



"Lock, blockhouse, etc. at the Narrows, Rideau Lake — the first descent from Summit towards Bytown" (from an original painting by Thomas Burrowes)

**THE LOCKHOUSES**

On May 31, 1838, Thomas Jenkins, the lockmaster at Nicholson's, wrote in his work journal "masons finished their work at the new lockhouse this day" and then a few entries later, he recorded he "inspected the work there and found it all going good."

In September of 1841, Peter Sweeney, the lockmaster at Jones Falls, scribbled a fast entry in his personal diary - "removed into the new house at the locks today." Sweeney had little time to appreciate his new home. The navigational season was at its height and besides this he was suffering from a painful attack of malaria all through that month. To escape the dreaded lake fever Mrs. Sweeney was away visiting friends in Bytown.

The houses which both Sweeney and Jenkins described were the defensible lockmaster's houses. In the decade following the rebellion of Upper Canada in 1837, 16 of these unusual dwellings were erected along the canal at undefended lockstations. The British military authorities who then operated the waterway feared sabotage of the canal. As well, the houses fulfilled the important need for staff housing. In the early days, the lockmaster was required to be at the station all year round for maintenance and security reasons.

Originally, the houses were all one story stone dwellings with tinned roofs and double porches. Many were equipped with gunslits. As well, the structures were erected on high points of land as an extra defensive measure. At first glance, these houses would have looked like small forts although they were primarily family homes.

Over the years, the lockhouse changed in appearance as the military function of the canal disappeared. Gunslits were filled in with wood or stone masonry. Wooden additions or frame upper stories were added to make the original four room houses more spacious. At least four of the buildings fell into disrepair and were torn down.

However, the majority of these structures were lived in by lockmasters and their families as late as the 1960's. Today, the remaining 12 lockmaster's houses are used for different purposes; staff housing, Parks Canada

offices and museums. At Jones Falls, one can visit Mr. Sweeney's house and see how this lockmaster lived in the 1840's. Susan Warren (reprinted with permission from STEAM & STONE)

**FROM DEFENSE TO DETENTE**

Four blockhouses stand on the banks of the Rideau Canal as silent reminders that the canal was built for the British military. Although Canada and the United States have been allies for many years, the Rideau was part of a scheme to keep Americans out of Canada.

As a result of the War of 1812, the British and Americans realized the weakness of the British army's St. Lawrence River supply route. With another war expected, the Americans began to prepare defenses for the south shore of the St. Lawrence and the British began searching for an alternate route into the Great Lakes.

Although more than 10 years passed before construction began, the Rideau Canal was built to fulfill this role by connecting the Ottawa River with Lake Ontario at Kingston. The Rideau would be part of the Duke of Wellington's grand plan for the defense of the Canadas.

Lockmasters' journals occasionally have entries mentioning the movement of troops along the canal and many of the lockstations and blockhouses were fortified by militia after the Rebellions of 1837. Peace, however, prevailed.

During the early years, the Rideau served as an immigration route rather than a military supply route. However, with the opening of new large locks on the St. Lawrence, immigrant traffic was reduced to a trickle.

Although few of the immigrants who traversed the Rideau settled in the area, a number of towns were established on the banks of the canal. Commercial use of the canal flourished as forwarding companies transported needed supplies by steamer to the area, raw materials to factories and manufactured goods to market. In 1834, there were only five steamers in use on the canal. By 1841, this had increased to 22.

The number of steamers

actively plying the canal had increased to 39 by 1890, but the character of the vessels was altering due to a change in the use of the canal. Shipping of goods and raw materials was now faster and cheaper by rail. As well, the public was more actively seeking ways to spend their leisure hours in rest and relaxation. As a result, vessels were providing more room and comfort for passengers and less space for cargo.

In 1885, the Rideau Belle was launched in Kingston as the first luxury steamer on the Rideau. She was soon to be followed by others such as the John Haggart, Ella Ross, Rideau King and Rideau Queen. Resorts sprang up to cater to the whims of the more sedentary. The waters of the Rideau became well known for their abundance and variety of fish and several fishing lodges were established. Recreation had become the major role for the Rideau and its traffic.

With the 20th-century came modern technology and the acceptance of the automobile. Roads were improved and transportation became much faster and easier. Individuals were buying their own private boats and cottages rather than relying on the palatial steamers. Although the steamboats disappeared the Rideau's role as a vehicle for recreation remained unchanged.

In 1972 the Rideau Canal was handed over to Parks Canada in recognition of its historical significance and today is one of the nine Heritage Canals operated and maintained by Environment Canada, Parks.

The Rideau has changed little in over 150 years because it has adapted itself to a variety of roles. From a military resource to immigration, commerce and recreation, the Rideau Canal's role in history has gone from defense to detente.

Brian Tychie (From STEAM AND STONE - Tales of the Rideau Waterway)



**ANNOUNCEMENT**



**RON BRUS**

Ken Burns, Broker of Frank Perrin Real Estate Ltd., is pleased to announce the appointment of Ron Brus to the sales staff. Ron has lived locally most of his life and has been involved in local events and several sports groups. He has had a strong interest in real estate for several years and recently completed the required courses at St. Lawrence College, Kingston, and is now fully qualified to assist you with your real estate needs. You are invited to contact Ron at our Westport office, 273-2852, or at his home in Newboro, 272-3146.



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