

This year the centenary of the first American locks was celebrated at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Dr. Bald here sketches the history of the two towns—American and Canadian—beside the rapids.

St. Lusson takes possession of the West for France—a ceremony enacted at the Sault in 1671. From the drawing by C. W. Jefferys, by courtesy of Imperial Oil Ltd.



THE STORY OF THE SAULT

by F. CLEVER BALD

THE inhabitants of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, were early astir on June 18, 1855. News had come that the *Illinois* was steaming up the St. Mary's River. The word was passed from neighbour to neighbour. Little groups of excited persons chatted together in the streets, and volunteer lookouts took up the watch for the approaching ship.

During two years the villagers had lived with the great engineering work that was to provide a channel for ships between Lake Superior and the lower lakes. Many had believed that it would never be completed; others hoped that the attempt would fail, for their livelihood depended on portaging goods around the rapids.

But the task had been finished within the two-year period required by the Legislature, and Michigan officials had accepted the canal and the locks in the name of the state from the builders, the St. Mary's Falls Ship Canal Company. All was in readiness for the opening of navigation.

When the *Illinois* appeared, the banks of the canal were lined with spectators. According to *The Lake Superior Journal*, the local newspaper, more than 1,000 persons saw the first ship locked through. The occasion was enlivened by a band "discoursing sweet music."

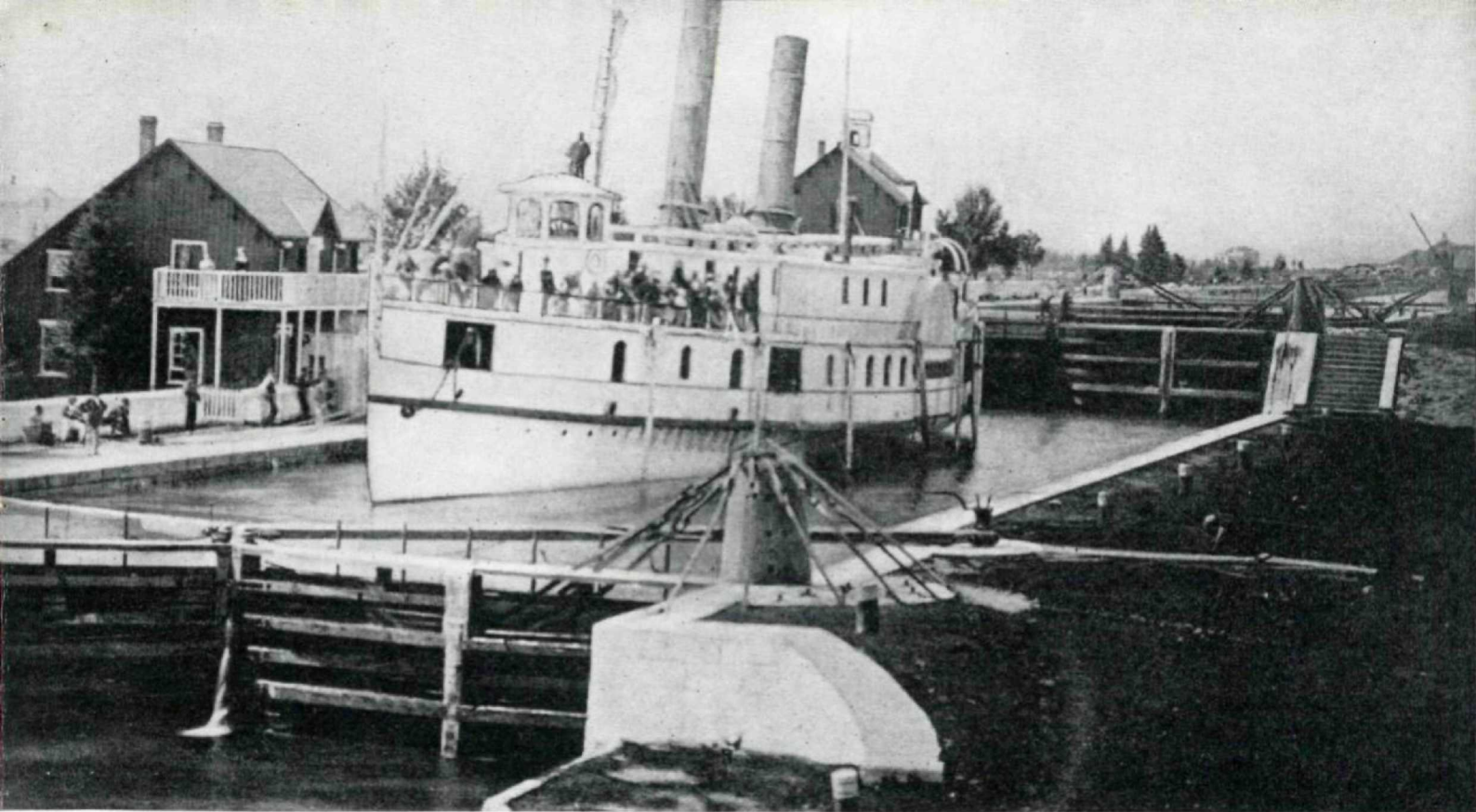
At eleven a.m. the *Illinois* approached the lowest gates. Men tugged at the windlass but it refused to open. A block of wood that had become wedged under one of the gates was removed, the gates swung open, and the ship entered. They were closed, water was let in, and the *Illinois* rose to the level of the upper lock. The middle gates swung open. They were closed, water was admitted, and the ship soon reached the level of Lake Superior. Then the uppermost gates were opened and the *Illinois* steamed into the canal on the Lake Superior level.

Only the great caisson gate, built to protect the locks, now remained to be passed. After some delay caused by a pile of earth on the bed of the canal, the ship steamed out into Lake Superior and rockets were fired to celebrate the first passage through the locks. Later, the first downward bound ship, the *Baltimore*, passed through. At last the Great Lakes were united.

The outlet of Lake Superior had been discovered as early as 1622 by a Frenchman, Etienne Brulé. Seeking a waterway to the Pacific, this hardy protégé of Samuel de Champlain had reached the Sault and Lake Superior by way of the Ottawa and Lake Huron. For centuries the Chippewa had camped periodically beside the tumbling waters and caught plentiful supplies of whitefish. Jesuit

The Hudson's Bay post at the Sault. From a water colour by Wm. Armstrong in the Toronto Public Library, sketched in 1853.





The first lock, built in 1855.

Michigan Historical Commission

missionaries, Fathers Isaac Jogues and Charles Raymbault, found them there in 1641 and preached the gospel to them. The priests named the rapids the *Sault de Sainte Marie*. Later, the name was shortened to Sault Ste. Marie, and still later it became the Soo.

Furs were the principal product for export from New France. Indians from the upper lakes brought them to Montreal in the spring by way of the Ottawa River route. In 1654 hoping to encourage a steady traffic, the Governor sent Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, and a companion to accompany the Indians on their return trip. Not until 1656 did they again see Montreal. With them they brought a great fleet of canoes loaded with fine furs. Having seen the riches of the upper country, Groseilliers was eager to return. Although the Governor denied his request for permission to go, he and his young brother-in-law, Pierre Esprit Radisson, left secretly with the Indians in the summer of 1659.

At the Sault they halted and built shelters to rest a while after their labours. They found the water teeming with whitefish, and there were deer, bears, and beavers aplenty for food and furs. Radisson declared that "it was to us like a terrestrial paradise." Revelling in the bounty of nature, in the freedom of the wilderness, and in the respect shown them by the Indians, he exulted: "We weare Cesars, being nobody to contradict us."

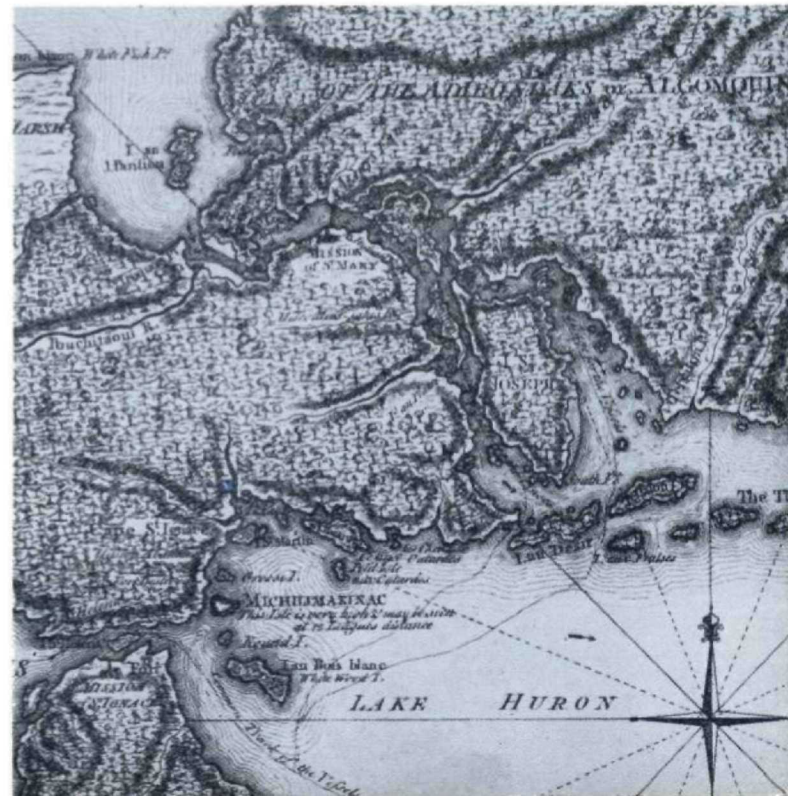
North of Lake Superior Groseilliers and Radisson heard from the Indians about Hudson Bay and the rivers which flowed into it. The rest of their story—leading up to their visit to London which resulted in the foundation of the Hudson's Bay Company—is too well known to repeat here.

Although the French had rejected the plan of Groseilliers and Radisson, they were aware of the value of the north

country and of the danger from the English. Jean Talon, the intendant of New France, now acted to obtain the north country for France. He dispatched Nicolas Perrot to conduct as many Indians as possible to the Sault, where Father Jacques Marquette had established a mission in 1668, and François Daumont, Sieur de St. Lussion, to take possession for the King of France.

On June 14, 1671, Indians from fifteen tribes gathered on a grassy slope near the foot of the rapids. From the mission enclosure, not far away, emerged a little procession.

Part of a "Plan of the Straits of St. Mary and Michilimakinac" printed in the 18th century. From the Coverdale Collection. C.S.L.



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At the head were four Jesuit missionaries in sombre black robes. Following them came St. Luson in the blue and white uniform of an army officer of France, and *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* in leggings and hunting shirts, with brightly coloured sashes around their waists.

Before the audience of Indians, the Frenchmen halted. They set up a cross and a post to which was affixed the royal arms. St. Luson drew his sword and with his left hand picked up a piece of sod, a symbol of the soil. Raising his sword in his right hand, he cried out in a loud voice that he claimed for Louis XIV all lands discovered and to be discovered to the seas of the north, west, and south. The Frenchmen fired their guns and shouted "*Vive le Roi.*" After an address by St. Luson, translated for the Indians, the Frenchmen signed the official report and the chiefs affixed their totems. Presents were given to the natives, and they reciprocated with bundles of rich furs. A great bonfire in the evening closed the proceedings. By this ceremony all the interior of North America became in theory part of the realm of Louis XIV.

Sault Ste. Marie itself became an important resting place for explorers, hunters, *voyageurs*, Indians, and missionaries passing to and from the north and west. Among them were Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette, discoverers of the Mississippi, Sieur Dulhut, master of the fierce Sioux, and La Vérendrye, who discovered Lake Winnipeg and ranged far beyond in his search for the western ocean.

The British had never recognized the French claim to the interior of the continent. Fur traders, in New York especially, tried to turn the Indians from their French attachment and obtain a share of the rich harvest from the upper lakes. Recognizing the strategic importance of the Sault for preventing British infiltration, the Governor of New France in 1750 sent Louis le Gardeur, Sieur de Repentigny, to build a fort there. The next year the king granted to Repentigny and to Captain Louis de Bonne a seigniorship eighteen miles square on the south bank of the St. Mary's River. Repentigny, who spent part of each year at the Sault, established Jean Baptiste Cadotte and his Indian wife on the land, and was successful in dealing with the Chippewa, bringing them back to their French allegiance.

The series of wars between France and Great Britain which had begun in 1689 was now drawing to a close. At Montreal in 1760, Governor Vaudreuil signed the capitulation which gave the British control of Canada. Repentigny and others from the West had fought valiantly in the defence of Quebec. Heartsick because his beloved New France had fallen into alien hands, Repentigny abandoned the seigniorship and went to France. Cadotte and his wife remained in the little fort at the Sault.

After the British occupied the western posts, a small detachment garrisoned the fort briefly in 1762. A fire, which destroyed all buildings other than Cadotte's house, caused the soldiers to withdraw to Fort Michilimackinac, now Mackinaw City.

The transfer of sovereignty made little change in the fur trade. *Coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* continued their

accustomed activities, and the packs as before were sent down to Montreal. Now, however, British merchants and clerks directed the trading. Alexander Henry, after escaping from the massacre at Fort Michilimackinac in June 1763, entered into partnership with Cadotte at the Sault.

Not until 1796 did the British government relinquish the western posts to the Americans. Then the garrison, on leaving Mackinac Island, moved to a new fort on St. Joseph Island in the St. Mary's River where they were able to retain the loyalty of the northern Indians.

Near the close of the Revolutionary War, some Montreal merchants had organized the North West Company, and the Sault was one of their important posts. On the Canadian side in 1797 they dug a canal and built a lock for canoes and *bateaux*. Oxen drew the small craft through the waterway. On the south bank of the river John Johnston was their factor, and on the north bank, Charles Oakes Ermatinger. Because there was no American garrison nearer than Mackinac Island, the Sault in fact remained under British control.

Since it was on the one and only highway between the St. Lawrence and the West, all travellers to and from the head of the lakes and beyond had to pass through the Sault, and men whose names have now become famous in western history paused there on their long voyages by canoe—men like Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the Frobishers, the Henrys, Peter Pond, John McLoughlin, the McGilivrays, Sir George Simpson, James Douglas, John Rowand, Thomas Simpson, John Rae, the Deases, Robert Campbell, John Franklin, George Back, John Palliser, Paul Kane, and scores of others.

During the War of 1812, Johnston, Ermatinger and others from the Sault were in the invading force from St. Joseph Island which captured Fort Mackinac. In retaliation, in 1814 the American detachment which penetrated to the Sault destroyed the furs and the lock of the North West Company and Johnston's merchandise. But Indians and whites on both sides of the St. Mary's remained loyal to the British.

After the Treaty of Ghent, the British garrison relinquished Fort Mackinac to the Americans and built a new fort on Drummond Island, believing that St. Joseph Island would be on the American side when the international boundary was run. As a matter of fact, the reverse happened, but until 1828 Drummond Island was a place of resort for the northern Indians.

Desiring to examine the resources of Michigan Territory and to establish American authority in the north, Governor Lewis Cass led an expedition in 1820 along the shores of Lake Huron, Lake Superior, and Lake Michigan. At Sault Ste. Marie he called the Chippewa chiefs to a parley in his tent and asked them to confirm a previous grant to a tract of land so that the United States could build a fort. The Indians were in an ugly mood. Sassaba, a chief wearing a British uniform coat, rose from his seat, contemptuously kicked aside the presents which Cass had brought, and stalked haughtily from the tent. The parley broke up.

Paul Kane's painting of an Indian camp on the American side of the rapids, sketched in the year 1846.
Royal Ontario Museum



A few minutes later Cass was informed that the Union Jack had been raised at the nearby Indian encampment. Unarmed, and taking with him only his interpreter, the governor strode across the intervening space, tore down the flag, and informed the astonished savages that only the Stars and Stripes were permitted on American soil.

The Indians sent away their women and children, and the governor's little force prepared for battle. John Johnston was away from home. Mrs. Johnston, daughter of Chief Wabojee, in spite of her natural feelings, acted decisively for peace. She warned the excited Indians that if they attacked the Americans, the United States government would surely destroy them. Accepting her advice, they agreed to another meeting and made the cession.

Two years later General Hugh Brady led a detachment to the Sault and erected Fort Brady on the side of Repentigny's stockade. Although the British remained on Drummond Island for six more years, American authority began to be felt in the Lake Superior country.

After the North West Company was absorbed by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, the post on the north shore of the Sault continued to be an important depot. On the south shore the American Fur Company had an office and a warehouse. Each built small vessels which plied Lake Superior, carrying fish, furs, merchandise, and supplies. But all cargoes, whether going up or coming down, had to be transhipped at the Sault.

The Michigan Legislature in 1837, following the advice of the youthful governor, Stevens Thomson Mason, provided for an extensive programme of canal and railroad building. One project was a series of three locks at Sault Ste. Marie to permit ships to pass to and from Lake Superior. In 1839 a contractor set men to work digging a canal. Although warned by the commandant of Fort Brady that they must not intersect a mill race, he directed them to do just that. A file of soldiers with fixed bayonets drove the workers from the ground, and the contractor

embarked for Detroit. In spite of an amicable adjustment between Michigan and the United States government, he could not be persuaded to resume operations. It is believed that he found the job not to his liking and deliberately sought ejectment by the military.

A canal in 1839 would have been a convenience; during the late '40s and early '50s it became a necessity. The copper rush to the Upper Peninsula and the opening of iron mines in the Marquette region increased the traffic on Lake Superior. To carry the cargoes, the schooner *Algonquin* was dragged across the portage at the Sault during the winter of 1839-40. Five years later the propeller steamer *Independence* made the same journey overland, and the sidewheeler *Julia Palmer* followed the next year. Goods, however, had to be discharged and loaded as before. A tramway, on which cars were drawn by horses, was constructed in 1850 and facilitated portaging.

Michigan senators introduced bill after bill to provide national assistance for constructing canal and locks. Moved either by ignorance or by prejudice, Henry Clay of Kentucky opposed the project as "a work quite beyond the remotest settlement of the United States, if not in the moon." Finally, in 1852 Congress granted Michigan 750,000 acres of public land as a subsidy.

When the law was passed, Charles T. Harvey, a young salesman for the Fairbanks Scale Company of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, was at the Sault. He had visited the mines of the Upper Peninsula, and he had seen the magnificent stands of white pine. Writing enthusiastically about the prospects for profit, which would increase if a canal were built, he urged his employers, the Fairbanks brothers, to organize a company to build the canal. Trusting his judgment, they induced other eastern capitalists to join them in the St. Mary's Falls Ship Canal Company. Harvey enlisted the aid of James F. Joy of Detroit and William A. Burt in putting a bill through the Michigan Legislature early in 1853, providing for the construction of the canal

and the awarding of the land to the builders. The law required that the locks be 350 feet long by 70 feet wide, and that the work must be completed to the satisfaction of the state authorities within two years.

The St. Mary's Falls Ship Canal Company was awarded the contract and Harvey was appointed its general agent. Gathering men and supplies in Detroit, he sailed for the Sault and broke ground on June 4, 1853. Tirelessly he laboured to house and feed his men—at one time 1,600 of them—and to find practical solutions for problems as they arose. His perseverance and ingenuity overcame both adverse natural conditions and technical difficulties. Canal and locks were completed on schedule. Two locks in tandem raised or lowered ships eighteen feet.

The total cost of the work was \$999,802.46. Harvey himself selected 140,000 acres of the best mineral and pine land in the Upper Peninsula, and others designated the remainder in the pine land of the Lower Peninsula. The



The American locks today, looking upstream.

company faithfully fulfilled the terms of its contract, and was richly reimbursed for its investment. The locks were used until 1887 when they were dismantled and replaced with a single larger one.

The new canal opened on June 18, 1855. During the first year 14,503 tons of freight were locked through. Ten years later the tonnage was 284,350, and the total reached 1,505,784 tons in 1875. Cargoes consisted largely of copper, iron ore, and wheat. The state appointed a superintendent in charge of the canal, and tolls were charged to provide funds for maintenance.

Increasing traffic made additional facilities necessary. The Weitzel Lock was completed in 1881, and in the same year the State Locks and the canal were transferred by Michigan to the United States government. Tolls were abolished, and ships passed through free of charge. The volume of traffic continued to grow, and in 1896 the State Locks were replaced by the Poe Lock. In the same year the Canadian government completed a canal and a lock, which for several years was the longest on the continent.

Port Arthur and Fort William shipped wheat from the prairie provinces of Canada; Duluth, and Superior, shipped wheat from the prairie states and iron ore from the Mesabi and the Vermilion ranges; and Ashland, and Marquette shipped iron ore from the mines of Michigan. All these cargoes passed through the locks at the Sault. The great industrial development of the United States was based on steel made from iron ore carried from the upper lakes region by inexpensive water transportation.

While this development was taking place, mainly on the American side of the river, another kind of development was being carried out on the Canadian side. In the 1890s a Philadelphia industrialist F. H. Clergue, crossed the International Bridge and saw the waters of the largest lake in the world tumbling unharnessed down the mighty rapids. He therefore proceeded to form a company and to build a large hydro-electric power plant on the Michigan side, and on the Ontario side another power house, a pulp and paper mill, and a steel plant; and in order to bring in iron ore and pulpwood from the wilderness north of the Sault, he began to build the Algoma Central and Hudson Bay Railway.

These industries were operated by the Lake Superior Corporation, the capital of which at one time exceeded that of the C.P.R. Later the corporation fell on evil days; but now all these industries are flourishing, and on them the prosperity of the Canadian Sault largely depends. They have made Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, the only Canadian border city which is larger than its American counterpart.

Larger ships and steadily increasing traffic resulted in the building of the Davis Lock, opened for service in 1914, and of the Sabin Lock in 1919. Both are 1,350 feet long. The first helped provide raw materials for munitions during World War I, and the second aided in the industrial growth of the 1920s. For many years the Sault canals have carried greater annual tonnage than the Panama and the Suez canals combined.

Demands for greater quantities of grain, copper and iron ore during World War II caused the removal of the old Weitzel Lock and its replacement by the MacArthur Lock. Because the canals and locks were vital to the safety of the United Nations, the Sault was the most heavily guarded place in North America. Ground troops patrolled the area, captive balloons dotted the sky, anti-aircraft crews were always on the alert, and fighter planes on nearby fields were ready to take off to destroy enemy bombers which might appear. Fortunately, the locks faithfully performed the service demanded of them, and they were essential factors in winning the war.

Although Sault Ste. Marie has changed greatly during the past century, the canals and locks are still the chief reason for the existence of the city on the American side. The greeting by townspeople of the *Illinois* in 1855 set a precedent which has been followed ever since. Today, the first ship through in the spring is met by an assemblage of residents and by a band "discoursing sweet music." The mayor presents a gift to the captain, and once again the locks take up the performance of their vital service.*