Kingston Chronicle and Gazette 1834 11 01

Simcoe Canal – article re

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And Weekly Commercial Advertiser

Vol. XVI. Kingston, Upper Canada, Saturday, November 1, 1834. (No. 18)

From the Montreal Gazette. (Did not see an author's name anywhere – probably an editor at the Montreal Gazette)

THE CARRYING PLACE – GOVERNER SIMCOE'S CANAL

The Carrying Place is about five miles distant from Consecon. It is a long, straggling village, situated upon the portage between the head of the Bay of Quinte and Weller's Bay, an arm of Lake Ontario. The population of this place may be two hundred. These is here a place of Worship belonging to the Church of England, and a school-house, which is occasionally used for religious purposes by the tribes of wandering priests of every denomination, by whom this Province is thronged. The accommodation for travellers at this place is miserable. A well conducted Inn or Hotel, as every wretched Tavern is called par excellence, would pay well here.

During the last war, this was cue of the most important places in the Province, it being necessary to disembark here all the troops and military stores destined for the upper part of the country, before hauling the batteau in which they had been conveyed across the Isthmus of Murray, a distance of a mile and a quarter. The Carrying Place must therefore have formerly exhibited a very different appearance from what it now does; for though it is sufficiently neat and dean, it is yet as dull, dreary and desolate a village as any I have visited in Canada. A few years ago, it was enlivened by all the bustling importance which uniformly attends military movements, now, however, not a sound is to be heard but what proceeds from the rude revelry of the numerous lumbermen, who for a certain period of the year, pursue their important avocation at it. Talking of this place a few days, ago to a gentleman to whom it has been long familiar, he said he never thought of it, but it reminded him of the Deserted Village. In one sense, the comparison is just, but I cannot for the | soul of me conceive, how, in even the best or worst days of its existence, its dreary sandy road, and its tall, naked looking bouses, could justify a comparison with the modest retiring beauties of Auburn, the "-loveliest village of the plain."

It Is somewhat astonishing, that notwithstanding the immense sums of money which have been spent by Government for the conveyance of their troops and stores across this place, that no means have ever yet been adopted, to bring the waters of Lake Ontario into closer connection with those of the Bay of Quinte. The very first Canal which it was proposed to cut in Canada, had this for its object, and so thoroughly convinced was Governor Simcoe of its absolute necessity, to preserve the peace and secure the safety of the Province, that it was one of the favorite schemes which he most delighted to bring into notice. I have now before me a letter from one of the most eminent men in Upper Canada, to a gallant officer, who served with distinction in this country during the late war, from which I have permission to extract the following passage. "A Canal at this place was the first ever contemplated in Canada, and it appeared to Governor Simcoe so very necessary; that he advised its completion long before he left the Province. I shall very willingly contribute my humble efforts to forward so desirable a plan, because it is public improvement which ought to have been made, and which cannot fail of proving highly beneficial, as you have already clearly proved, both in peace and war."

Notwithstanding, however, the obvious utility of such a canal as that which I have mentioned, and the urgent recommendation to complete it of Governor Simcoe, and other individuals equally capable of judging of its merits, it was not, I think, until 1823, that Sheriff Ruttan first moved for a survey of the tract through which a canal could be most advantageously constructed. A survey authorised by Act of Parliament took place in 1824, according to which it was recommended, that a canal should be cut from Dead Creek into Presqu'ile harbor, of such dimensions as would admit of

ship navigation, and be regulated by the depth of water at the entrance of the harbor. The estimate for the construction of such a work is stated by the commissioners appointed by His Excellency Sir Peregrine Maitland, to amount to £16, G21, 9s. Sd. Trifling however, as this sum is, when considered in reference to the advantages certain to arise from the completion of the work upon which it was to be expended, the object of the survey has never yet been carried into effect. The subject of Simcoe Canal, as I shall venture to call it, was never again agitated until the arrival of our present intelligent Lieutenant Governor Sir John Colborne, whose mind, ever since he arrived in this country, has been constantly employed in devising and carrying in effect, the best means for advancing the general prosperity of the Province. Under his wise and energetic Administration, we have observed plans proposed for connecting the great waters of Upper Canada and for opening up new channels to agricultural and commercial enterprise, which are all upon a scale of such grandeur and extent, as literally to fill the mind with the most cheering anticipations, with respect to the speedy advancement of this magnificent Province in Wealth and importance. Among these plans, one for connecting the waters of the Bay of Quinte with those of Lake Ontario has been revived, and the result was that another survey, authorised by Act of Parliament, took place last autumn.

According to this survey, it is proposed to carry the canal from the head of the Bay of Quinte into Weller's Bay, whenever there is a passage into Lake Ontario. According to the surrey which took place in 1821, it was proposed to carry the canal directly from the head of the Bay of Quinte into Presqu'ile harbor, it is not my present object to make an estimate of the comparative merits of these two routes; I must acknowledge, however, that after a careful examination of both, I certainly think the first proposed is decidedly preferable to the last.

Mv object will have been sufficiently accomplished, if I succeed in impressing upon the mind of the public, a due sense of the benefits which would necessarily arise from a direct communication being ?? between the Bay of Quinte and Lake Ontario.

In a commercial point of view, the advantages to be derived from the constructions of such a canal as that now proposed, are great and obvious.

1st. It will afford a safe and convenient channel of communication between the extremities of Lake Ontario, free from all the danger and delay attendant upon the navigation of the open Lake.

It is well known to those who have made the winds prevailing upon the Lake their study, that they are subject to certain apparently capricious and anomalous laws. It has been observed, for instance, that while the wind blew strongly from the east to the westward of Point Petre (a promontory projecting far into Lake Ontario, on the south side of the District of Prince Edward,) it blew a violent gain from the south, at the lower end of the Lake.

Another remarkable circumstance connected with the winds prevailing on Lake Ontario, is that, while during the summer mouths, a south-west wind prevails at night upon the middle of the Lake, light airs from the north are frequently experienced along the shore. From these two remarkable circumstances, then, it is evident that all sorts of vessels sailing between the head of the Lake and Kingston, might avoid a considerable proportion of the danger and delay to which they are at present subject, by keeping near the shore, entering Presqu'ile harbor, passing through the projected canal, and sailing thence to the , place of their destination, along the smooth waters of the Bay of Quinte. If vessels were sailing upwards, the same course, only in the opposite direction, would, in like manner, be the safest and the best.

2d. It would be the means of affording a direct line of communication between the District of Newcastle and Kingston, and thence by the Rideau Canal or the St. Lawrence to Lower Canada. If even now this rich and fertile District is rising rapidly into notice, it is obvious. that an additional impetus would be given to its advancement, did it possess a safe and direct means of conveying its produce to other parts of the two Provinces. To the lumber trade of the Newcastle District in particular, such a Canal promises the greatest benefit. At present all the timber which is not floated down the Trent, is conveyed long the lake shore in cribs, into Wellers Bay. These cribs are then broken up, when the logs are drawn one by one across the Carrying Place into the Bay of Quinte, where the business of rafting is repeated. By the aid of the Canal,

rafts from all parts of the Newcastle District, bordering on the lake shore, could be conveyed directly to Quebec, without the inconvenience or expense attending the operation to which I have just alluded.

3d. It would be of essential benefit to the interests of the Bay of Quinte, and to all the towns and villages lying along the shores of Lake Ontario. A safe communication being once formed through the Isthmus of Murray, and harbours being now in existence along the lake shore, such as those at Cobourg and Port Hope, it is pretty evident that to a certain extent, the ?? of commerce would change its course, and benefit all the places through which it passed, by putting them in possession of a free, safe and expeditious water route immigration to a desirable market, and thereby giving an additional spring to their energies.

The advantages which I have pointed out would be unmingled with the slightest injury to other parts of the Province, there being now not a single harbor or village in existence on the .lake shore between Presqu'ile and Kingston.

In n military point of view, this Canal would add greatly to both the strength and protection of the country. Troops and military stores could then be conveyed from Kingston, or even Montreal, and be brought to here upon any particular place without the necessity of disembarkation. One great inconvenience which was experienced during the last war, was the delay which often took place for want of the necessary means for further transportation. Several days, l understand, were frequently lost on this account. Now the power of concentrating troops upon a particular point in the shortest space of time is acknowledged by all military men to being great means of ensuring victory. Celerity is strength, was the remark of Napoleon. Were the Canal which is now projected once constructed, it is obvious that, in the event of future hostilities, the flotillas which might be assigned for the protection of the Bay of Quinte, and the, ports along the lake shore, would be able to co-operate, which, as things are now ordered, it would be impossible for them to do.

Presqu'ile harbour possesses more natural advantages than perhaps any other in Canada. The depth of the water is so great, and the area of the basin so extensive, that it is capable of affording safe anchorage to all the vessels which are likely to navigate Lake Ontario for commercial purposes. The point at Presqu'ile is beautifully situated for the erection of a battery, and enjoys so advantageous a position, that no hostile vessel attempting to enter it could by possibility escape destruction, it being necessary for them to pass within point blank shot of its guns.

While I am upon this subject, I may remark *empassant* that it has often appeared to me somewhat extraordinary that there is not a single fortification in the whole distance between Kingston and Toronto, and that not the slightest means have been yet adopted for keeping open a safe communication between these two places. To affect this, nothing more is necessary, than after the completion of the Canal to erect a battery upon Presqu'ile Point, and another at the heights of Port Hope. This subject has been too long neglected. It is now full time that the Engineer Department should take it into its serious consideration.

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But to return to the Canal—I am aware that objections have been urged against its construction by a few interested individuals. One person, indeed, from whom I would have expected a more enlightened and statesmanlike view of the subject, has openly declared that he I would give it his decided opposition, because he conceived the interests of the neighborhood in which he resided would be injured by it. It is to be hoped, however, that when the subject is again brought before Parliament, the views of the majority of the Members will not be so contracted as those of the individual to whom I have alluded, and that the subject will meet with all the attention which its importance demands, no local or selfish interests being allowed to prevent the execution of a work, which has so obvious a tendency to ensure the safety, and increase the strength of the Province, and to open up new channels to the enterprise and skill of its inhabitants.

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