

DECade of Discovery

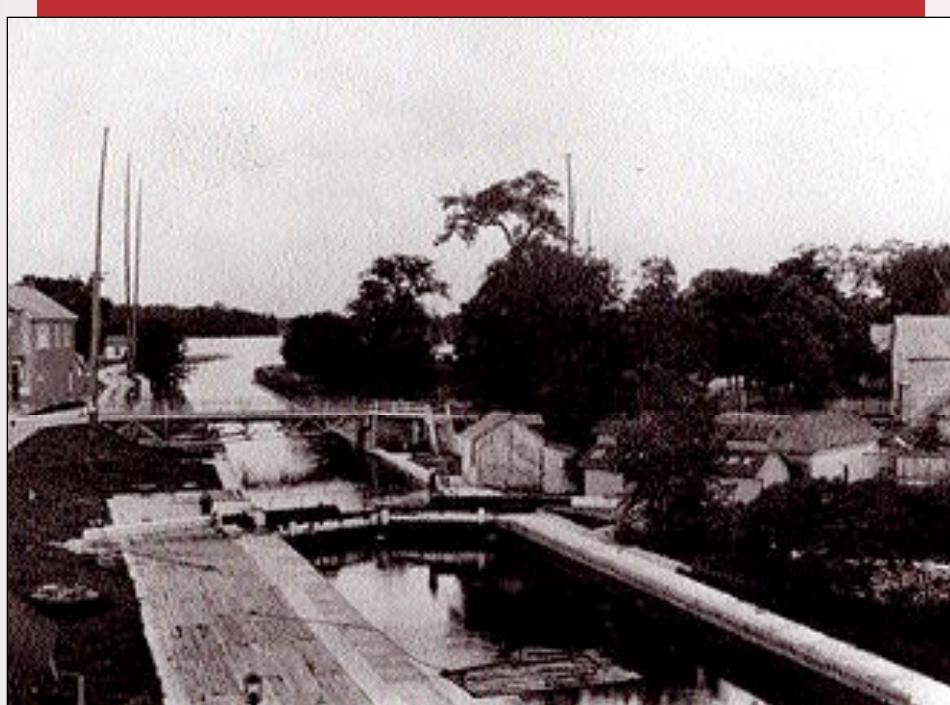
By Dennis Carter-Edwards

In 2008 the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada will launch a “Decade of Discovery” with a celebration of the 175th anniversary of the birth of the Waterway. Work on the first lock began at Bobcaygeon in 1833 thus giving it the honour of being the birthplace of the Trent Canal. The original lock was designed by Frederick Preston Rubidge who was featured in the 1932 edition of the Annual Report of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors. Indeed, surveyors made an important contribution to the development of this transportation route, providing the expertise for laying out the line for the locks and dams that formed the heart of the system. Over the next 87 years, work continued sporadically on the dream of linking Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario by a system of locks, canal cuts, lift locks and marine railways.

The system of lakes and rivers that formed the waterway was originally conceived as a secure military route that followed a corridor used by First Nations for centuries. Construction of the Trent Canal was later promoted as a vital commercial artery for opening the heartland of Ontario to settlement and for transporting first lumber and later wheat to markets abroad. In the twentieth century, the waterway became a premier tourist attraction for cottagers, recreational boaters and land based visitors, currently attracting over a million visitors every year. Recognizing the importance of the canal to the development of Canada, the federal government designated the Trent-Severn Waterway as a national historic site in 1929.

Apart from the boon to tourism, the waterway also encouraged the development of hydro electricity. The Trent Canal was built using the “slack water system”, which consisted of damming up the rapids and building locks to

prompted the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable John Baird, to convene a special panel to study the Trent-Severn Waterway. Following extensive public consultations, the Panel will report to the



Bobcaygeon lock looking west from the mill circa 1903. Library and Archives Canada C-21220.

bypass the dams. These dams created a head of water, which was used to run the generators that provided the electricity or “white coal” as it was called that helped fuel Ontario’s industrial development. The system of dams and control gates was also used to regulate water levels to ensure a sufficient depth of water for navigation along the waterway. Today, hydro generation and water management throughout the entire Trent-Severn watershed are integral components of the operation of the Waterway. It is this complexity of canal operations, power generation, water management, protecting heritage assets and safeguarding ecological integrity that

Minister with recommendations for the future management of the Waterway.

To help celebrate this rich legacy and to mark the 175th anniversary of the start of construction of the canal, the Trent-Severn Waterway is collaborating with the Bobcaygeon Chamber of Commerce to launch “Born in Bobcaygeon” as a special part of the town’s “Unlock the Summer” event June 6-8. A variety of special events, displays and performances will take place in and around the lockstation and the town of Bobcaygeon. For more information about the anniversary, visit the following: www.tswborninbobcaygeon.org.