

JAMES KERBY::: "THE SHIP CANAL ON THE NAIGARA"::: 1834.

In June of 1834 Col. Kerby wrote the Private Secretary of Sir. John Colborne, to solicit support for his "Ship Canal" at Fort Erie. It was to commence, below his warehouse at Fort Erie, and to pass in a straight line, by the Government Warehouse at Fort Erie, cross in thr ravine, and curving to the head of the bay, or bend in the River; the whole length to be one mile and five furlongs and thirty seven poles; from 12ft to 20ft. of water to be got close in shore, in a secure and sheltered bay, protected by winds by the high sandy ledge called Snake Hill; and thurther protected by a rocky ledge running west, south west, under sandy ridge. This Canal would be behind and in the Village, and cut into the River for a short distance, from the landing pier of the ferry boat, in deep water.

The Village at this time staggled around and below "Fort Erie" and one ferry was there and one was on the lower river in front of George Lewis's place at the foot of Catherine.

There was to be a lock at the lower end" both to give the least possible delay to vessels ascending, and to give the fullest advantage to the vast power it would confer upon this place; a thing most wanted and in itself sufficient to warrant a portion of the expence! The Canal was to accomodte boats of five tons burden, and vessels drawing twelve ft. of water ; and even steam boats of first class; with one lock and load gates at the upper end.

The rock-bed underneath was found to be of limestone, fit for building the docks, and any excavated material, and rock

could be sold in the neighbourhood. The Erie and Ontario Railroad had just obtained a Charter, which this Canal Comp. was intending to compliment; and this encouraged interest in the project; especially since the Port Of Chippewa was thriving with the opening of the new Welland Canal, from Lake Ontario to Port Robinson to the Welland River, and the Grist Mills in the immediate section, were at Chippewa and Fort Erie.

A meeting was held in 1834 and a Committee appointed to draw up a Petition to the Lieut. Govenor:::

The Petition of Alexander Douglas, Charles Jones, George Mac.Kenzie, Edmund Riselay, William Buck, Issac Hawn, Issac Johnson, Jacob Gander, John W. Lewis, James Johnson, Jacob Wilson, and George Hardison of the Township of Bertie, Esquire:

Above members of the Committee appointed at a meeting of the inhabitants of the said township of Bertie, on the 24 of Aug. last. There was given to Kerby to forward(a petition) in which the enumerated the natural impediments to a free water-communication, between Lake Erie & the Niagara River; that because of the strength of these rapids, sailing vessles could only ascend with a strong favourable wind; having sometimes to resort to the use of the recently completed Canal in the U.S.A. , to avoid the Rapids. That the inhabitants of the frontier were inconvenienced for the want of water power for Mills, and various other hydraulic purposes; Mills on the American side having to be used for want of utilities on the Canadian side. This made the Canadians completely dependent on the Americans

at their own price; for making flour, carding & manufacturing wool, and the sawing of lumber; and these services were not available when the ice was running, during winter and spring.

To remedy all this The Committee, petitioned for the said Canal, to pass through Military Reserve, or Reserved Lands of the Crown of Fort Erie. In his forwarding letter Major Kerby stated::

"That very few place along the Niagara frontier, possess greater advantages then this neighbourhood; and these could soon develop themselves, when the proposed improvements, and the Erie and Ontario Railroad, are completed, but most to certain extent, lie dormant , until then."

The matter was referred to the Royal Engineer, Capt. (later sir Richard) Bonnycastle; who stated it impossible to give an opinion, until a new servey was made; although deeming it of great importance to Bertie & Fort Erie generally.

Unfortunately during the following stormy session; of Parliament; it was not brought up, but on Dec. 7th., 1836 another Petition from Alexander Douglas (Dr. Douglas's Father) and 88 others from Bertie and Willoughby townships, asking for permission to incorporate a canal construction, Comp." from Fort Erie to some place on the Niagara River below the Rapids"; was introduced by the Niagara Member; and it was referred to a special committee, which reported favourably , to Parliament on the 18th., of Jan. 1837. However when it came up for the third reading on Feb 14th., William Hamilton Merrit, moved an ammentent , that nothing in the Bill should effect the rights

and powers of the Welland Canal Company; and this was given final consent in March. However due to hard times , following upon the heels of Commercial & Industrial failures , throughout the country, and civil strife , which made borrowing for such an enterprise almost impossible; the FORT ERIE SHIP CANAL, died a slow death; for the first spadeful of sod, was never turned; and Fort Erie lost its chance to become a commercial metropoles to vie with Buffalo, which it once overshadowed.

James Kerby ; ; ;

In 1838 James Kerby was in command of the Queen's Own Fencibles at Waterloo; which met at the old Drill Shed on Waterloo St., near Queen, west side. It consisted of upwards of 600 men; including a Company of the 24th Reg. who were served by the Rev. John Anderson of St. Paul's Parish, in Waterloo.

Cpts. Samuel Usher.
James Egan
Edmund Riselay
Joseph Clark

Lts. J. Usher
W.B. Roberts
Jno. Mc. Wilson

Eng. William Thompson
George Roberts
Kenneth Reid
James Hoggan

Adj. Dennis Kerby
Pay Master K. Roberts

Surgeons- William Sutherland & Angus Hall

Assistant Quartermaster John Martin.

"Fort Eric, July 18th, 1838.

"Col. the Honble James Kerby

"We, the undersigned officers of the Queens Niagara Fencibles, now about to be disbanded, feel desirous of shewing our respect and esteem to you as Col. of the Corps. We therefore beg your acceptance of the accompanying small but sincere testimonial of the kind feelings we have entertained towards you. With the best wishes for the future Welfare and happiness of yourself and Family We will ever remain your sincere and devoted Friends.

Captains

1 James S. Egan
2 Edmund Riselay
3 George H. Sheehan
4 Alexr. Douglas
5 William Duff
6 C. H. Leonard
7 John Ussher
8 C. W. Grange

Lieutenants.

1 Wm. E. Roberts
2
3 John Walker
4 John Bowen
5 Mark Dyett
6 William Peterson
7 Charles Hale.

Ensigns.

1 G. W. Webster
2 Kenneth Reid
3 James Hogan
4 John Mylne
5 Wm. A. Rooth
6 Henry Foot

Pay Mastr.

Kenneth Robertson

Surgeons.

William Sutherland
Cyrenius Hall."

On March 6 he was directed to bargain for two thousand bushels on the River Thames. On April 10 they observed that he had purchased 1650 bushels and stated their hopes that he would obtain two thousand. On May 3, he is informed that they have chartered the schooner *Perseverance* to convey their wheat to Fort Erie and he was instructed to ship one thousand bushels on board her. On June 1, they wrote that he had their authority to pay 5/ per bushel for another thousand bushels, although the price paid at Fort Erie Mills, Chippawa, and Queenston had fallen considerably. On June 9th the *Perseverance* had returned from Kettle Creek with wheat and flour, and as soon as she was unloaded, which would be the next day, she would sail for Sandwich, if the wind permitted, to take on board the wheat he had on hand. On June 11, they stated that a scow belonging to them loaded with wheat from a vessel at Fort Erie had sunk in the rapids but the cargo had been saved. Next day they informed him they would send 715 bags for shipping wheat. On June 13, the *Perseverance* was still at Fort Erie harbour, waiting for a fair wind. On June 29 they announced that the *Perseverance* had sailed with bags on board and directed Askin to ship not less than 2200 bushels on her. He was instructed to "engage" all the wheat he could, even if he had to pay 5/ per bushel for it, delivered at Sandwich. On July 10, they had sent 535 bags on the *Perseverance* and the wheat shipped in her had arrived in "perfect good order." They were glad to learn that Askin was likely to increase the quantity purchased by him to five or six thousand bushels. On July 28, they remarked that the price of wheat had fallen but hoped he would continue to buy to the extent of six thousand bushels if he could do it at 4/ to 4/6 per bushel or even 5/ for a good lot as an inducement, "but it is the extent you ought to pay for the present, lower if you possibly can." On August 10, the *Perseverance* had just discharged her cargo of wheat from the River Thames and would return for more. On August 22, he was told that Kerby had gone with his family to Avon Springs, in the State of New York, for the benefit of their health. Wheat was down again in Montreal and he was cautioned not to pay more than

4/6 per bushel. "The wheat of the present year is not worth with us as much as that of last year by 1/6 per bushel." On August 30, they stated that the *Perseverance* had arrived with a thousand bushels of wheat and had sailed the day before for another cargo from Kettle Creek. On September 13 Kerby was absent attending the Assizes at Niagara. The schooner *Talbot* had arrived the day before. They had received a part of her cargo and the remainder had been unloaded at Fort Erie. On November 2, Askin was informed that the absence of Kerby attending the Quarter Sessions and the adjourned Assizes immediately after for the last three weeks had precluded him from going into his accounts. Finally, on November 27 they inquired whether he would be able to act as their agent for the purchase of wheat on the same terms as before.

Quote:::: from Kerby by Col E.A. Cruikshank.

"On Feb. 1820, Grant and Kerby took a step to provide for the future purchase of the Grist Mill at Fort Erie rapids, from William Dunbar. The Mill had been built some thirty years before by , and Dunbar had cut a canal through solid rock for a considerable distance for supplying it with water from the river. It escaped destruction during the war, 1812.

JAMES KERBY----- and THE FORT ERIE MILL:::::

In 1796 Thomas Clark went into Partnership with a Samuel St., and a Robert Nichol. It lasted three years; and they built warehouses at Queenston, Chippewa, and Fort Erie. In the early 1800's A Robert Grant went into Partnership with James Kerby and they leased these warehouses of Clark & St.

The stone warehouse that stood just south of the Old Fort, was taken over by the Government in 1812; and they held it till the troops left, 1813. It was soon afterwards burnt by the enemy. The war had done great damage to Grant & Kerby's holdings in the district; however they kept the partnership and took up again as forwarders and shippers of Merchandise from over the Niagara Portage to Fort Erie.

In 1820 Robert Grant took over the Mill property at Fort Erie, from a William Dunbar. This Mill was situated at the head of the Rapids, about 3/4 of a mile upstream from the Waterloo Ferry landing at the foot of Catherine St. A channel was deepened in the rock along the shoreline of the river to make "The MILL RACE". The next closest Mill was Chippewa; so all the wheat grown within ten miles of the village was brought to Fort Erie Mills. In order to keep the Mill fully employed, it was necessary to import grain from other areas; and this entailed a great deal of work for Kerby and his partner. During the winter the Mill was often idle, because of the ice jams in the River; and at other times of the year it was out of operation for the lack of sufficient water. Kerby sought help from the Government to have a canal built; which would not only assure a plentiful supply of water, but would allow safe passage of boats upstream in the area of the Rapids. To further this dream a committee of prominent men in the Village formed, and for several years heated discussions for and against this venture were heard around the Village. Finally the idea was shelved because of the financial reasons, and also lack of interest in the right places.

In 1823, Grant & Kerby sold a third of their interests in the Mill to Benjamin Hardison. He died shortly after and Kerby took over operations.

In 1831 Grant & Kerby broke up their Partnership, and Kerby went into business on his own. Poor health, and the pressure of other Public offices, made his Mill unprofitable; and he sold out to Buffalo interests, in 1843. On Jan 14th 1831 William Dunbar gave Kerby a quit claim deed of his interests in the Fort Erie Mills for the sum of one thousand pounds. Kerby was given the Superintendance of the Ferry in 1840, and the same year he had wharfs and a warehouse built. He employed Nelson Forsyth for this job, and for the job of running his Ferry. The new landing was moved upstream from the foot of Catherine, 1/3rd. of a mile from the old Landing, and thus closer to the Mill. He approached the Government to make this place the official landing, and for years fought this out with them and the owners of the Old Ferry.

"Fort Erie Mills, 29th Decr., 1830.

"With reference to Grant & Kerby's letter under date of the 27th Novr., an Answer to which has been just received, & we noted its contents, I beg leave to acquaint you that our co-partnership, which has existed for nearly twenty years, will be dissolved by mutual consent on the 31st instant, And that the business at this place after that period will be conducted by myself. I shall continue to purchase wheat as usual, And if you will consent to become my Agent in your Quarter, under the conditions contained in your letter last received in relation thereto, I shall be pleased. You will be pleased to confirm the understanding, if found agreeable to you, and to instruct me at your earliest convenience how I shall pay your drafts, or remit you.

"G & K wrote you on the 17th instant."

On 14th of January, 1831, William Dunbar gave Kerby a quit claim deed of his interest in the Fort Erie Mills, for the sum of one thousand pounds.