

Lakefield Heritage Research©

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"our roots...our heritage"©

September 14th 2007

Dr. Thomas Symons, PhD
Chair, 2007 Panel on The Future of the Trent Severn Waterway
and
Members of the Panel

Dear Dr. Symons and Panel:

Lakefield is well known as the "cradle of Canadian literature" and sometimes, the co-current creator of the cedar-strip canoe. Thomas Gordon here, and, John Stephenson in Peterborough.

However, today, we would like to warmly welcome you to the "home" of the Trent Severn Waterway.

Almost no one recognizes that we are.

It was here that the Strickland (Roland & George) brothers along with the Boyds and several others met to send a delegation to Ottawa in 1879 to ask the government to consider building the canal.

They were asked to return with working documents by McDonald's government.

The offices of the first Trent Severn Committee were established over the Sherin store now part of the Lakefield Clinic. John Sherin even had the telegraph line extended from the railway west to his store so that the committee could have a "conference call" with any of the various men employed.

Thus saving the committee the onerous duty of having to juggle their timetables. Many decisions were thus made by "conference call" rather than meeting as a whole. We think we are so modern!

George Ranney and Bruce Ludgate C. E. who were in partnership in Peterborough were hired on to do a technical survey of the entire watershed east of Bobcaygeon as this was the area of most interest to the Boyds and the Stricklands. They had their sub-office above Sherin's as did several Peterborough lawyers including the Burnhams, and A. P. Pousette...at various times. (Pousette a descendant of a prominent Channel Island Church of England family would eventually make his home at Lakefield Preparatory College (now Lakefield College School; he was key to the legal aspects of the canal's early days construction.) Thomas Rubidge was appointed the Superintendent for this period of time (c.1882); the Trent Canal Association office above Sherin's was his domain.

Thus we can say that John Sherin was just as much a "father" of the Trent Severn Waterway as any of the other men; as he had the vision to give gratis, the office space above his store for the purpose of creating the waterway between Peterborough and Bobcaygeon.

One need not rehearse how Richard B. Rogers having obtained civil engineer degrees became the Superintending Engineer for the Trent Canal in 1884 and his suggestion to the Minister of Railways and Canals, John Haggart about the possibility of the use of an hydraulic lift lock to overcome the great drop at Peterborough. (Haggart, from Perth Ontario was a natural supporter for the canal as he could see the value of the Rideau Canal that came by.)

Some of Rogers' later successes would be based on the watershed and waterflow studies made by George Ranney and Bruce Ludgate; who in turn had based their work on an earlier study by Rubidge and others.

Rogers and Walter Francis then worked out the needed dams on the contributing watersheds in the area from Peterborough and Bobcaygeon. The resulting work needs no further explanation.

Finally.

We also have strong historical evidence that Walter John Strickland Traill, (Catharine Parr Traill's youngest son), who was a grain buyer out of Grand Forks North Dakota and Morris Manitoba seems to have tipped-off R. B. Rogers about the Peevey-Haglin grain elevator experiment in Minneapolis' St. Louis Park that used Portland cement and a slip-form type of construction in 1900.

We can also brag that tourism probably began here in Lakefield with the American Canoe Regatta of 1883 ?

All of this to simply say, that in so many ways the canal began here.

Our Presentation

-We know that in our presentation we are likely repeating what others have likely stated elsewhere.

-Nevertheless.

-We feel that the Trent-Severn needs an even wider marketing of all the special places along its entire length. Each, city each town, each village, and, in some instances, a cross-road, (where a vanished community once thrived) wherever there is lock on the system needs to be celebrated on a system-wide basis.

-To that end, we suggest that there might be a joint celebration by all the communities perhaps on the Civic Holiday weekend of 2010.

-That would give enough time to co-ordinate a huge bash and market the large event. From Trenton to Port Perry, From Fenelon Falls to Big Chute Marine and everywhere in between.

-The 100th anniversary at Kirkfield this year is a prime example. Somewhere close to 500 came out. And, Kirkfield Lift Lock is about as remote location as you could find on the system. It isn't even in "downtown" Kirkfield.

-So a system-wide bash could work. "Imagine the Trent-Severn" OR "Celebrate the Trent-Severn" or something similar. Every community would celebrate what the Trent-Severn has meant to them...how the town thrived. The heritage if you wish of the Trent-Severn. We have just given you Lakefield as but one of the towns that could promote its several heritages.

-We feel that this celebration could be promoted at the annual conventions of say the American Canoe Association, the American Sailing Association, and, all the travel related conventions...the American Bus Association, and, any other travel related conventions in 2008.

-The old adage "It takes money to make money" hangs true here. How have we not promoted ourselves like our great-grandparents did ?

-We would like to see if there might be corporate sponsors who might supply signs that would basically say, "Welcome to Lakefield" at the approaches from north-n-south, much like we do on highways.

-At some locks, there is little community information of where to find what, and, that needs to be addressed.

-Perhaps what might be considered is a summer-months only sub-office of the local tourism offices...perhaps simply a folding summer tent with folders of local attractions. The boaters then could connect with the main tourist office uptown.

-Perhaps some other floating or stationary "highway" signs pointing to a marina or a downtown core for shopping could be sponsored by the local merchants or, a combination of downtown and corporate sponsors. Perhaps the corporate offices of some of the major chains of drug stores/groceries or anything else that are within the town might assist.

-Yes we are aware that the canal needs lots of upgrade repairs; however, by heavily promoting the canal, it might be possible to generate some of the funds needed for these major upgrades.

-There are probably other items equally deserving, but, in the interest of time, we would like to highlight these few suggestions.

Thanking you for your consideration of our letter.

Sincerely,