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BACKGROUND OF THE ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY AND POWER PROJECTS

On June 26, 1959, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States of America, in a joint ceremony near Montreal, will open the St. Lawrence Seaway. On June 27, on the Saunders-Moses power dam joining Barnhart Island to the north shore of the river just west of Cornwall, Her Majesty will take part in a second international ceremony. These two ceremonies will mark the completion, after almost five years of actual construction work, of two monuments testifying to the spirit of co-operation that exists between Canada and the United States.

2. The St. Lawrence Seaway in its broadest sense is a deep waterway extending some 2300 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the head of the Great Lakes at the heart of North America; strictly speaking, however, within the meaning of the legislation which permitted construction to get underway, the St. Lawrence Seaway extends from Montreal Harbour to Lake Erie and includes the Welland Ship Canal.

3. In the early part of the sixteenth century the French explorer, Jacques Cartier, was turned back by the rushing waters of the Lachine Rapids just west of what is now Montreal and was thereby forced to abandon his dream of finding the Northwest Passage and the route to the rich and glamorous East. At various times during the intervening 300-odd years, canals have been dug and locks built around the natural barriers to navigation in the St. Lawrence River and in the waters connecting the Great Lakes. This activity was spurred on by the desire to make use of the economical water route which the waters of the Great Lakes Basin offered for the transportation of goods in and out of this important area of the continent. The first such canals were built in 1783 but were only two feet deep. By 1850, 9 foot canals had been completed in Canada right through to the Upper Lakes. By 1900, 14 feet was the regulating depth in these canals, although certain of them - Sault Ste. Marie, for example - were deeper. In 1932 Canada completed the Welland Ship Canal, 27 miles in length with a governing depth of 25 feet in some reaches. This canal and its eight locks overcomes the differences in level of 326 feet between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Its construction may be considered as the first and a decisive step in the construction of the present St. Lawrence Seaway.

4. The needs of commerce pointed to the desirability of providing even greater depths in the St. Lawrence Canals, its locks, and the connecting channels, and by 1959, as a result of the joint efforts of the Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Authority and the United States Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation, 27 foot depths were available from Montreal to Lake Erie. The improvements to the Welland Ship Canal between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie around the barrier of the Niagara Falls