

IROQUOIS

by Walter Lewis

Prior to the opening of the Rideau canal, only two alternatives were available to emigrants and other passengers making their way into Upper Canada. The inexpensive approach was to take passage in a Durham boat returning upriver to Prescott. Most often towed across the open water of Lake St. Louis and Lake St. Francis, these boats had to be manhandled around, and often up, the intervening stretches of river and rapids. Their "passengers" would often find themselves on the ends of towlines or just walking up the river alongside the rapids. Those who could afford the passage were in a position to ride aboard the towboats and bypass the rapids in a series of stagecoach rides. Both the stages and the steam towboats were the property of Horace Dickenson's Upper Canada Stage and Steamboat Company.

In the passage up the river the least popular section was the fifty miles of wretched road between Cornwall and Prescott. This avoided the worst rapids in the river, the ten miles of the Long Sault, as well as a series of smaller rapids. The experience was compared by one exhausted traveller to something out of Dante's *Inferno*.

In the spring of 1832, the opening of the Rideau canal was eagerly anticipated by many. It brought the promise of a third alternative, one without road travel or hauling 40-ton boats up rapids. But for the merchants of Brockville and Prescott, as for Horace Dickenson, the Rideau threatened to leave them in an economic backwater. The *Iroquois* was one part of their strategy to "improve" service on the St. Lawrence route.

In February 1832 the *Upper Canada Herald* reported that the *Iroquois* was in frame at Gananoque. With the *William IV* in the water, preparing for its first run the following spring, this project probably took advantage of the *William's* ship's carpenters. Nowhere is the architect of the *Iroquois* credited, but it is likely that it was either Jesse Wood (the builder of the *William IV*) or a senior member of his shipbuilding crew. The steamer was designed to have an 18' beam with a 120' keel and a very light draft. At this point, all the *Herald* would say of the hull design was that it was "different".¹

Like the *John By*, launched in Kingston in November, the *Iroquois* was to be a sternwheeler. More surprising, however, was the fact that she was to be equipped with two 25 horse power, high pressure engines. Up to this time, Dickenson had always used low pressure engines from Ward's Eagle Foundry in Montreal; a fact that is not surprising considering that one of his daughters had married Lebbeus B. Ward.² But the

Wards didn't build high pressure engines—a predilection perhaps explained by the death of their uncle some years previous in the explosion of an experimental high pressure boiler.³ The *Iroquois'* engines would be supplied by Fuller and Copeland, a foundry in Hartford, Connecticut.⁴

At the same time she was described as having fairly extensive passenger accommodations. The Ladies cabin was 20 feet long and the Gentleman's, 43. Neither of the cabins could be below decks in a hull that was designed to draw only 12 inches of water.⁵ According to one account,

*"The boat is plainly, but neatly fitted up. In the gentlemen's cabin is a table of horse-shoe form which is capable of accommodating seventy-five persons. The ladies' cabin ... is fitted up in a light and healthy style, with large windows, and comfortable accommodations for the inmates."*⁶

Almost no notice was given of her launch. The first news of her being afloat followed her progress down river to Prescott where the work of finishing her was to be done.⁷

Hopes of completing her before the opening of the Rideau Canal were dashed when the cholera epidemic that June killed Horace Dickenson.⁸ Two months later, his brother and sometime partner, Barnabas, succumbed to the same illness.⁹ Having died intestate, Horace's Upper Canadian estate was to be administered by his widow, Mary Amelia Bigelow. In Montreal, A. and J.S. Bigelow was deputed to collect Dickenson's debts. The firm of H. Dickenson & Co. kept operating until the end of the season when new arrangements were made. With the exception of Macmillan, Link & Co., the principal forwarding firms at Prescott bought two-thirds of Dickenson's interest in the steamboats between Prescott and Montreal.¹⁰ The partnership included Macpherson & Crane, Hooker & Henderson, and James McCutcheon. They would retain A. Bigelow & Co. as the agents for the Upper Canada Stage and Steamboat Company.¹¹

Meanwhile the trials for the *Iroquois* came off in September 1832 when she visited Brockville "crowded with all the beauty and fashion" of Prescott and Ogdensburgh.¹² A trial followed where the *Iroquois* ran down the Galops Rapid and the Rapid Plat, to the head of the Long Sault rapids. "...Although the machinery was new, and the wind a-head, she ascended these rapids with considerable ease, and reached Prescott as soon as the stages by land could have performed the distance."¹³

The tiny community that would grow up around the wharf at the lower end of the run would soon be known as Dickenson's Landing.

It was mid-May the following season before the *Iroquois* made her first regularly scheduled trip. The account of this was filled with all the optimism that advertising could buy:

"She steams the rapids with the greatest ease. Her cabins are elegantly furnished with every convenience—her engine, machinery and apparatus are differently [sic] constructed, and arranged, to any we have hitherto seen, and seem to answer the navigation of the rapids much better than was expected."¹⁴

Much of the published speculation that year focused on the number of passengers she was carrying (20 to 80 per trip) and the rapidity with which she was repaying her investment.¹⁵

It would be some time later that a more honest assessment of her activities was offered. A traveller writing to the *Montreal Gazette* that summer commented that

"the engines of this boat have been greatly improved during the past winter and in such manner as greatly to increase her speed, at the same time lessening the consumption of fuel; and are in all respects highly creditable to the science and skill of the engineer, Mr. Hulbert of Prescott, under whose superintendence, I understand, the improvements have been made; a young gentleman whose acquirements and knowledge of his profession, entitle him to the confidence and patronage of those interested in steam navigation."¹⁶

While Sam Hulbert may have appreciated the comment it is clear from this passage that the *Iroquois* had not been the unqualified success that the *Grenville Gazette* kept telling other papers it was.

The really honest answers are sometimes best found in traveller's accounts, especially those not intended for publication (and the attendant libel suits). In early October Alfred Domett made his way upriver in the stages and steamboats of the Upper Canadian Stage and Steamboat Company. The account is worth enjoying at some length. Domett left Cornwall at 4 a.m. in a stage that made its way up the road past the Long Sault rapids.

"At a small village at the Head of the Long Sault waited a small steamboat called the *Iroquois*. The boat is built upon a peculiar principle, formed to navigate the rapids. It looks like a long low white wooden house placed in a barge. It draws only 27 inches of water. If the hold were cleared of dirty water etc. this depth would be reduced to 2 feet. It is propelled by a steam engine the piston of which is horizontal and pushes backwards and for-

wards a beam connected with the axle of the wheels which are placed at the stern of the boat. It is not of sufficient power for this undertaking. Another of greater is building at Brockville. We passed among the swelling wooded islands forming beautiful vistas on every side. The boat at times made scarce any headway at all. The water was not much broken but ran with considerable rapidity. About the middle of the day we stopped a while in a sort of bay formed by the curving shore. Ahead of us was a projection of the land beyond which the river foamed along with a strong and swift motion. We lay crouching under this point for some time getting up more steam and taking in wood. The little steamer seemed like a living animal gathering wind and strength to make a decided and final effort. At length we darted into the current intending to round the point of land. We were carried by the stream quite across to the other bank and for a long time had to struggle hard for every inch of progress we made. We were obliged soon after to throw out a rope to a team of three horses waiting for us on the bank by whose assistance we passed the worst part of the river. ... In the evening we reached Prescott."¹⁷

The following winter, like the previous, was spent trying to improve the engines of the *Iroquois*. Hulbert was not available this time, having set to work building the engines for the *Rapid*. Instead Edward Quigly, whose claim to fame was having rebuilt the boilers of the *Great Britain*, would work long and hard on the business. Rumours were circulated in June, arrangements advertised in July and trials made in August before the *Iroquois* reappeared.¹⁸

By this point it was too late. The *Iroquois* was an idea whose success had attracted competition. Before much of 1833 had passed the *Brockville* was under construction, and in the winter of 1834 some of the investors in the stage company were experimenting with the even more unusual design of the *Rapid*. In the spring of 1835 it was rumoured that another new forwarding firm might be established on the Rideau canal and that the *Iroquois* might be among the steamers used.¹⁹ The following season, Macpherson & Crane offered the "boat *Iroquois*" for sale, suggesting that by shortening her she could be used on the Rideau, a rather sad fate for a boat intended by Horace Dickenson to attract passengers away from that canal.

The epitaph of the steamer may in fact, lie in her engines. When, in 1838 the United States conducted a survey of steam engines, the Saginaw sawmill of N. Little & Co. reported a high pressure engine. Although built in Connecticut, they weren't aware of the name of the foundry. All they could offer was that "the engine has been used on a SB on the St. Lawrence River". The mill was not yet operational.²⁰

REFERENCES

1. *Upper Canada Herald*, 15 Feb. 1832. Quoted by *Brockville Recorder*, 23 Feb. 1832.

2. *Canadian Courant*, 9 Sept. 1829.

3. See Walter Lewis, "The Ward brothers, George Brush and Montreal's Eagle Foundry," *FreshWater*, v. 4 (1989): 29-33.

4. *Brockville Recorder*, 29 Mar. 1832 quoting *Montreal Gazette*. It is noteworthy that this is the only purchase of marine engines for operation on the St. Lawrence or Great Lakes that were not built in New York or Philadelphia. We know that the senior partner in the Bell Foundry of Hartford was Bartholomew Ward, but any relationship with the Wards of Montreal is purely speculative (they hailed from New Jersey). *The Pocket Register*, for the

Register, for the City of Hartford..., (Hartford: Benjamin H. Norton, 1825). But the Dickenson family, Hiram Norton (an Upper Canadian associate) and indeed most of the members of the American Presbyterian Church that the Dickenson's attended in Montreal all hailed from various parts of New England.

Of Daniel Copeland's engines, surviving to 1838, only one was low pressure, and only one dated from before 1832. United States, Steam Report. In the *Hartford City Directory for 1828* (Hartford, Conn.: Ariel Ensign, 1828) p. 22, 25. Copeland was described as a joiner's tool manufacturer.

[speculation that the Connecticut river was one of the first places where sternwheelers were used]

5. *Brockville Recorder*, 17 May 1832 quoting *Grenville Gazette*.
6. *Canadian Courant*, 29 Sept. 1832.
7. *Brockville Recorder*, 10 May 1832.
8. *Canadian Courant*, 23 June 1832.
9. *Colonial Advocate*, 6 Sept. 1832.
10. *Brockville Recorder*, 17 Jan., 24 Jan. 1833.

11. *Hallowell Free Press*, 5 Aug. 1833 quoting *Montreal Gazette*. *Montreal Gazette*, 22 July 1834.
12. *Brockville Recorder*, 20 Sept. 1832. *Cobourg Star*, 26 Sept. 1832 (quoting *Grenville Gazette*).
13. *Canadian Courant*, 29 Sept. 1832.
14. *Canadian Courant*, 22 May 1833 quoting *Grenville Gazette*. Also quoted by *Colonial Advocate*, 30 May 1833, *Liberal* (St. Thomas), 6 June 1833.
15. *Montreal Gazette*, 6 Aug. 1833 quoting *Grenville Gazette*. Also quoted by *Cobourg Star*, 7 Aug. 1833.
16. *Montreal Gazette*, 13 July 1833.
17. Alfred Domett, *The Canadian Journal of Alfred Domett: being an extract from a Journal of a tour in Canada, the United States and Jamaica, 1833-1835* (ed. by E.A. Horsman and Lillian Rea Benson, London, Ont.: University of Western Ontario, 1955), pp. 19-20.
18. *Montreal Gazette*, 3 June, 17 July, 7 Aug., 12 Aug. 1834.
19. *Montreal Gazette*, 9 July 1835, quoting *Perth Courier*.
20. U.S., Steam Engine Report., p. 347.

Notes

\$13 Million for Archaeological Management over Five Years

Canada's Communications Minister Marcel Masse today tabled draft legislation to protect and manage Canada's archaeological heritage and resources. In an unusual measure, the bill is being distributed in draft form to permit detailed comment by individuals and groups interested in archaeology, notably from organizations representing the aboriginal peoples.

"Our archaeological resources are threatened by land development underwater exploration, rapid technological advances and an international trade in antiquities," said Mr. Masse. "On May 10, I announced the Archaeological Heritage Policy Framework in Whitehorse. This archaeology bill will give effect to that policy."

The Office for Archaeological Resource Management, created July 3, 1990, with headquarters in Montreal and a budget of \$13 million over five years, will administer the policy.

The consultation document tabled acknowledges the cultural legacies of Canada's aboriginal peoples as the foundations of our archaeological heritage.

Wreck and wreck sites, which are not adequately protected at present under the *Canada Shipping Act*, would be protected from now on under the proposed new measures. The Canadian Government, also in the light of this bill could declare ownership of an abandoned wreck five years after sinking.

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