

## SIR WILFRID and HERCULES

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk with The Editor -

Around the turn of the last century, the Canadian Government, through the Ministry of Public Works, undertook the deepening of harbours and waterways to facilitate better shipping. For this purpose, they had built a fleet of tugs, dredges and scows, however they contracted much of the dredging to private firms, much as is done today. Another practice unchanged by a century is the awarding of government contracts to friends and political supporters. Thus it was in 1902 that the Liberal government under Sir Wilfrid Laurier was embroiled in a patronage scandal, through its Minister of Public Works, Joseph Israel Tarte.

Mr. Tarte, born in January 1848, was a notary, journalist, publisher and politician. He was appointed Minister of Public Works on July 13, 1896, in the Laurier cabinet. He was the Liberal political organizer for Quebec, and thus was in charge of patronage. Mr. Tarte had taken various steps to speed up the improvement of the Laurentian route for wheat being shipped to Europe from the Canadian west. The Soulanges Canal was built to replace the Beauharnois Canal; the channel between Montreal and Quebec was deepened; port facilities at Montreal and Quebec were repaired and enlarged and the government shipyard at Sorel was established under his direction. Tarte proposed using government-built icebreakers to keep the St. Lawrence River open to shipping year 'round. His plan to modernize transportation and construct the proposed \$30 million Georgian Bay Canal was raised to the status of a national project.

William Joseph Poupore was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Quebec from 1882 to 1892 and a member of the House of Commons from 1896 to 1900. A staunch Liberal supporter, he also happened to be president of W. J. Poupore & Co. Ltd., of Montreal, a firm involved in the construction of marine terminals, and in the dredging of rivers and canals. A canal in Quebec was named for him. He was an ardent advocate for the construction of Tarte's controversial Montreal, Ottawa and Georgian Bay Ship Canal.

Other strong Liberal supporters were Franklin Bates Polson, of Toronto, and his partner John Bellamy Miller, president of the Parry Sound Lumber Company. Mr. Miller was a major shareholder of the Polson Iron Works, and he became a co-owner of the firm in 1893, and sole owner in 1899. F. B. Polson was a shareholder in Mr. Miller's Parry Sound Lumber Company, and in 1901 he returned to the Polson Iron Works partnership. Later on, he was a co-owner of the Parry Sound Transportation Company along with Miller. The two shared business and pleasure interests, both belonging to the prestigious Royal Canadian Yacht Club and various men's business clubs of the day.

The Polson shipbuilders lobbied the Liberal government on an annual basis for subsidies for the construction of Canadian-built ships. Mr. Polson was quick to point out that such federal assistance would balance the difference between a Clyde-built and a Canadian-built ship, and that the assistance would diminish gradually as the Canadian industry developed. His firm already had been the beneficiary of government assistance through contracts with the Ministry of Marine and Fisheries for the construction of fisheries patrol vessels at the Polson company's Owen Sound shipyard. Mr. Polson found a willing ear with J. I. Tarte, the Public Works Minister, who commissioned the construction of two hydraulic dredges to be manufactured as much as possible from parts made in Canada. Although Tarte expressed misgivings about awarding contracts to the "politically heretic city of Toronto", he was impressed by Mr. Polson, whose firm turned out the hydraulic dredge KING EDWARD VII and the aptly-named dredge J. I. TARTE in 1901. For some reason, neither of these vessels appears on any Dominion List of Ships. However, as Tarte was impressed with the completion of this contract, Polson was in line for another sweet deal.

In the fall of 1901, the Polson Iron Works Company signed a contract with