

Focus on:

THE RIDEAU CANAL

OTTAWA LOCKS - RECONSTRUCTION

The job of reconstructing part of an engineering masterpiece - preserving heritage - takes time and patience.

The job began in 1982. In the fall of that year, the Ottawa Locks were closed for the reconstruction of locks 1, 2 and 3. This year the system of eight locks, located adjacent to the Chateau Laurier, will be closed to navigation from September 14 to June 14, 1987 for the rebuilding of locks 4 and 5. By limiting the construction more to the off-season, it is hoped the impact on boaters will be minimized.

The reason for the reconstruction of Ottawa Locks is historically linked. During the original construction years, 1826-1832, veins of running sand and numerous springs required constant pumping and drainage to keep the excavated areas clear of water. The lock walls had to be reinforced against the relentless pressure of underground water. They were secured with iron wedge bolts and straps while the limestone blocks were bonded with grout and cement. Since then, 154 years of heaving, shifting and rapid spring thaws have combined to severely weaken and warp the lock walls. Extensive reconstruction is necessary. Even the stone must be replaced. The original limestone, procured on-site has deteriorated under severe fracturing.

Due to French's favourable report of the area, settlement was planned for the spring of 1784. However, no official action was taken and it was several years before the first Loyalists settled on the Rideau.

While Lt. French was not assigned to ascertain the navigability of the Rideau lakes and rivers, his journal is important as it provides the first written confirmation of a feasible water route through the area.

Today, Lt. Gershom French's descriptions of the terrain provide valuable information as to the nature of the region before the advent of the Rideau Canal.

Susan Code
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WAS IT WORTHWHILE TO WORK ON THE RIDEAU CANAL

During the construction of the Rideau Canal, a forty-shilling note (\$10) represented 14 to 16 hours of work per day for a period of about two weeks. An ordinary labourer would earn about two shillings and sixpence (63 cents) per day. More specialized tradesmen received better wages. A blacksmith, for example, earned five shillings per day, and a carpenter six shillings. A skilled mason could earn up to seven shillings per day.

Labourers had to pay six to eight shillings per week for lodging in uncomfortable camps. Families could not live on the work sites, and their needs had to be met from labourers' wages.

The cost of living was high not only because of the distance between the work sites and supply points (Montreal and Kingston), but also because contractors took some advantage of this fact to make extra profits on various goods: whiskey, for instance was bought for two shillings per gallon and resold to labourers at nine shillings per gallon. On a few occasions supplies were distributed free of charge to encourage the men to stay on the work sites during the winter or during periods of illness.

The desire to build a canal rapidly and at a low cost resulted in several problems with labour. Low wages and deplorable living conditions provoked three demonstrations at Bytown in the spring of 1827. After the Royal

Engineers arrived, continuous military surveillance of work sites was instituted to avoid repetition of such incidents.

It is now interesting to calculate the quantity of goods that could be bought by the family of a labourer or a mason, taking into

account their daily wages and consulting the following conversion table as well as the list of prices of the products prevailing at that time.

12 pence (d)	1 shilling
1 shilling	25 cents
1 pound sterling	\$5.00
Beef (lb)	9d
Pork (lb)	5d
Coffee (lb)	8d
Corn (60 lb)	6s 3d
Butter (lb)	8s
Eggs (dz)	9d
Potatoes (bu)	3s
Peas (bu)	2s
Oats (34 lb)	2s 6d

Considering the fact that a horse was worth 15 pounds sterling, how many days of work would a labourer have had to put in before his family could purchase one? What of a mason, blacksmith or a carpenter? (reprinted with permission from STEAM AND STONE)

1783: A FORTNIGHT ON THE RIDEAU

On September 29, 1783, Lieutenant Gershom French, a veteran of the American Revolution, set off to "(explore) the Lands on the Ottawa River from Carillon to the Rideau and from the mouth of the River to its source, from thence to Ganoncoue and the same to its Fall into the St. Lawrence". Upon the completion of his trip on October 13, 1783, Lt. French submitted the first written account of the region that today is drained by the Rideau Canal.

Gershom French was born in the province of New York to a distinguished New England farming family. In 1776, just prior to the beginning of hostilities in the 13 colonies, French commenced business as a merchant. However, he soon exchanged these duties to take up the commission of lieutenant in the British Army where he served under John Peters, captain of the Queen's Loyal Rangers.

Described as a "brave, good subject", French fought

at the Second Battle of Saratoga in 1777 where the British were soundly defeated. During the retreat north, French was captured by the rebels but managed to escape both hanging and his captors to report for continued duty at Sorel, near Montreal, a base for provincial troops.

In 1781, a new corps, the Loyal Rangers, was created out of the amalgamation of the King's Loyal Americans and the Queen's Loyal Rangers. French was transferred to this new corps where

he continued to serve as lieutenant under Major-Commandant Edward Jessup. This corps was mainly comprised of frontiersmen and did considerable work for the Royal Engineers.

Following the American Revolution, one of the major problems for Sir Frederick Haldimand, Governor of Quebec, was settling the thousands of Loyalist immigrants who were fleeing north from religious and political persecution in the newly created United States. To assuage the debt of honor that he felt the British government owed these loyal subjects, Haldimand sent out several survey parties to examine various locations in present-day Ontario to see if they were suitable for agricultural settlements.

Due to his wartime experience in gaining enemy information in the Vermont and New Hampshire woods, Lt. French was one of the party leaders chosen. He was to explore and survey the lands flanking the ancient Indian canoe route that joined the already charted Lake Ontario and Ottawa River. With the aid of seven soldiers, two Canadians and one Indian guide, French set off from Carillon in two canoes.

French's journals describe the Rideau corridor to the summit as being very fertile with only a few swamps and feeder streams. There was plenty of, "very Tall and Straight [timber] without any underbrush, and...a Man will be able to clear, in the American method an Acre fit for seeding in eight days".

In spite of the necessary reconstruction the locks have aged well. Like the rest of the Rideau Canal, they are a testament to the dedication, ingenuity and hard labor of Lt. Colonel John By and his men. They were the creators of the biggest engineering project of its time in the British Empire. With proper care we will all be benefactors for years to come, as we visit this entrance to the Rideau Canal.

Simon Lunn and Christiane Bauer.

(From STEAM & STONE - Tales the Rideau Waterway)