

The North West Company Lock 1797 & 1896

Location

The structure known as the North West Company Lock is located on property currently owned by the St. Marys Paper Company Ltd. It is situated north of the St. Marys Paper Ltd. office building at 75 Huron Street and adjacent to the west side of Huron Street. (Map - Appendix # 2) Two cairns have been erected on either side of the lock, one with a plaque commemorating the site of the first Sault Ste. Marie Canal and the other in memory of the men of Abitibi Power and Paper Company who gave their lives in WWII.

Description

The structure known as the North West Company Lock is actually two structures built almost 100 years apart. The stone replica lock which we see today was built by F. H. Clergue in 1896 and lies over the timber floor and framework of the original lock built in 1797 by the North West Company. (Photo - Appendix #3)

Constructed about 1797 by the North West Company, the original lock was part of a water system used to transport laden bateaux around the rapids. From a report dated September 10, 1802 by Captain Bruyeres of the Royal Engineers we know that the water system consisted of a wharf at the lower entrance to the lock and an approach which had been cleared of boulders (B on Map- Appendix #4), a lock that raised the bateaux 9 feet with a gate at the lower end that let down with a windlass and two folding gates at the upper end with a sluice (A on map - Appendix #4), a wooden trough about 300 feet in length which carried water from the canal to the lock, a canal with a floor of round logs to aid in the dragging of the boats over rough spots (dotted line on Map - Appendix #4) and a dam to raise the water level (C on Map - Appendix #4). The canal was 2580 feet in length with a wooden pathway running alongside which was used by oxen to track the boats through the locks. (Report on the Establishment formed on the North Shore contiguous to the Falls of St. Mary by the North West Company Trading to the Indian Country, Captain R. H. Bruyeres, Royal Engineers, Sept. 10, 1802; vertical file 002 Sault Ste. Marie Public Library).

From Captain Bruyeres report we know that the lock was in use in 1802. We do not know how long the lock continued to be in use, however, if it was still in existence in 1814, it would have been burned along with all the other buildings at the fur trade post when Sault Ste. Marie was attacked by the Americans in that year.

In 1886 Judge Steere & Mr. Wheeler of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and Joseph Cozens of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario succeeded in uncovering the ruins of the lock and found its wooden floor and foundation intact. "The floor of the lock is forty feet long and eight feet nine inches in width. It is made of plank two inches thick running longitudinally. They are fastened to traverse foundation timbers with wooden pins shown at 'B'. There are thirteen planks, the seventh or middle one being narrower than the others. The lower transverse timber formed the sill for the

gate. It is twelve inches square. On top of this is pinned a piece of oak eight inches wide and four inches thick. It is probable that this piece was the cleat against which the lower edge of the gate rested when closed. There are mortises in each end of this timber shown at 'A'. These mortises, the countersinking and notch in the floor plank seem to indicate that vertical timbers fourteen inches square stood at these points." (Report on Canadian Archives, 1889, P. XXXVIII) A lithograph illustrating their findings was included in the Report on the Canadian Archives, 1889. (Appendix #5)

In 1896, F. H. Clergue upon hearing about the canal and lock searched out its location and had it excavated. He found the entire framework and bottom of the lock in sound condition, however, the sides and ends had fallen in. Clergue had a replica lock built over top of the old North West Company Lock according to its original design but to make the structure more permanent he had stone walls erected instead of replacing the wooden timbers. Clergue also installed a miniature head and tail gate, a water pipe and overflow to permit flowing water. He also had the structure enclosed with an iron gate. Clergue gave instructions that the original floor timbers were to be left in their position. Clergue recollected that if the water was drawn off and the present floor taken up, that the original planking and sills would be found. (Sault Star , July 7, 1922) (Photographs -Appendix # 6 & 7).

Historical Significance

The epic story of the transcontinental fur trade route and its national significance to the history and development of Canada has been commemorated throughout Canada with plaques and national historic sites. The North West Company Lock is the only remaining link to this past still in situated in Sault Ste. Marie. In 1923 during the Discovery Week Celebrations which marked the 250th Anniversary of Brule's arrival to the St. Marys Rapids, the Historic Sites and Monuments of Canada recognized the historic significance of the North West Company Canal and Lock by installing a cairn and plaque. (Appendix #8) This first canal and lock was the precursor of the extensive system of locks which would be developed through the rapids over the next two centuries.

The lock is first recorded on a map by Theodore de Pincier in 1797. (Appendix # 9) In 1802 a dispute over the use of the lock arose between the North West Company and the X Y Company. Captain R. H. Bruyeres of the Royal Engineers sent a report dated September 10, 1802 detailing the situation at Sault Ste. Marie and describing the construction and operation of the canal. No documents have been found which record the activities at the canal in the years following 1802, however, it is assumed that if the canal was still in existence in 1814, that it would have been burned during the American raid on Sault Ste. Marie in that year.

Reference to the lock and canal is next found in the Report on Canadian Archives, 1889, by Douglas Brymner where he includes an account of an expedition led by Judge Steere and Mr. A. S. Wheeler, General Superintendent of the St. Marys Falls Canal, from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and Joseph Cozens, Provincial Land Surveyor from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Their excavations revealed the floor and foundation of the lock in perfect condition. A sketch of their finding accompanied the report.

When the existence of the lock was brought to the attention of F. H. Clergue, he had the structure uncovered and a stone replica of the lock built on the site while preserving the remains of the original lock. F. H. Clergue transformed Sault Ste. Marie into an industrial centre and has been recognized as a nationally significant person with the erection of a plaque by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1994. It is a reflection of Clergue's vision and the scope of his interests that while developing an industrial complex based on the newest technology, he would preserve the original lock timbers and construct a replica stone lock.

Conclusion

The Sault Ste. Marie L.A.C.A.C. after careful review recommends that the structure known as the North West Company Lock be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. The reasons for designation are:

- The lock was a part of the transcontinental fur trade route and is significant as it provides a link to the history of the fur trade in Canada and has been recognized by the Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada with a plaque as being of national significance.
- The wooden floors and timbers of the original lock built in 1797 have been preserved beneath the replica lock making the lock the oldest heritage structures in Sault Ste. Marie.
- The replica lock was built in 1896 by F. H. Clergue, who has been recognized as a nationally significant person for his development of the industrial complex in Sault Ste. Marie, and is a reflection of Clergue's acknowledgment of the historical importance of the area.

Introduction

The Sault Ste. Marie Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (L.A.C.A.C.) is comprised of members interested in heritage conservation with expertise in a number of related fields such as local history and architecture. The members are appointed by Council and recommend to Council significant properties of historical and/or architectural value for designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Sault Ste. Marie LACAC has examined the structure known as the old North West Company Lock situated on the property of St. Marys Paper Ltd. on Huron Street and recommends to Council that this structure be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. L.A.C.A.C. has consulted with the current owner. St. Marys Paper Ltd., and the owner has indicated that they have no objection to the designation of this structure. (Appendix #1)

An information sheet outlining the designation process has also been included with this report.

Bibliography

Bruyeres, R. H. Capt. Royal Engineers; Report on the Establishment formed on the North Shore contiguous to the Falls of St. Mary by the North West Company Trading to the Indian Country, September 10, 1802; National Archives of Canada, "C" Series 382, Ordnance and Engineer Reports dated 1795 - 1802- photocopy, vertical file 002, Sault Ste. Marie Public Library.

Brymnner, Douglas; Report on Canadian Archive, 1889, Ottawa, Brown Chamerlin Printers

Sault Star, July 7, 1922

SAULT STE. MARIE

L.A.C.A.C.

DESIGNATION REPORT

NORTH WEST COMPANY LOCK
1797 & 1896

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

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