

SUBMISSION TO THE
PANEL ON
THE TRENT SEVERN WATERWAY

BY
THE PETERBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESENTED BY MICHAEL TOWNSEND,
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

SEPT. 14, 2007

Please accept our sincere thanks for the opportunity to submit this paper to the Trent Severn Waterway panel on behalf of the **Peterborough Historical Society.**

We are fortunate that the headquarters for this treasure is in Peterborough. There are countless persons who live or lived in the city who built, managed, repaired and operated this wonderful series of canals, buoyed channels in lakes and river locks, some still hand-operated and two hydraulic liftlocks.

The Lift Lock itself is one of the wonders of the world and when transiting it you recall that it was built “by hand” over 103 years ago. It is indeed a marvel.

The Kawarthas ARE its waterways and the essential backbone of the lakes and rivers is the Trent Severn Waterway.

This area was settled by water – prospective settlers journeying from “the Front” into the backwoods and lakes by water and by portage across the intervening land and swamps. The proposal and subsequent building of the canal system provided easy access and wonderful opportunities for settlement on the back lakes. That settlement grew into tourism possibilities as the urban population sought respite from their urban conglomerates.

In 1835 N.H. Baird surveyed the Trent Canal route as a defensive measure against our southern neighbours. Will it be needed again? In 1920 – 85 years later – the system of over 40 locks, 50 km. of man-made canals, 125 dams and countless areas which were altered by dredging or flooding was fully navigable. This historic passageway has been named “one of the finest interconnected systems of navigation in the world”. As a National Historic Canal it has been safeguarded and administered by Parks Canada for the joy of all Canadians and visitors alike.

Its amazing engineering feats in building the two highest hydraulic lift locks in the world – Peterborough with a lift of 19.8 metres and Kirfield with a lift of 14.9 metres are both over 100 years old!

The incredible marine railway at Big Chute built in 1917 and rebuilt in 1978, lifts boats 17.7 metres via its carriage on twin railway tracks and carries boats up to 30 metres in length from Gloucester Pool to the Severn River. In addition, there are 36 conventional locks, some still operated by hand to the delight of the visitors. The Burleigh Lock, which was converted from twin locks to a single lock in the 1950's puzzled engineers and planners for some 50 years before its twin flight locks were built.

The Trent Severn Waterway, operating safely from spring until autumn for the past 100 years is an astounding piece of our heritage. It deserves continued Parks Canada Federal funding to rebuild and maintain to ensure its Federal heritage for generations to come.

Much history can be displayed along the route in the form of fascinating vintage photographs and information. Locally, such displays have been successfully mounted at Juniper Island, Stony Lake and along the Rideau Canal. It's time that Parks Canada be funded to display information and recognition mounted along the Trent Severn Waterway.

Historically the Trent Severn waterway allowed for creation of the Steamship lines which opened the larger lakes to vacationing populations. The waterway became part of the round the world route for sailing and power craft. Visitors travel this route avoiding the long route through the lower Great Lakes and the Welland Canal.

The Trent Severn Waterway is recognized as an important tourism attraction along the entire corridor, while the locks and canals

provide an essential means for recreational boating. Along the canal, resorts, parks and playgrounds attract visitors. Boat usage of the canal is up 10% this summer serving to increase tourism dollars along the system. The Federal Government surely profits from the tourists who visit by land of water because of the taxes levied on the businesses they patronize.

The Trent Severn Waterway manages the water levels through its control of the dams along the canal and surrounding lakes – enhancing fish spawning and the protection of the environment and waterfront properties. This has become increasingly important these past hot, dry summers or conversely at times of heavy rains.

There is so very much history associated with this waterway with one block of 19th century business on the east side of George Street in Peterborough located very close to the liftlock. Where is the sightseeing bus or wagons to take the tourist from their watercraft to see everything the city has to offer.

✓he Trent Severn Waterway is also an important historic asset with significant engineering resources along its entire length, such as the Peterborough Lift Lock which is recognized as a national historic site in its own right and the first concrete lock which was built along the Otonabee River at the end of the nineteenth century

✓he Trent Severn Waterway also features important archaeological resources, many of them associated with the First Nations who have used the waterway for thousands of years

✓he Trent Severn Waterway is also associated with many significant Canadians who played a major role in its development such as Mossom Boyd, an effective lobbyist for construction of the lock, Richard Birdsall Rogers who designed the Peterborough Lift Lock and Sir John A. Macdonald who authorized expansion of the waterway in 1891; there were countless unnamed persons,

including a contingent of Italian immigrants who contributed their labour to the building of the canal and left a legacy that is still with us today

In the villages, towns and cities along the waterway lived many of the leaders in business and the professions that have built the country such as Senator Cox, Sir Sandford Fleming (who spent his first two years in Canada right here in Peterborough) and Dr. G. Stewart Cameron (who was one of the founders of the C.M.A. and the O.M.A. as well as organizing a group practice clinic, the most modern idea with four other doctors in the 1920's).

We shall also remember the wealth of the literary traditions that grew up around the settlements of the waterway, including Catherine Parr Trail and her sister, Susannah Moodie and her brother, Sam Strickland. As well, there are others, including Isabelle Valery Crawford, the Laytons, Jean Cole, Margaret Lawrence, and as pointed out by one of the panel, Stephen Leacock.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) In light of these important historic resources and the diverse stories that relate to many aspects of Canadian History, we would encourage the Panel to recommend that Parks Canada take the necessary steps to ensure the historic character of the waterway be preserved and its stories interpreted to the wide range of users of the Trent Severn

☺ In particular we would encourage the Panel to emphasize the importance of reaching school age children with suitable curriculum based education programs both on site and in the classroom

☐☺ The waterway passes through many communities which, through their museums and local historical societies, tell a part of the story of the Trent Severn Waterway; we would encourage Parks Canada to work with the broader heritage community in preserving and presenting the rich history of the waterway

☐☺ In the past, Parks Canada sponsored a successful publication program of informative brochures, books and other materials related to the waterway; we would strongly encourage the Panel to recommend that Parks Canada re-establish a publication program to share the history of the waterway with a broader audience

5) The lockmasters used to pride themselves on the gardens they tended. Perhaps there used to be more manpower at each lock and we would encourage that time be allotted for this.

6) It is a national historic site therefore the nation should keep it in good mechanical condition and invest in improving the lands surrounding the system to ensure it continues to be a viable and important part of this wonderful country.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Townsend, President, Board of Directors.