

of the small, joint stock association steamboats were desperate for the kind of guaranteed income that a multi-seasonal charter could bring. Let someone else take the risks in the depressed post-rebellion economy. Thus, when John Hamilton approached the managing committees of several of these vessels in the winter of 1838 they were quite eager to place the steamboats under his management. He then neutralized the threat of competition from other powerful interests in the local trades by agreeing to share a quarter of the spoils with the Jones family of Brockville and by chartering one vessel from the Gildersleeve interests in Kingston.<sup>8</sup> The "Lake Ontario and River St Lawrence Line" floated by Hamilton that spring was an amalgam of two vessels owned by him, four which were chartered and the two vessels which the Jones family promised to supply at their own risk.

Not only would this combination succeed in capturing the most valuable Troop transportation contract since the War of 1812, but it also attracted a second opportunity. The late 1830s was a period of dramatic change for the British Post Office, one of the highlights of which was the triumphant coming of age of ocean steamships. Due in large part to political pressure the post office almost immediately began contracting with what would become some of the major steamship lines in the British Empire: Cunard, the Peninsular Steam Navigation Co., and the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company. Demand for frequent, rapid mail service in the Canadas was accentuated by the rebellions. With pressure from the colonial administrators and the example of the Atlantic and Peninsular mails before him, the deputy post master-general for British North America offered Hamilton a contract to carry the mails. Post Office requirements, however, proved too inflexible for the operator of a service whose primary responsibility was to deliver troops whenever and wherever the military wanted them. Consequently Hamilton settled for an interim, informal arrangement which would persist for another three years.<sup>9</sup>

When the Jones's quickly reneged on their part of the contract, the line settled into a pattern of owned and chartered vessels. Control over operations was in the hands of two men, John Hamilton, the 36 year old entrepreneur, and his ex-captain and general manager, William Meneilly.

Of all the variations which appeared on the trade prior to 1861, this line most closely paralleled the origins of companies, like the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company, whose unincorporated partners had chartered steamers to flesh out their first line service. But in fact, they differed in two respects. Hamilton failed to secure the mail contract when next it was offered him while the Peninsular and Oriental was incorporated as a quid pro quo for an extension of their mail contract through to India. Subsequently, in 1840, even as the P & O began to develop into one of the world's largest shipping corporations, Hamilton found himself in the position

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the subsequent lines see Walter Lewis, "Until Further Notice": The Royal Mail Line and the Passenger Steamboat Trade on Lake Ontario and the upper St Lawrence River, 1838-1875 (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1983); Jones V. Hamilton, *Upper Canada, Queen's Bench Reports*, v. 3, 170-2; *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1837, 11 Apr. 1838.

<sup>9</sup> Davies, "Development of Liner Trades," 183-4.; *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette*, 1 Aug. 1838.