

'30s marked end of era for tugboats in Trenton

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100 tons." The certificate, which was awarded by the Minister of Marine and Fisheries of Canada, permitted Couture to operate a tug in the minor inland waters of Canada.

Couture went to work for the Robert Weddle Company, marine contractors who built docks and dredged waterways. He, and his crew of two men, operated the A.B. Cook — the smallest tug in a three-boat fleet.

With the Weddle Company, Couture helped build docks, dredge the Bay of Quinte and build the Trent Canal. Gradually, as the Bay of Quinte was developed and local jobs diminished, the company had to look further afield to areas like Toronto for work.

While on the latter jobs, the men ate and slept on the Aye Ready, the company barge. But, Couture was not happy working away from home.

"One of the last jobs my father worked on was the break-wall at Sunnyside in Toronto," Couture says. Around 1916, Couture quit the tug business to be closer to his family.

Although his was an accident-free career, it was not without excitement. Couture remembers his father told him of a particularly dangerous trip.

"He was coming back from Toronto on the lake when a storm came up. The waves were so high they were breaking over the cabin," Couture recalls his father telling him. Although the men were certainly fearful, they weathered the storm and arrived safely at port.

Joseph (Couture's younger brother) was also involved in the tugboat business. He spent much of his working time dredging the Toronto harbor.

After working at British Chemical for a year, Couture went to work for the CNR where he worked until he died in 1929.

Couture, who was born after his father gave up the tugboat business, remembers his father taking him to watch the boats in action.

"If they were hauling a barge, you'd hardly think they were moving. It was very, very slow."

As a child, Couture remembers tugboats changed the face of Trenton.

"The east part of the river below the bridge was all tugboats and barges...The Weddle Company had a slipway, where they hauled boats for repair, that was located where Fraser

Park is. There must have been a steam winch or something (to haul the tugboats out of the water)."

The 1930s marked the end of an age for the tugboat in this area, Couture says. Work was unavailable, and the tugboat was no longer needed.



The Couture family before the turn of the century. Back, from left: Joseph, Auriela, Josephine and Harriet. Front, from left: Harriet (Miron), Celina and Oliver.

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