

W. J. Poupore & Co. to build the largest dredge in Canada. Poupore had received a government contract for dredging the St. Lawrence River in the vicinity of Lake St. Peter, and for harbour improvements at Trois-Rivieres. For this purpose, a large dredge was required. The new dredge, to be constructed at the Polson shipyard at Toronto, was to be christened SIR WILFRID in honour of the first francophone Prime Minister of Canada, The Rt. Hon. Wilfrid Laurier, whose Liberal government had been elected to parliament in 1896. Sir Wilfrid was knighted by Queen Victoria at her Diamond Jubilee ceremony in 1897. To the Laurier government we owe the establishment of the Royal Canadian Navy (in 1910) and the creation of the Department of External Affairs.

Work on the new \$60,000 dredge SIR WILFRID began in the spring of 1902 and by May the project was well in hand. The dredge was designed by A. L. Desy of Montreal, consulting engineer for the Poupore firm, and construction was overseen by W. E. Redway, naval architect for the Polson company. The dredge was 96 feet long with a beam of 36 feet 8 inches and draught of 9 feet 7 inches. The dredge was of composite construction, with oak planking over a steel framework. Her Clyde-built boiler measured 10 feet 6 inches long by 10 feet 6 inches diameter, producing a working steam pressure of 150 lbs. which drove a Polson-build hoisting engine with cylinders of 16 and 18 inches diameter.

The dredge had three 65 foot long steel spuds (also reported in the press as being made of squared timber), the aft spud being a "walker", on which the dredge could be moved forward or spun. An overhead steel A-frame truss of channel and I-beams supported the heavy steel crane and dipper handle. The dipper bucket had an 80 cubic yard capacity. We have no photos of the dredge as she originally was built, but we would assume that she looked much as she did in later years, with a two-decked cabin and tall smokestack.

SIR WILFRID's launch date is not known, but the dredge was completed by October 4, 1902, and was taken in tow for Montreal on Monday, October 6th, by the wooden steam tug MARY (C.71274) of Sarnia, which was officially registered to Capt. Patrick Larkin, of St. Catharines, in 1902. The tug had been built at Port Huron, Michigan, in 1874 by George Hardison, a former St. Catharines resident. Capt. Larkin acquired the 64 foot long tug in 1886. He died in 1900, and whether or not ownership was retained by his family is not known. Ownership may have passed to the Poupore firm by 1902, but if so, the official paperwork was not registered.

SIR WILFRID proceeded slowly down Lake Ontario in tow. On Tuesday, October 7th, the weather turned against them. When about eight miles from Port Hope, Ontario, the dredge's boom reportedly broke and the new dredge sank. The tug rescued the three men who were riding the dredge and took them to Swift's wharf at Kingston. The men were from Iroquois and had been engaged only for the delivery trip by the tug's owner. Frank Polson, in a statement to "The Toronto Evening Telegram" the following day, stated that the dredge had cost \$62,000 to construct and that it was insured for \$40,000. The "Telegram" stated that the loss fell upon Polson Iron Works, as the contract called for delivery at Montreal. Other newspapers, however, placed the insurance and ownership with the government.

It was rumoured that the guy wires holding the boom in position had broken, allowing the boom to swing wildly in the rough seas, this causing the dredge to list and fill with water. It also was stated that the frequent jerking of the tow line had caused the dredge to ship water and sink. Whatever the cause, the dredge sank in 80 feet of water, which meant that its spuds were just below the surface. Mr. Polson had heard indirectly that a brakeman riding atop a Grand Trunk freight train just west of Port Hope had spotted the spuds, but it also was reported that the dredge had gone down in 100 feet of water; its exact location was unknown. The brakeman's story never was confirmed. A search was made in the following days but the dredge was not located and the Polson Iron Works Company then posted a \$500 reward to anyone