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ST. OURS AND NAVIGATION ON THE LOWER RICHELIEU RIVER IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY: Documentary Problems and Solutions

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The questions surrounding navigation at St. Ours and on the lower Richelieu in the 1850s are part of a larger historical context that I have been examining for some time: the local and regional impact of the St. Ours lock. If I have chosen to underline this aspect of my research in this report, it is because it seemed to me that its documentary value deserved to be more widely known, partly of course because of the problems it raised, but particularly for the answers it provided.

The following pages are not intended to give a critical review of all of the documentary sources likely to be helpful in studying navigation on the lower Richelieu River in the mid-19th century. In fact, only a few of them will be presented, and these have been selected not simply for the abundance of information they contain, but primarily because they are original and previously untapped sources. These documents will undoubtedly prove useful to other researchers, even in lines of research that are quite different.¹

St. Ours: A Village and a Lock

From their inauguration in September 1849, the lock and dam at St. Ours contributed to making the Richelieu River navigable, thus assisting the nine locks of the Chambly Canal (in service since 1843) in the task of connecting the St. Lawrence River and Lake Champlain. The St. Ours lock was situated on the east bank of the Richelieu, 52 kilometres below Chambly and 23 kilometres above Sorel.

Two kilometres farther downstream, still on the east bank of the river, stood the village for which the lock was named. Like all of the settlements along the banks of the lower Richelieu at that period, St. Ours, with a population of about 4000 people, including its parish, owed its prosperity to its very productive farmlands. The wheat, oats and peas raised by the local and regional farmers provided a living for prosperous merchants in the village itself, while they, in turn, operated a very lucrative trade with the urban and industrial centres along the St. Lawrence.

Since it was somewhat remote from the central part of the river marked by the towns of Chambly and St. Jean, and seemed to be lost in the reaches of the lower Richelieu, lying concealed between the shoreline and the little Ile d'Avard, the St. Ours lock has received far less attention throughout its existence than the Chambly Canal; it was looked on as just another lock — the tenth — or a mere adjunct to the larger canal system.

For the past several months I have been studying various aspects of the



Richelieu canal system, in particular its commercial use and the operating staff,² and from the beginning my attention was drawn to the special and important contribution of the St. Ours lock. From the commercial point of view, two factors are largely responsible for the specific role of this lock in inland navigation, namely its location and its size.

Geography and Structure of a Lock

Well before the middle of the 19th century and the building of canals on the Richelieu, a thriving trade had developed along this waterway. On the Lower Richelieu, ships could go no farther than the falls at Chambly, which marked the southern limits of this shipping route, a factor that certainly served to define the geographical notion of the lower Richelieu. During the summer months even less of the river was navigable, and any boat worthy of the name usually did not go farther upriver than St. Ours, where its cargo had to be trans-shipped.

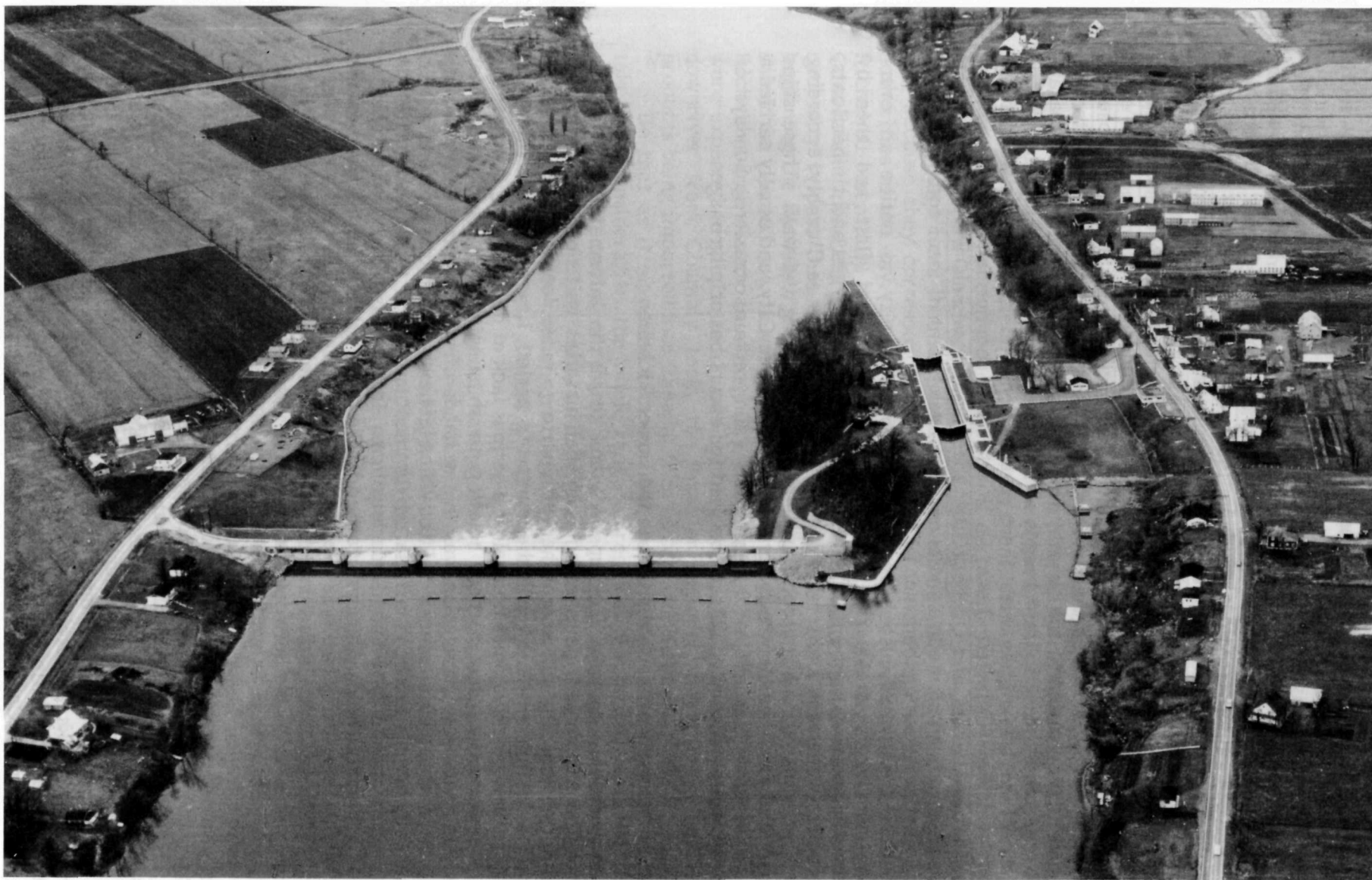
Between 1730 and 1830 the lower Richelieu was commercially oriented toward the St. Lawrence valley, except for timber from Vermont which was floated downriver in rafts to the St. Lawrence, particularly in the spring, when water levels were at their highest. From the Chambly basin to Sorel, taking in such productive and prosperous parishes as St. Mathias, St. Hilaire, St. Charles, St. Denis, St. Antoine and St. Ours, a communications and trade network using the river was formed very early, both among these villages and with the towns spread out along the St. Lawrence from Montreal to Quebec. This network was so well-structured that its basic outline remained largely unchanged, even after the Chambly Canal was built. In point of fact, with the construction of the St. Ours dam and lock, the improvement in navigation on the lower Richelieu made it easier to maintain this commercial orientation. Indeed, after 1849, ships sailing from St. Ours to the Chambly basin could count on a navigable depth of at least seven feet.

There are historical and geographical reasons for the importance of the St. Ours lock, but there are structural ones as well. The nine locks of the Chambly Canal, which came into use in 1843, were about 122 feet by 23.5 feet, with a depth of hardly more than six feet of water over the sill, but the one built at St. Ours six years later could be used by many more vessels and was considerably more advantageous for it measured 200 feet by 40 feet with seven feet of water over the sill.

For various economic and political reasons, the canal administrators did not enlarge the locks of the Chambly Canal, in spite of the repeated complaints of Canadian and American boatmen and merchants. Consequently, this waterway soon became a bottleneck for vessels, particularly steamers, which, in that era of rapid technological change, kept on getting larger.

Why then was this state of affairs allowed to go on? Apparently it was precisely because the St. Ours lock made it possible to arrive at an acceptable modus operandi, which can be briefly explained as follows. In the 19th century the main Canadian-American trade along the Richelieu (which had prompted the canalization of the river) consisted of two major commodities: Canadian timber exported to the U.S., and coal from Pennsylvania and other neighbouring states brought in to the St. Lawrence valley. These products were mainly carried by barges, which were extremely well-suited to canal transport.

If the steamers towing these barges had been unable to get into the Chambly Canal at either end, i.e., at Chambly and St. Jean, it could then be said that the limited dimensions of the canal locks would have seriously affected this international trade. But thanks to its lock and dam, St. Ours solved this problem on the lower Richelieu.



The lock and dam at St. Ours, looking north. This photograph, taken in 1974, shows the lock built in 1933 and the dam constructed in 1969, on either side of the Ile d'Avard. The village of St. Ours, not shown in the photograph, is situated on the eastern bank of the Richelieu, about two kilometres north of the lock. (Photo courtesy Studio Lausanne for Parks Canada, 1974.)

St. Ours or Inland Shipping in all its Forms

The preceding analysis leads to a fundamental and decisive observation. For the complete and detailed study of commercial navigation on the Richelieu, St. Ours constitutes a much better observation point than the Chambly Canal. On the one hand, the considerable international trade in timber and coal, essentially in transit on the Richelieu, ran the entire length of the river, and obviously passed through St. Ours as well as St. Jean. Moreover, the lock on the lower Richelieu was used by a whole range of vessels, carrying on various activities, which were often restricted to this part of the waterway for the reasons already mentioned.

In the second half of the 19th century, any alert and interested observer stationed near the St. Ours lock would have been able to appreciate the full extent of the commercial navigation of the time by following the development of the disparate collection of sailing vessels, from barges and scows through various kinds of sloops and schooners to brigantines with their greater tonnage. Plying back and forth between the lower Richelieu, Lake St. Pierre and commercial centres such as Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Quebec City, these sailing vessels were suited to all types of cargo and contributed to the economic development of local communities as well as the entire region of the lower Richelieu.

Our observer would also have had ample opportunity to notice an ever-increasing number of steamers, driven by paddlewheels at first and then by propellers. In addition to the specialized tugboats towing barges and timberfloats, many steamers went back and forth along the Richelieu as far as Chambly, according to generally regular schedules, docking at parishes all along the way. These ships were registered at either Montreal, Sorel, or even Quebec City, and usually carried a varied cargo as well as about 20 passengers. On certain occasions, Sundays or holidays, for example, they could even be used for excursions or pilgrimages.

Difficulties in Documenting Navigation on the Lower Richelieu

It is relatively easy to pick up here and there the information just given; monographs on the various parishes and regional histories quite often contain this kind of information. But any researcher wishing to go more deeply into one or more aspects of navigation on the lower Richelieu at this period, i.e., toward the middle of the 19th century, quickly comes up against a serious lack of documentary sources. At present there are very few records relating to shipping companies of the time; moreover, in those days navigation was in the hands of small independent boatmen and local merchants whose commercial activities left even fewer traces.

One might wish to check official government statistics to find some details about the trade and shipping that concern us here. In that case, perhaps it would be best to be guided by the conclusions reached by Gérald Tulchinsky in his study on the Compagnie du Richelieu between 1845 and 1854:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine precisely the volume of trade between the ports along the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu, as well as the position occupied by Montreal in this trade. The available statistics on the Richelieu only apply to the Chambly Canal and the port of St. Jean; they tell us nothing about the transport of passengers and cargo between the villages along the Richelieu and the city of Montreal. The shipping companies' files containing this invaluable information have disappeared. [Translation.]³

In fact, the statisticians of the ministries or offices responsible for canals in the 19th century (Public Works and Railways and Canals) hardly ever saw any reason to separate information relating to the traffic passing through the St. Ours lock from that of the Chambly Canal. They systematically preferred to present the figures

either lumping together the ten locks on the river or else referring strictly to the Chambly Canal.

Until 1852 the commercial use of the lower Richelieu lock was not taken into account at all, as the titles of the statistical tables for those years clearly indicate. For example, the General Table showing the Quantity of each Article transported on the Chambly Canal during the Year 1850, and the Amount of Revenue collected on this Quantity⁴ or the Table showing the Number of Vessels, their Nationality and their Tonnage, which passed through the Welland, St. Lawrence and Chambly Canals during the Year 1850, and the Amount of Revenue derived from them.⁵ Only the Table showing the Receipts collected at the different Toll Stations of the various Canals during the Year 1850⁶ makes the distinction, for the Richelieu, between the toll-collector's stations at St. Jean, Chambly and St. Ours.

From 1852 on, there is not much more information on commercial navigation at the St. Ours lock, except that now there is often an indication that the statistics for this lock are incorporated with those of the Chambly Canal. Thus we have the General Statement shewing the Quantity of each Article transported on the Chambly Canal including St. Ours Lock, during the Year 1852.⁷

It is quite clear that the statistics for commercial canals are presented in this way because they correspond exactly with the demands and needs of the Canadian authorities of the day. Here it should be remembered that canals were built on the Richelieu essentially because of the requirements of the international trade between Canada and the U.S. Consequently, any vessel using the Chambly Canal had of necessity to pass through the lower Richelieu lock, and vice versa, since from the beginning the Richelieu had been considered strictly as a transportation corridor. It should be pointed out, however, that various products coming specifically from the Richelieu area — such as wheat, hay and even lumber, depending on the period — were exported to the United States by this canal route. It also happened that villages downriver from Chambly took, for local or regional use, certain quantities of products being imported into Canada, such as coal, for instance.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the statistics were not expected to take into consideration the whole range of regional navigation, particularly on the lower Richelieu, any more than that of the market steamers, those omnipresent steamers that went back and forth between Sorel and Chambly. As their name implies, in addition to passengers they carried every kind of product imaginable, stoves, furniture, horses, ploughing implements, etc., transporting them throughout the region.

A thorough knowledge of navigation at St. Ours and in the lower Richelieu region at that period requires more than merely finding out about the ships that were used or the commodities they carried. It would in fact be highly desirable to identify the destinations, that is, the markets, of the various products that were transported both up and down the river. The people responsible for this commercial navigation should also be identified, whether they be ship's captains, shipbuilders, shipowners or forwarders. Certain documentary sources, for example, nominal censuses and parish records of baptisms, marriages and burials, help to establish a list, albeit somewhat fragmentary, of the boatmen and merchants of a locality and allow us to guess at the relative importance of commercial navigation in the village in question. But this kind of information remains sketchy and cannot be readily used as it is.

It can still be profitably supplemented by looking up legal documents from old record offices, for we know it is possible to track down sailors' contracts, shipbuilding contracts, commercial articles of incorporation and contracts for the supplying of certain products involving local craftsmen or merchants, etc. As Michel Gaumont and Paul-Louis Martin note in their work on the potters of St. Denis:

One only needs to examine notarial records in order to get an idea of the intense activity in fitting out vessels of all sorts: small craft, batteaux or schooners which were responsible for

the movement of goods and commodities along the north-south and east-west axes of the St. Lawrence region. [Translation.]⁸ This kind of investigation is certainly productive, but cannot be undertaken for every research project because it requires a systematic, painstaking and lengthy search, especially if one is dealing with a lengthy period and if there are a great many records to go through.⁹

Articles of Incorporation

In addition to the extensive records of former notaries, regional archives often kept exceptionally interesting documents pertaining to business in the region. Thus, for the judicial district of the Richelieu, I found in the courthouse in Sorel the series of Registres des Déclarations d'Actes de Sociétés, of which the first four cover the period from 1859 to 1906.¹⁰

These official documents concern the associations formed among various individuals wishing to go into business together. Usually the date of the notification is given, along with the date on which it was registered, the names, addresses and occupations of the parties, the purpose of the company, its trade name and the division of interest shares among the parties. Sometimes certain specific corporate agreements made by the company are also included, as well as the amount of its registered capital, the date of the unofficial inauguration of the company and, if applicable, the date on which it was dissolved.

Here are some examples to give an even clearer idea of how interesting these rarely used documents can be.

On February 22, 1864, we learn that a company was formed by Joseph-Guillaume and Louis Tranchemontagne, merchants of the parish of Ste. Geneviève at Berthier, François Chapdelaine, an engineer from Sorel, and Frédéric Saint-Louis, a steamboat captain also from Sorel. The owners of the company, under the name of J.-G. Tranchemontagne, F. Saint-Louis et Cie., stated their intention of "operating on the St. Lawrence River and elsewhere a steamboat bearing the name Canada and all other steamboats, vessels or other craft which may later become the property of the said company" [translation]. The interests of the owners in the company were as follows:

J.-G. Tranchemontagne	1/6
Louis Tranchemontagne	1/6
François Chapdelaine	2/6
Frédéric Saint-Louis	2/6

The assets of this company were not limited. This statement of incorporation was registered at Sorel on February 23, 1864.¹¹

These documents are interesting both from a commercial and a social point of view because they bring to life individuals from all walks of life with the most varied occupations and careers. Here is another example. On July 1st, 1864, Théotime Marchessault, a prosperous merchant from St. Ours, went into partnership with Israel Dionne, a brickmaker from the same village, to operate a brick business under the name of Marchessault et Dionne.¹² On March 31, 1862, a farmer from St. Ours named Charles Magnan formed a company with Louis-Adolphe Codère, a merchant from the same village, to "trade in drygoods, groceries and other items at St. Ours" [translation]. They operated under the name of Magnan et Codère.¹³

This documentation on regional business firms is, however, somewhat limited. For one thing, the statements of incorporation it includes do not all pertain to navigation, and moreover there are not very many of them — only about 90, covering the period from 1859 to 1869. Besides, it seems that captains who shared the ownership of their boats with business partners were quite rare at that time, as John G. Sippell, the supervising engineer of canals remarked in 1866:

that of the Chambly Canal. They systematically preferred to present the figures

A large portion of the sailing craft trading on this route [i.e., the Richelieu] are owned by the men who sail them and they trade principally with ports below Montreal. These men have generally invested their all in these vessels and depend almost entirely on their sails.¹⁴

Fortunately, these are not the only documents that can help us find out more about the boatmen of the Richelieu and their craft.

Shipping Registers

The Public Archives of Canada have in their holdings under "Department of Marine, 1762-1966" (RG41, A1) registers of the ship registration certificates issued by some Canadian ports. As Pierre Dufour has noted in a recent article on shipbuilding at Quebec City, these registers, a source which has not hitherto been used systematically, "have turned out to be extremely valuable, if not essential, for any study on shipbuilding" [translation].¹⁵ And in fact shipbuilding actually has an important role in the whole question of navigation in the 19th century, including the area of the lower Richelieu.

The establishment of these shipping registers resulted from a law passed in 1786 by the British Parliament in order to encourage trade and shipping:

This law provided, among other things, that only British ships would henceforth enjoy certain rights and privileges pertaining to merchant shipping. In accordance with this law, only ships built in England or in her colonies and owned and chartered by British subjects would be considered British vessels. To ensure that this restriction was enforced, the law also stipulated that every owner of a vessel having one deck and of more than 15 tons burthen must obtain a registration certificate from a collector of customs. [Translation].¹⁶

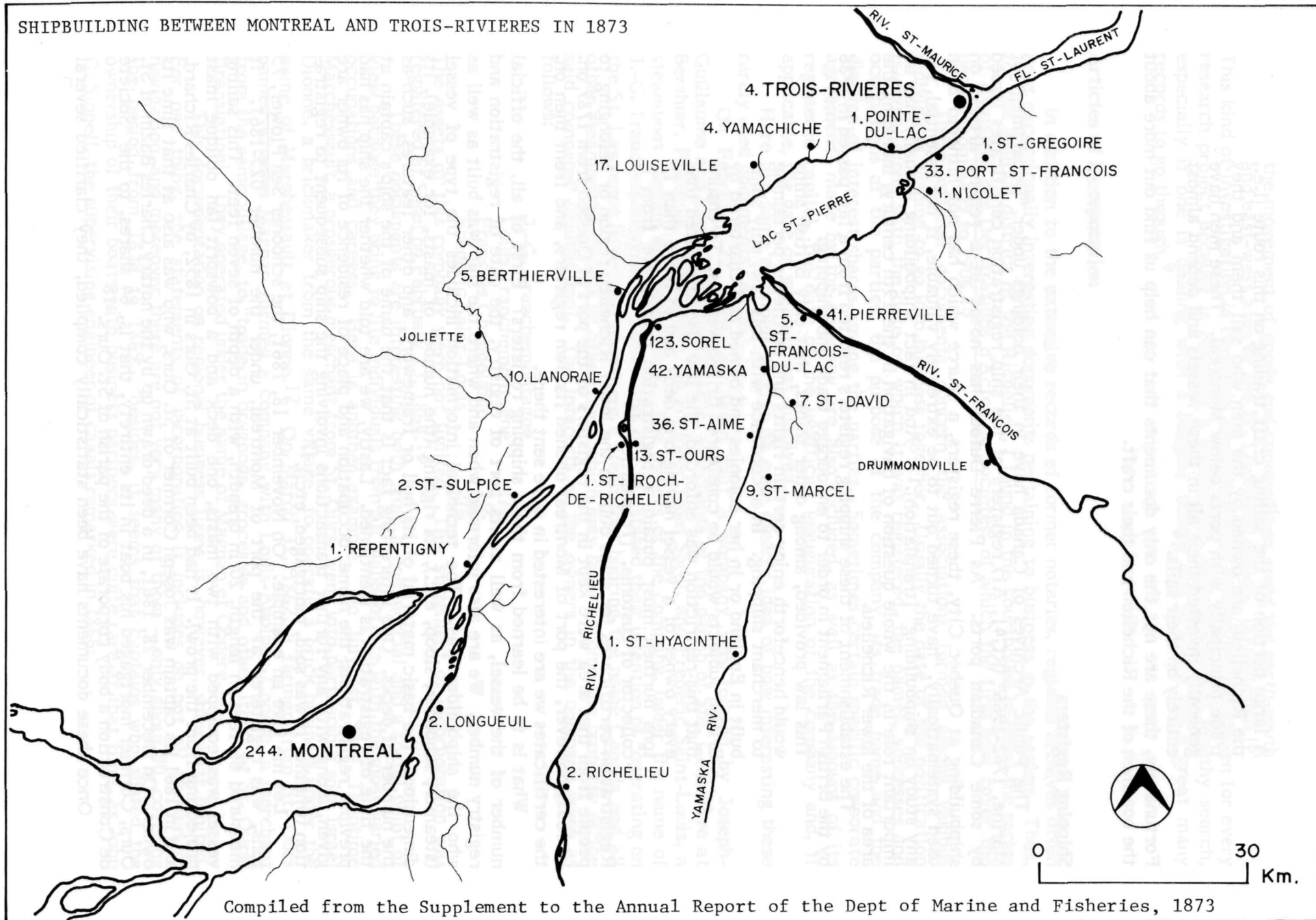
Registration certificates for ships built in the lower Richelieu region or belonging to people from that area were kept in the registers of the port of Quebec from 1787 on. In 1832, however, the port of Montreal opened its own registers, and from then on, the certificates we are interested in were sent there.

What is to be learned from these shipping registers? First of all, the official number of the vessel, as well as its port of registry, the date of registration and registry number. We are also informed when and where the ship was built as well as who the shipbuilder was. The technical information includes the type of vessel (steamer, schooner, sloop, etc.), its rigging (the number of masts, for example), its dimensions, the basic material of its hull or framework, and other features, such as the number of decks. One interesting fact is that the name of the ship's captain at the time of registration is mentioned. Lastly, we are told whether the ship has had previous registrations; the name, occupation and place of residence of its owner are given, along with any further transactions involving the ship subsequent to registration (whether it was sold, mortgaged, etc.).¹⁷

Let me give an example. On November 18, 1861, the schooner Sea Flower, 75 tons, was registered at the port of Montreal, under the number 025-1861. It measured 66 feet in length, 20 in breadth, with a depth of seven feet. This sailing vessel was equipped with two masts, one deck and a bowsprit (an oblique mast projecting from the prow). It had been built at St. Ours in 1852, by Charles Richard, and in 1861 its captain was Joseph Cormier of St. Ours, who was also at that time its owner. On December 28, 1861, in a deed drawn up by the notary Charles Bazin of St. Ours, Cormier mortgaged his boat in its entirety, that is, 64 shares, to the "Société de Construction a body corporate of the parish of St. Ours."¹⁸

Once these documents have been statistically compiled, they clarified several

SHIPBUILDING BETWEEN MONTREAL AND TROIS-RIVIERES IN 1873



Compiled from the Supplement to the Annual Report of the Dept of Marine and Fisheries, 1873

different aspects of research on navigation; first and foremost, regional shipbuilding. In 1873, for example,¹⁹ 938 ships were registered at the port of Montreal. Two-thirds of this number, or 605, were built between Montreal and Trois-Rivières, while the others came mainly from shipyards in Quebec, Ontario and the United States. Here is a table showing the place of origin of ships launched between Montreal and Trois-Rivières.

Table 1. Shipbuilding between Montreal and Trois-Rivières
According to the Shipping Registers of the Port of Montreal for 1873

PLACE	SAIL	STEAM	TOTAL
Montreal	179	65	244
Sorel	94	29	123
Yamaska	40	2	42
Pierreville	40	1	41
St. Aimé	36	0	36
(port) St. François	33	0	33
Riv. du Loup (Louiseville)	15	2	17
St. Ours	13	0	13
Lanoraie	10	0	10
St. Marcel	9	0	9
St. David	7	0	7
Berthier	5	0	5
St. François-du-lac	5	0	5
Trois-Rivières	4	0	4
Yamachiche	4	0	4
Longueuil	2	0	2
St. Sulpice	2	0	2
Richelieu	2	0	2
St. Roch (sur-Richelieu)	1	0	1
Nicolet	1	0	1
St. Grégoire	1	0	1
St. Hyacinthe	0	1	1
Repentigny	1	0	1
Point-du-lac	1	0	1
Total	505	+ 100	= 605

In addition to showing the importance of the shipyards of Montreal and Sorel, which account for more than half the ships built in this region including almost all of the steamers, the 1873 registers indicate both the broad distribution of shipbuilding over the area between Montreal and Trois-Rivières, and the existence of small centres that were particularly active in this field. A brief glance at the map drawn up from the preceding table is sufficient not only to identify these centres (Yamaska, Pierreville, St. Aimé, Port St. François, etc.), but also to make us aware of the existence of a considerable shipbuilding industry all along the southern tributaries of the St. Lawrence. In fact, 157 of the 238 ships built in places other than Sorel and Montreal came from inland shipyards along the St. François, Yamaska and Richelieu Rivers. Nearly 100 ships were produced on the Yamaska River alone.

At first glance the figures relating to the Richelieu River are scarcely

impressive. The list of registrations for 1873 shows that only 16 boats were built between Chambly and Sorel, setting aside the very considerable number of ships built in this latter place. It is evident, moreover, that on the lower Richelieu only the village of St. Ours had a marine industry, in other words, a fairly continuous involvement in shipbuilding. St. Ours would probably have had an even greater share of this industry if it were not for the proximity of the shipyards at Sorel, which at that time quite likely lured away a substantial number of its specialized workers.

What sort of boats were built at St. Ours? The shipping registers for 1873 distinguish steamers from sailing vessels and usually identify the various types of sailing vessels — barges, sloops, schooners or brigantines. Thus, the 13 ships built at St. Ours and registered at Montreal in 1873 were all sailing craft. Eight of them were launched between 1853 and 1856, four during the 1860s and one at the beginning of the 1870s. The first eight, which were all sloops with capacities in the 70-ton range, had average dimensions of 79 feet by 19 feet, with average draughts of 6.5 feet. The last five, built between 1863 and 1871, were considerably larger. Their average capacity was 100 tons, while their average dimensions were 90 feet by 20 feet, and their average depth increased to 7 feet.

Of the 13 boats built at St. Ours, only seven belonged to "locals" in 1873, i.e., people from the village itself. Six of these seven vessels were built between 1853 and 1856. The other owners of boats launched at St. Ours were the following:

Sincennes-McNaughton Line, Montreal	: 2
John M. Burns, Esq., Port Hope, Ontario	: 1
Jackson, Holt & Co., (merchants), Quebec City	: 1
Marcelline Richard, Richelieu	: 1
William Andrew, (captain), Quebec City	: 1

It is also useful to know who the shipowners were on a regional basis, regardless of where the ships were built. This brings out clearly the importance of the shipping trade of a particular village. Thus, from the shipping registers of 1873 we can draw up a list of 20 shipowners in the Richelieu region, living in the area between St. Jean and St. Ours.²⁰ It is immediately clear that 12 of the 20 people identified in the registers were from St. Ours; their occupations, as recorded, were the following: seven captains, four merchants, and one farmer.

Of the other eight shipowners, four lived in St. Jean, one in Iberville, one in St. Denis, one in Richelieu and one in St. Roch.

A further question might be asked: did the shipowners or captains of St. Ours use vessels built in their village by local shipwrights? The 12 people from this village identified in the registers of 1873 were then the owners of 16 boats, built in the following places:

St. Ours	: 7
Yamaska	: 2
Sorel	: 1
Richelieu	: 1
Pierreville	: 1
Montreal	: 1
St. Roch	: 1
Ste. Croix	: 1
Whitehall (U.S.)	: 1

Was this in fact normal practice? In my more general study of the local and regional impact of the St. Ours lock I shall attempt to clarify this question. As for the eight other shipowners from the Richelieu valley who were identified in 1873, to what extent did they patronize the local shipbuilders? Very little, if we are to believe the following figures.

Compiled from the Supplement to the Annual Report of the Dept of Marine and Fisheries, 1873

SHIPBUILDING BETWEEN MONTREAL AND TROIS-RIVIERES IN 1873

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Owner's Place of Origin	Location of Shipyard
St. Roch	Sorel
St. Denis	St. David
St. Jean	Lanoraie
St. Jean	Longueuil
Iberville	Pierreville
St. Jean	Yamaska
St. Jean	Gentilly
Richelieu	St. Ours

These preliminary and fragmentary findings may lead to many fruitful lines of research. A rapid and partial perusal of the registry books for the port of Montreal has already shown that they contain some extremely useful information. Only an exhaustive and methodical examination of this little-known source could, however, do it real justice.

Lock Records of the St. Ours Lock

In order to take the study of mid-19th-century navigation on the lower Richelieu even further, other information is still required. It is not enough, for example, to have a fairly accurate knowledge of the people and ships involved in this regional trade. We also have to know what cargo was carried by the batteaux, barges, sloops, schooners and even steamers which plied up and down the lower Richelieu. And finally, in order to understand this trade fully, it would surely be useful to find out how far it extended. What was the destination of goods leaving the lower Richelieu? Where exactly did the commodities come from that were unloaded on the many wharves along the lower reaches of the river?

Earlier I quoted a passage by Gérald Tulchinsky deploring the lack of statistics related to the shipping trade on the lower Richelieu and to the specific use of the St. Ours lock. We now know in fact that at the beginning of its existence and at least up until the end of the 1860s, this lock had its own statistics, and even the superintending engineer of canals was apparently unaware of their existence. It was with evident surprise that John G. Sippell, who held this supervisory position, informed the secretary of Public Works in October 1867 of the existence of such figures: "there appears to be no record kept of the business that passes through the St. Ours Lock except such as is connected with the river, or rather that does not pass through the Chambly Canal. The St. Ours statement therefore only shows the Richelieu river business that passes through the Lock below Chambly."²¹

Sippell's perplexity is understandable. Although he had held the post since 1853, he had never been concerned with the canal records because these were the responsibility of the toll collectors, who in the 19th century came under the jurisdiction of the Department of Internal Revenue, rather than the Department of Public Works. Furthermore, he apparently found it hard to understand why a lock on the great inland waterway of the Richelieu would bother to record only its local or regional traffic.

Records of ships passing through the St. Ours lock did in fact exist in the 19th century. A few years ago, during a trip to the Chambly Canal, I found some of them in an abandoned warehouse. Unfortunately, these long-awaited documents are far from complete, and before giving a qualitative analysis of their contents, I must say something about their limits. There are three books with thick cloth-covered bindings. The first two, untitled and unpaginated, but each containing about 250 pages, measure 22.5 cm by 41.5 cm. These are the daily records of lock use for the

years 1853 and 1861. The third one, which is larger (35 x 48.5 cm), has 280 un-numbered pages, the last 16 of which are blank. On the back of this volume are the words "Canal Register No. 1 — Customs V.R." It is also a daily record of traffic passing through the St. Ours lock, but in this case it covers the period from 1859 to 1868.

Table 2. The Annual Period Covered by the Lock Records of the St. Ours Lock

RECORD	YEAR	PERIOD COVERED	LOCK OPENING & CLOSING DATES	CONDITION
1853	1853	Apr. 12 — Aug. 15	Apr. 13 — Dec. 4	incomplete
1859-68	1859	Apr. 5 — Nov. 27	Apr. 5 — Dec. 3	complete
1859-68	1860	Apr. 4 — Dec. 5	Apr. 4 — Dec. 5	complete
1859-68	1861	Apr. 16 — Aug. 9	Apr. 16 — Dec. 3	incomplete
1861	1861	Apr. 16 — Sept. 27	Apr. 16 — Dec. 3	incomplete
1859-68	1862	NIL	Apr. 25 — Dec. 2	missing
1859-68	1863	Aug. 1 — Dec. 3	Apr. 29 — Dec. 3	incomplete
1859-68	1864	Apr. 14 — Dec. 5	Apr. 7 — Dec. 9	complete
1859-68	1865	Apr. 16 — Dec. 6	Apr. 16 — Dec. 9	complete
1859-68	1866	Apr. 10 — Dec. 8	Apr. 9 — Dec. 12	complete
1859-68	1867	May 1 — Nov. 30	Apr. 16 — Dec. 2	complete
1859-68	1868	Apr. 1 — Oct. 18	Mar. 30 — Dec. 2	incomplete

The greatest problem with these records, apart from the fact that they cover only a limited number of years, is doubtless the fact that for certain years the entries are incomplete. Table 2 presents schematically the state of the records in this regard.

There is no explanation for these incomplete years with regard to the records for 1859-68. In the case of the individual records for the years 1853 and 1861, it seems likely that there were not enough pages in either of these books, and that they were continued elsewhere. The record for 1859-68, in which these years follow one another in sequence without any breaks in continuity, might simply be a later copy of individual registry books such as those for 1853 and 1861, since all of the pages of this substantial volume are in the right order. But this is only a theory. What is the net result of an examination of these three old registers? They contain a mine of first-hand information about commercial navigation at St. Ours, spread over 11 years, only six of which are covered in their entirety.

The lock records for 1853 and 1861 and the one covering 1859-1868 contain essentially the same information. Here is one example, taken from the record for 1853:

Office at the St. Ours Lock. Let Pass No. 22, St.Ours 1st May, 1853. Permit the Br [British] boat Betsey of St.Ours, 40 tons burthen, J. Bouvier owner, ___ master, to pass from St.Ours to Quebec.

Under the heading of goods transported, the printed pages mentioned seven classes, the first one taking into consideration the boat itself, in this case 40 tons, then the passengers, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth not being previously identified, and the seventh being reserved for wood (and its by-products) in all its forms. Still taking the Betsey as our example, it was bound for Quebec from St. Charles-sur-Richelieu with 1500 bushels of wheat (41 tonnes) and 1000 bushels of peas (27 tonnes) on board. The following tolls were to be paid: 10 pence for the vessel and 17 shillings for the cargo.²²

Perhaps the most obvious contribution of these records to our history of commercial navigation is in relation to the ships and their owners. In fact they corroborate and supplement the knowledge gained from the articles of incorporation and especially the shipping registers. In this case, however, the name of the captain or pilot of the boat is not recorded. The only information about the boat itself, apart from its name, tonnage, and port of registry, is its nationality (British or American) and usually its mode of propulsion (sail or steam). There is no mention of its dimensions or other features.

But where these records do have something new to tell us is in showing, day by day, and for each boat, what commodities were carried and in what quantities, the number of passengers and, above all, the ports of origin and destination of the vessel and its cargo. This kind of information will certainly help to facilitate several research projects which were previously at a standstill. They may even lead to new lines of research. It is hardly necessary to give further examples of the many possibilities they offer. Nevertheless, some of the practical applications of this data should still be pointed out.

Table 3. St. Ours Shipping and Trade from April to August, 1853²⁴

DATE	VESSEL	PT. OF ORIGIN	DESTINATION	CARGO	TONS (TOTAL)
May 1	Betsey	St. Charles	Quebec	1500 bu. wheat	68
				1000 bu. peas	
May 1	Elisabeth	St. Charles	Quebec	2752 bu. wheat	107.5
				1219 bu. peas	
May 3	Jean-Baptiste	St. Denis	Quebec	3366 bu. wheat	114
				725 bu. peas	
				3 T. flour	
May 10	Tempérance	St. Denis	Montreal	5247 bu. peas	142
June 1	Fortune	St. Denis	Quebec	4200 bu. peas	118
June 4	Tempérance	St. Mathias	Montreal	3000 bu. wheat	130.5
				1800 bu. peas	
June 5	Victoria	St. Denis	Montreal	2960 bu. peas	80
June 12	St. Louis	St. Charles	Quebec	1034 bu. wheat	41
				480 bu. peas	
July 2	Tempérance	St. Charles	Montreal	5360 bu. peas	145
July 7	Elisabeth	St. Denis	Quebec	3000 bu. wheat	81.5
July 30	St. Louis	Beloeil	Montreal	1190 bu. barley	26.5
Aug. 1	Hermine	Quebec	St. Mathias	coal	80
Aug. 14	Tempérance	Quebec	St. Mathias	gypsum	114.5

What then were ships owned by people from St. Ours being used for in 1853?²³ It should first of all be made clear that this question can only be partially answered, in the sense that our record for that year goes from mid-April to mid-August, in other words, only about 120 out of the 240 days in the total average shipping season for the St. Ours lock. In the first half of the 1853 season, eight boats whose port of registry was St. Ours carried on trade by using the lower Richelieu lock: three sailing barges and five sloops. Altogether, these eight boats passed through the lock 13 times during this period, with cargo aboard. The barge, the Tempérance, belonging to François Cormier, was by far the most active, passing through four times with cargo. The preceding table shows the goods that were transported and the distances covered during these 13 trips.

There are some obvious conclusions to be drawn. During that first half of the navigational season of 1853, boatmen from St. Ours carried almost exclusively agricultural products: 14 652 bushels of wheat, 22 991 bushels of peas and 1190 bushels of barley. These farm products are in a sense exports from the Richelieu valley destined for the large urban centres of Quebec City and Montreal. Coal and gypsum are the only "imports" brought into the Richelieu region by the boatmen of St. Ours. If we were to extend our inquiry to all of the vessels mentioned in the 1853 record, would there be any notable change in the products that were transported or their destinations?

And what cargo was carried by the steamers that plied the waters of the Richelieu from the earliest days of the canal? Here again, if we limit ourselves to the year 1853, we must be content with data for the first four months of navigation. But the year 1853 does have the advantage of being closer to the official opening date of the St. Ours lock, 1849. The steamer that most frequently travelled on the lower Richelieu during 1853 was certainly the Richelieu, belonging to Augustin Saint-Louis, a merchant from Sorel. This was also the ship whose cargo was recorded in the most detail in the St. Ours lock register.²⁵ Its activities at the time are well known: two trips a week between Montreal and Chambly and sometimes, when the schedule allowed, a few excursions between Sorel and Chambly. Naturally, on the runs between Montreal and Chambly this market steamer stopped at all the riverside parishes along its route on the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu. However, our records mention only the towns at either end of its route, and for this reason it is impossible to determine what cargo or passengers were taken on or discharged along the way, at St. Charles, for instance, or St. Denis, Lanoraie or Berthier.

Be that as it may, from the 15th of April to the 15th of August, 1853, the Richelieu passed through the St. Ours lock 71 times. Here is a breakdown of its starting and destination points:

Chambly-Montreal : 32 lockages

Montreal-Chambly : 32 lockages

Chambly-Sorel : 4 lockages

Sorel-Chambly : 3 lockages

This means that it made 36 trips downriver and 35 up. The following table shows its total cargo, going in both directions during this period.

**Table 4. Passengers & Cargo Carried by the Steamer Richelieu
Going Up and Down the Richelieu River,
from April 5 to August 15, 1853**

	UPRIVER	DOWNRIVER	TOTAL
Passengers	856	923	1779
Cast iron (tons)	10.5	0.0	10.5
Peas (tons)	7.0	69.0	76.0
Flour (tons)	8.5	6.0	14.5
Oats (tons)	4.0	24.0	28.0
Wheat (tons)	6.0	9.0	15.0
Miscellaneous	150.5	89.5	240.0
Total tonnage	186.5	197.5	384.0

These statistics can of course serve many purposes and be used in several different ways; however, certain observations should be made: first of all, the fairly substantial number of passengers, an average of 25 per trip. Then there is the high proportion of

miscellaneous freight, 62% of the tonnage. The records for the years 1859-1868 provide even more detailed and complete information. Lastly we see the importance of agricultural products (previously mentioned in Table 3) as "exports" from the Richelieu region, this time going to Montreal.

In spite of the fact that we have statistics for only a few years, and some of them are fragmentary, any researcher who uses these records for the St. Ours lock will no doubt take advantage of the wealth of unpublished information they contain, whether he is interested in social, economic, technical, cultural or geographical questions.

The description I have already given of these sources, pointing out the gaps they fill in the existing documentation and giving examples to illustrate their usefulness, are doubtless enough to introduce them to researchers. However, I cannot resist adding one final proof of how immensely helpful these registers are bound to be to historians, this time with a very precise example.

In 1978 Michel Gaumond and Paul-Louis Martin undertook the study of a very important and long-established group of craftsmen, the potters of St. Denis-sur-Richelieu. For over a century, from 1775 to 1885, this village was renowned for its artists in clay who in 1825 numbered no fewer than 18, and 13 in 1840.

Having described the origin, recruiting, apprenticeship, day-to-day life and production methods of these potters, the authors of this study tried to find out how these craftsmen sold their products and how far afield their market extended²⁶ "On the strength ... of information picked up here and there," they answered the first question with the theory that "the potters produced mainly for merchants, who then undertook to sell the product. Or perhaps some potters (and there could have been only a few of them) became peddlers of their own wares." [Translation.]²⁷

In going through the registries of former notaries of the region, the authors naturally came across some documents which lend a certain credibility to their theories, including the suggestion that the distribution of the potters' products mainly depended on transport by water, in other words, along the Richelieu River.²⁸ But, in the last analysis, Gaumond and Martin consider that it is in fact the study of the St. Denis pottery itself which will help to "clarify several aspects of the small-scale internal trade ... to evaluate its importance and discover the unifying links between the various regions" [translation].²⁹

In answer to the second question, the geographical extent of the St. Denis potters' market, these historians offer only an archaeological solution: excavations, which by the way have not yet been carried out. These digs should be undertaken at the main localized primary sites, i.e., at St. Denis, and "at the same time, it would be advisable to work on secondary sites, in other words, to conduct digs at domestic sites in remote rural areas, which is in all likelihood where most of the pottery ended up" [translation].³⁰

Quite obviously, boats leaving St. Denis and going down the river had to pass through the St. Ours lock and declare their cargo. It is not surprising, then, that the lock record for 1853, in spite of the fact that half of it is missing, mentions several loads of pottery or "earthenware." I have discovered that in that period of just barely four months there are entries for five of the major St. Denis potters of the time, Edouard Besse (or Baise), J. Courtemanche, Isaac Frappier, Thomas Thommelet and Antoine Fontaine. They were the owners, respectively, of an unnamed barge and the sloops (or sailboats?) St. Joseph, Thomas and Osias.³¹ The following table summarizes their commercial itineraries on the lower Richelieu from April to August of 1853.

**Table 5. The Pottery Trade on the Lower Richelieu, from April to August, 1853,
According to the Lock Records of the St. Ours Lock**

Date	Potter	Pottery in tons	Destination
May 21	Courtemanche	4.5	Yamachiche
May 23	Fontaine	4.0	Sorel
June 3	Thommelet	3.0	Berthier
June 23	Besse	3.5	Sorel
June 23	Thommelet	3.0	Berthier
July 14	Thommelet	2.0	Berthier
July 19	Frappier	3.0	Sorel
Aug. 11	Thommelet	3.0	Berthier

Leafing through this register, it is amazing the amount of information that can be found in just four months' entries. Twenty-six tons of earthenware sent to three localities on Lake St. Pierre by five potters over a period of four months. This is certainly new information!

Thanks to these unpublished or little-known sources, the history of commercial navigation on the Richelieu and the St. Lawrence is given a new lease on life. Despite the drawbacks or gaps in these documents, taken together, they succeed in answering more and more questions.

ENDNOTES

1. In the final pages of this report the reader will find a good example of this contribution to very specific studies, in this case the history of the potters of St.-Denis-sur-Richelieu.
2. P.-André Sévigny, Le canal Chambly: utilisation commerciale, Travail inédit No. 346 (1978), Parks Canada, Quebec: La main-d'oeuvre des canaux de la rivière Richelieu, 1843-1950, manuscript on file, Parks Canada, Quebec, 1980 (forthcoming).
3. Gérald Tulchinsky, "Une entreprise maritime canadienne-française: la Compagnie du Richelieu, 1845-1854," Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, Vol. 26, No. 4 (March 1973), p. 575, n. 61.
4. Province du Canada, Dixième volume des Journaux de l'Assemblée Législative (Quebec, 1851), Appendix A, No. 3.
5. Ibid., Appendix A. No. 11.
6. Ibid., Appendix A, No. 10.
7. Province of Canada, Appendix to the Eleventh Volume of the Journals of the Legislative Assembly, (Quebec, 1853), Appendix A, No. 3. There is, however, one notable exception: for the year 1867 we have a brief but interesting table of the number of vessels (and of their total tonnage) which used the St. Ours lock from 1860 to 1866 inclusive, without passing through the Chambly Canal. (Rapport général du Commissaire des Travaux publics pour l'année 1867 (Ottawa, 1868), Appendix No. 48, Table 13, p. 422.
8. Michel Gaumond and Paul-Louis Martin, Les maîtres-potiers du bourg Saint-Denis, 1785-1888, (Ministère des Affaires culturelles, les Cahiers du patrimoine, No. 9, 1978), p. 80.
9. In the fall of 1981, just as I was about to undertake a thorough examination of the records of three of the most important notaries who had practised in St.

- Ours between 1840 and 1860 (over 6000 items were contained in these files), all of the old files kept in the legal archives of the district of Richelieu in Sorel were transferred to the Quebec National Archives in Montreal. At the time of writing, I do not know whether these records are available to historians.
10. Sorel, Judicial Archives for the district of the Richelieu, Registres de Déclarations d'Actes de Sociétés (hereafter RDAS). These registers have numbered pages and the documents they contain are also numbered. The first four registers cover the period as follows: Register I: 1859-1879; Register II: 1880-1885; Register III: 1885-1896; Register IV: 1896-1906.
 11. RDAS, I, pp. 33-34, document No. 27.
 12. Ibid., p. 38, document No. 32.
 13. Ibid., p. 30, document No. 24.
 14. Parks Canada, Quebec, Letterbook, 1865-1870, (hereafter Letterbook), John G. Sippell to F. Braun, 22 Jan. 1866, Letter No. 150.
 15. Pierre Dufour, "La construction navale à Québec, 1760-1825: sources inexplorées et nouvelles perspectives de recherches," Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, Vol. 35 (Sept. 1981), pp. 231-32.
 16. Ibid.
 17. The amount of information given may vary from one certificate to another. Indeed, such a detailed list of specifications is found particularly in registrations after 1824, when more detailed forms were introduced.
 18. PAC, RG42, A1, Vol. 179, fol. 87.
 19. Beginning in 1873, the Canadian government from time to time published the major data contained in the shipping registers of the country's ports. The statistics which follow are drawn from the Supplément au Rapport Annuel du Ministère de la Marine et des Pêcheries pour l'année expirée au 30 juin 1873 contenant une Liste des navires inscrits sur les Livres d'enregistrement de la Confédération du Canada au 31 décembre 1873, Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1874.
 20. These figures should, of course, be considered as merely a sampling of results for this line of enquiry, for at that period there were several other shipowners in the Richelieu valley who were also merchants or ship's captains.
 21. Letterbook, Letter No. 891.
 22. Parks Canada, Quebec, Register of boats passing through the St. Ours lock in 1853, no title, n.p., n.d., 1 May 1853.
 23. Note that the answer to this question takes into account only boats actually passing through the St. Ours lock. Thus, a boat from St. Ours that operated particularly or exclusively downstream from the lock, i.e., on the St. Lawrence or Lake St. Pierre, or between St. Ours itself and Sorel, would scarcely if ever appear in the lock registers.
 24. Parks Canada, Quebec, Register of boats passing through the St. Ours lock in 1853, n.p.; see dates indicated in table.
 25. As a general rule, the cargo entries for boats passing through the St. Ours lock are much more detailed in the register for the years 1859-1868, especially in the case of steamers.
 26. M. Gaumond and P.-L. Martin, op. cit., pp. 78-83.
 27. Ibid., p. 78.
 28. Ibid., p. 80.
 29. Ibid., p. 79.
 30. Ibid., p. 83.
 31. The sloop St. Joseph apparently had two successive owners at that time, J. Courtemanche and Isaac Frappier. (Could this be an error in the register?) Perhaps there actually was a transaction between them, or these potters may have been co-owners of the boat.

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