

of in Canada. Having thought out some of the leading features of his scheme, Mr. Merritt made a survey of the district through which he deemed it most desirable for the canal to pass. The survey was rough, and very defective, but its results satisfied Mr. Merritt of the practicability of carrying out the scheme at a moderate cost. He presented to the Legislature a petition, signed by himself and most of the influential settlers in the neighbourhood, asking for an appropriation for a more accurate survey. The petition was successful, and a sum of two thousand pounds was voted for the purpose. This sum, however, was expended upon an injudicious survey, which, if acted upon, would have involved the construction of a canal nearly double the required length, and more than double the necessary cost. The project was accordingly suspended for about five years. During this interval Mr. Merritt was not idle, but spent a great deal of time in pondering over his project. In the spring of 1823 he conceived that he had brought it to perfection, and repaired to Niagara to get up an agitation on the subject. A subscription list was set on foot for the purpose of raising funds to pay for a new survey by a competent engineer. The necessary amount was soon raised, and the survey proceeded with. On the 10th of May the engineer's report was published, and at the next session of the Legislature, in February, 1824, an Act of Incorporation was procured. On the 12th of June Mr. George Keefer was elected President of the Company, the corporate style of which was, "The Welland Canal Company." Mr. Merritt was delegated to go to New York to induce capitalists to embark money in the undertaking, and started on his mission shortly afterwards. His efforts were to some extent successful, and on the 30th of November the first sod was turned by Mr. Keefer. The work of construction went steadily on during the next five years, and

on the 27th of November, 1829, the first two vessels passed through St. Catharines on their way to Buffalo, whither they arrived in due course. In the following July the canal was formally opened, and a brisk business at once began to be done upon it. In 1842 all the stock of the Company was purchased by Government, who thenceforward assumed the control of the enterprise. Under their auspices various enlargements and improvements have from time to time been effected. The commercial importance to the country of the Welland Canal is incalculable. The obstruction to trade between west and east caused by the Falls of Niagara is thereby entirely obviated, and the produce of the west is thereby enabled to pass down the St. Lawrence, and thence to the seaboard by water, without transshipment. Its value, moreover, is not confined to the facilities thus afforded, as there is a fall of about three hundred and thirty-four feet between the two lakes, and the hydraulic power thus gained has been turned to account by the inhabitants of the various villages along the banks of the canal. The construction of the canal, of course, gave a great impetus to St. Catharines. In 1826 the population of the village was 317. In 1831 the population had more than quadrupled, and in 1843 was 2,354.

In tracing the history of the great enterprise with which Mr. Merritt's name must ever continue to be associated, we have to some extent anticipated the course of his life. In 1832 he for the first time entered Parliament, having been elected to a seat in the Legislative Assembly by the electors of the county of Haldimand. He was placed on the Finance Committee, and forthwith made his mark as a useful and industrious member. His first speech in the House was in favour of free trade in grain and cattle with the United States. Another of his early speeches was in favour of a Bill for the abolition of imprisonment for debt.