

By the late 1820s there was still no serious competition within the steamboat trade on Lake Ontario. Indeed there would have been little point to such activity as the vessels could be deployed in such a way that plenty of opportunities were available to all.

In 1829 the three Prescott-Niagara boats started advertising as the "Lake Ontario Canadian Line of Steamboats." Given that two of the proprietors were brothers, Robert and John Hamilton of Queenston, this development is hardly surprising. Partners until 1827, they had been the first on the Canadian side to run vessels on complementary schedules. In announcing the line two years later, neither the Hamiltons nor the owners of the *Niagara* were undertaking much of a risk. In fact they may have saved some money by jointly paying for the handbills and newspaper advertising. In addition, they maintained a common set of rates and agreed to a schedule which did not overlap at any of the ports they served.⁶

This simple co-operative arrangement persisted for as long as the primary condition of its existence held: minimal competition. For three years the vessels enjoyed a profitable association. However, their very success stimulated new steamboat construction even as these vessels began to show signs of age. By 1832 the launch of several new boats, including one owned by John Hamilton, had resulted in overcrowding on the trade. Although there was a concerted effort to orchestrate departure times on the Prescott-Niagara route, the uncertainties of steamboat operation in a generation of vessels plagued by frequent mechanical breakdowns inevitably led to confrontations and hard feelings. This, combined with the seizure of the *Niagara* by her creditors and a falling out between the Hamilton brothers over a contract for the transportation of the troops, meant the end of this simple co-operative venture.⁷

One element which distinguishes it from these other lines which followed was the relative absence of contractual obligations. Much of this lies in the fact that the government contracts, which would have a major influence in the development of lines after the rebellions were relatively unimportant. In fact, the Troop contract involved one and only occasionally two vessels and thus was not even able to accommodate an entire line.

This situation was dramatically altered in the wake of the shots fired around Montgomery's Tavern in 1837. The continuing unrest in Upper Canada meant that large numbers of troops would be shipped into and around the region to the direct benefit of those holding the exclusive rights to supply steamboat transport to the military. Concurrently, in the wake of several years of uncertain profits, the owners

⁶ *Kingston Chronicle*, 18 April 1829, 7 May 1831; *Brockville Recorder*, 25 May 1830; *Colonial Advocate*, 8 Nov. 1827.

⁷ H.A. Musham, "Early Great Lakes Steamboats: Westward Ho! and Flush Times, 1831-1837," *American Neptune* 7: 1 (1947), 42-65; J. Ross Robertson, *Landmarks of Toronto*, (Toronto: J. Ross Robertson, 1896) II, 856-60; *Brockville Recorder*, 3 May, 8 Nov. 1832; H.J. Boulton to Col Rowan, 10 Nov. 1832, LAC, RG 5, A1, v. 123; Robert Hamilton to ?, 16 Mar. 1832, LAC, RG 8, I, C Series, v. 377, 159-61 ; Robert Hamilton to ?, 17 Apr. 1832., *ibid.*, 165-73.