

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



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HISTORIC DEVELOPMENTS ON ST. LAWRENCE

An address by Mrs. Ellen L. Fairclough, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, at the dinner on International Day, July 4, 1958, during the St. Lawrence Seaway inundation ceremonies, Cornwall, Ontario.

You are today celebrating the completion of one of the most important stages in the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project. With the creation of the huge body of water above Cornwall, the hydro authorities on both sides of the International boundary have a supply of potential power which will undoubtedly have most beneficial results in the development of the industrial area of Eastern Ontario and adjoining New York State.

With the filling of the huge reservoir which has been created out of the St. Lawrence Valley, a water head has now been reached which should soon be turning over the huge turbines in the power houses built by the Ontario Hydro Commission and the New York State Power Authority. The benefits of this additional power will undoubtedly be felt locally as well as throughout the hydro grill which covers this province.

Various Canadian and American public and governmental bodies have been involved in this week's operations. The Department of Transport has been concerned with the handling of shipping and the dismantling of the old canal system. Also involved have been the Ontario Hydro Commission and its U.S. counterpart, the New York State Power Authority; the St. Lawrence Seaway Power Authority and its American counterpart, the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation.

I suggest we try to look at this week's happenings in perspective in order to appreciate fully the significance of these historic developments.

The beginning of the end of this saga of international co-operation and achievement began on Monday morning, at 4:00 a.m. to be exact, when all shipping was excluded from the Department of Transport canal system in the area to be flooded and during the day commercial traffic was all moved out. In fact the last ship to be moved through the canals was the "Tecumseh" - an historic name appropriate for an historic occasion - with iron ore from Contrecoeur, Que. to Buffalo, N.Y., a happy augury of the traffic which will be moving through the new Seaway canals in increasing volume in the coming years.

Immediately, Department of Transport crews, some one hundred strong, drawn from the principal canals worked around the clock demolishing the old canal system. All machinery and electrical installations were removed, lock gates were unhinged and attached to floating markers, and buildings razed by fire, explosive or by demolition chain.

With the demolition of the coffer dam between Sheek and Barnhart Islands, the flooding began of the area to provide a head water for hydro power development. This has brought to a successful conclusion most of the construction work jointly carried out by the Ontario Hydro Commission and the New York State Power Commission.

Following the flooding, the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation of the United States, the counterpart of the Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, officially opened the newly constructed Seaway locks on the United States side of the International section of the river on Wednesday with appropriate ceremony. These are the Dwight D. Eisenhower Locks and the Bertrand H. Snell Locks.

Today, shipping was due to start operating again but instead of the old canals they will be using the new Seaway Locks at Iroquois, Eisenhower and Snell in the International Section of the Seaway. While large lakers are now able to come down all the way to Cornwall, the section of the Seaway between Cornwall and Montreal has still to be completed before through shipping of vessels drawing 27 feet of water is finally possible.

I have briefly outlined the historic stages marking the completion of the greater part of the St. Lawrence Seaway and power project. It is now possible for hydro power to go into operation and also for the Seaway to advance one stage further in its progress to sea.

With the flooding of the International Rapids Section of the river, a huge lake has now been created. Dimensions are still rather difficult to give to the decimal point until the water has reached its final height, but it is roughly estimated that the lake is 32 miles long, extending from Cornwall to the Iroquois dam, and has a width varying from one to four miles.

The navigational facilities provided in this power pool, which forms part of the Seaway project, have in most cases been placed during the past few days and a wide and well-marked channel today replaces all canals which formerly served the International Rapids Section of the St. Lawrence. Today, these rapids as well as the canals themselves lie under many feet of water.

Shortly before navigation closed last year, the completed Iroquois Lock was officially opened with the first ship entering the lock chamber. The ship was raised in the lock in five minutes, and passed through the upper gates, indicative of the speed of operation when larger "lakers" will be able to use the Seaway in its entirety.

The Iroquois Lock has a depth over sill of 30 feet, a width of 80 feet, and a usable length of 768 feet. The Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Bertrand H. Snell locks, like the other Seaway locks, have the same dimensions. The safety features of these locks, when approaching downstream from the Great Lakes is of interest to all. There is a wire-rope fender strung across the entrance and attached to huge drums. Should a vessel by some misadventure go out of control and strike the fender boom, the boom may sheer apart, but the wire rope fender will absorb in 70 feet the shock of a ship of as much as 40,000 tons, travelling at a speed of three miles per hour. There are four fenders at each lock, two to protect each set of gates from upstream and downstream. However, it is only in extremely rare cases of accident that the fenders will be called into play.

Perhaps it is almost a case of "Taking Coals to Newcastle" to tell a Cornwall gathering such as this about the St. Lawrence river in general and the Seaway project in particular. But I would like to draw attention to a few historic facts about navigation on the St. Lawrence.

From the early days of Canada, this river of yours has played a major role in transportation and the accounts of the travels of the intrepid adventurers, explorers and traders, whether French or English, are filled with excitement and interest and are a fruitful source of Canadian history.

The development of passenger and freight traffic also followed the Canadian water routes from Quebec and Montreal up the St. Lawrence river to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. On these routes, however, an elaborate system of portages was required and no improvement in this system took place until canals were built to bypass the rapids and the other obstacles to navigation.

The first attempt to build a canal in Canada was made in the early part of the eighteenth century. The Sulpician order attempted to construct a shallow canal to bypass the Lachine Rapids, but due to a lack of funds, the project was never completed. The first successful project was the series of locks and canals built by the Royal Engineers between 1779 and 1783 to provide 2-foot draft navigation between Lake St. Louis and Lake St. Francis.

The advent of the steamship to Canada in the early 1800's brought about a real improvement in transportation on the St. Lawrence and on the lakes, but it was still necessary to resort to various time-consuming expedients to surmount the obstacles on the waterways. Frequently stage coaches and flat-bottom "Durham" boats were used in the portaging operations in conjunction with the steamships.

Only minor canal works were carried on from time to time until 1821 when the building of a 5-foot canal at Lachine was undertaken, and in 1825 when private interests embarked on the building of the Welland Canal to provide eight foot navigation between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Since then, Canada has been engaged, almost without interruption, in the extension and development of her system of canals, the main purpose being to provide navigation facilities from Montreal through to the Great Lakes.

And now in July, 1958, we find ourselves engaged, with the United States, in navigating a man-made lake, the construction of which was one of the greatest engineering feats of the day. The St. Lawrence Seaway is a vital part of the St.-Lawrence-Great Lakes waterway which has rightly been described as the world's greatest inland navigation system, which extends more than 2,000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the western end of Lake Superior and overcomes a difference of 600 feet in water levels.

In closing, I would like to say that in my opinion all Canadians are taking the greatest interest in what has been accomplished this week and when the Seaway is completed next year and opened to navigation, we will have every cause to take pride in the engineering achievement of our engineers.

From a navigation standpoint, development of the St. Lawrence Seaway project will meet a long-standing need to extend the benefits of low-cost transportation to industry. It will be of particular benefit to industries having high transportation costs relative to their value, and should enhance Canada's position in competitive domestic and world markets.

Thus the Seaway will facilitate foreign trade, which is so essential to Canada's economic well-being as a nation. Reduced transportation costs will not only enable Canada to reach more distant markets but will more firmly entrench us in the markets we now hold.

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