so far from being troubled with quick-sand, the banks are the best on the whole length of the cutting. There are three dredges at work here finishing the excavation and straightening the banks, thus completing the canal as far as navigation is concerned from the eastern extremity. Here also a great number of teams with scraper are busily engaged in leveling the banks in order to form a tow-path.

Passing the second road bridge a dam across the canal is arrived at, and another can be seen a short distance farther up. Between these dams, the water having been drawn of, appears the only rock met with in the whole route of about five miles. Had the contractors been aware of the existence of a bed of rock at this part of the cutting of such a size and of a quality equal to at least to any used on the works, they would have been saved the expense of procuring stone from the Point Ann quarries for the piers of the bridges. This rock is very irregular in its formation; rising to an elevation of about eight feet from the bottom on the southerly side, it gradually diminishes in thickness, in the form of steps towards the north, until it disappears altogether, or leaves only a thin ledge to be removed in order to obtain the required depth of the excavation. In this form the rock extends for about 2,800 feet, and was a complete surprise to the engineers, its existence being unknown until struck by the dredges. A large gang of men are at work at this point drilling and blasting

out the rock to the required depth, and removing the pieces with derricks stations on each side of the canal, their long arms reaching half way from bank to bank. Another body of men are engaged in finishing the piers for the third and last road bridge, which is located here.

A short distance north from the third bridge site is a post office and quite a little village, where before the commencement of the canal there was only a solitary farm house. The buildings are principally boarding-houses put up for the accommodation of the workmen. The headquarters and office of the contractors being at this point of the works I proceed thither in quest of the foreman of the work, Mr. McAulicliff, who on being found, after laughing merrily at my muddy appearance, which was the result of my stepping upon an innocent looking clay bed and my sinking therein father and quicker that I expected, to the great merriment of the workmen, kindly consented to accompany me over the remainder of the southern bank, Mr. McAulicliff in the meantime giving me a detailed account of the chief point to be observed in the building of this canal.

Above this upper dam the canal is completed, the banks being all leveled, thus forming the tow-path, which looks like a wide and level roadway on each side. Part of this tow-path, or roadway, had to be made by filling in a large marsh with mud scows, making the operation very tedious. The banks, where formed of clay, which my companion informed me was the more unstable as compared with sand, are “rip-rapped” below the water line as in the eastern end.

Arriving at the end of the bank, we found two lines of piers extending out into Presqu’Isle harbour similar to those found at the entrance of the canal from the Bay of Quinte. I learned, on questioning my comrade, that these piers which are almost completely filled with stone, were to be planked over with heavy plank, every other one being fitted with a tie post, so forming for all practical purposes, a long dock on each side of the canal. A channel 200 feet wide and 16 feet deep has been dredged out in the harbour to the main channel leading out into the lake, which latter channel is 1,000 feet wide. From the appearance of it here, one can judge what the canal will be like when completed for the whole distance. The mouth of the canal on the western end finishes in a marsh, which the good old times when whisky brough a good price across the line, served as a hiding place for the small fleet of boats of the smugglers who lurked about it, on account of the willows which grow in profusion, and among which they could rest undetected through the day until night, when, under cover of its darkness, they could run across the lake, land their cargo in some secret and secluded place, and return the following night.

Standing on the most outermost end of the line of piers, one has a fine view of Presqu’Isle by or harbour and the surrounding shores. Across the bay can be seen the lighthouses and the white tents of the campers on Presqu’Ilse Point, which is a noted summer resort for the surrounding townspeople. North-west about a mile from the north shore of the bay, among the trees, appears the picturesque little village of Brighton, with its pretty houses and wide clean streets.

I had now travelled the whole length of a canal having four and a half miles of clay cutting, which together with the formation of dredging and piers of convenient entrances at either end, make up an artificial channel six miles long, having a width on the bottom of eighty feet and two hundred feet at the ends, and which will have when entirely completed, at ordinary low water (or zero of the Toronto harbor gauges) a uniform depth of twelve feet six inches and sixteen feet in the channels leading to it. The actual uniform depth of water in the finished portion of the canal at present is thirteen feet six inches according to the Toronto harbour measurement. Towards the cost of construction of this work the Government, up to the 30th of June, 1887, the close of the fiscal year of 1886 and 1887, had paid a sum of $680,565.56.

Mr. J.D. Silcox, to whose energy the great progress towards and early completion of the canal is due, has superintended the operations of the contractors in person until a few weeks back, when he was compelled to relinquish his post through illness. In conversation with Mr. Mowry, one of the contractors, as to the time of completion, I was told that the whole of the clay excavation and the trimming up of the banks would be completed this fall. Mr. Mowry said that he did not think it possible that all the work between the dams would be removed by that time; but since the winter would not hinder in the least the work of blasting it would be all removed by the spring, leaving then only the dams to be cut away to render the canal open to navigation. It might be necessary, he said, to keep a dredge at work nearly all next summer to dig down the slight irregularities which may be found in the bottom of the canal on sounding.

The advantages which are likely to arise from the construction of the work are then discussed in detail and finally summarized as follows.

I have now mentioned the several local advantages to be derived from the Murray canal, namely: The convenience to the grain trade in the vicinity, the stimulus given the manufacturers on the Bay of Quinte by extending the local and facilitating the foreign trades, the coasting and passenger traffic it would promote, and lastly the opening up of the mineral wealth of the community. These are, indeed, the chief apparent advantages, but any one for a moment supposing it would turn the course of the great highway of Canadian commerce on the great lakes in that direction is in error. Our commerce there is no longer carried on by means of canoes, but by vessels as large and strong as those with which our forefathers crossed the Atlantic and doubled Cape Horn. The cost of Prince Edward presents no longer any terror to the Canadian mariner. So it will appear that the only through trade which will pass through the canal will be that carried by passenger steamers from Toronto to Montreal, calling at intermediate ports. Of course, the canal will be important in very heavy gales, because then lake vessels having made Presqu'Isle harbor could pass through it and so pursue their voyage down the more placid bay, or come to anchor in a position which is perfectly secure to any number of ships that might find their way thither.

As a naval station, in case of war, it is pointed out, the canal would be of great advantage, and the opinions of General Sir James Carmichael Smyth and Col. McDougall to that effect are quoted.

The article is of such interest that we regret that lack of space prevents its reproduction in full.