

## Shooting the Long Sault Rapids

By Ian Bowering

For historians "firsts" have magnetic attraction. Given this aura of uniqueness it is not unusual to find varying accounts and dates for the time something momentous happened. This is true of the shooting of the Long Sault Rapids by steamboat.

According to the United Counties historian Judge Pringle, the "Neptune" tried the Rapids in 1828. Pringle wrote: "...an attempt was made to run (the "Neptune") up to the foot of the Long Sault Rapids. All went well until she got into the channel between Barnhart's Island and the south shore, where she was caught in the strong chute that sets across from the island, and narrowly escaped an upset." The first recorded successful attempt took place according to G.W. Browne in his 1905 book "The St. Lawrence," in 1840.

To see if the Rapids could be navigated, "Two Indians were paid \$1,000 to do the trick. They built a crib 40 foot square, pine floats 10 feet apart, and stakes 10 feet long driven in each square, projecting downwards."

"There were Indians stationed at the foot of the Rapids, some in trees, some on the bank. The crib was towed by others to the Rapids, where they let it go. They observed its course as it went with the current of the stream. At the foot of the Rapids, the crib was turned over for examination and none of the stakes were broken. This they took for positive indication that there was water enough to run the 'Ontario' through." "The Indians boarded the steamer and each one piloted her as far as he had observed the crib's course. Only one white man was aboard, the engineer, who was also said to have received \$1,000 for his job. All went well." The south channel was one first, Pringle records the successful running of the north channel.

He Pringle wrote: "The river steamboats came down the south channel of the Longue Sault for six years after the opening of the Cornwall canal. It is said that the first steamboat that tried the north channel was the "George Frederic." This voyage was recounted by the "Cornwall Observer", on June 1, 1848 in a story headed "The North Channel of the Long Sault." "This channel was successfully navigated on the morning of the 1st June, by the steamer "George Frederic," commanded by Captain Sawyer, under the management and superintendence of Messrs. Adam Hanes and W. Hoople, of Dickinson's Landing, at 7 a.m., and arrived at the wharf, at Cornwall, after making the run of 12 miles with perfect ease and safety in the space of 25 minutes."

"Messrs. A. Kezer and J.E. Dixson, came down on her from the Landing, and they, together with the captain and pilots, appear convinced that this channel has a great depth of water and is far preferable to that on the south side of Long Sault Island for large steamers."

"The "George Frederic" is a new boat, about the size of the "Henry Gildersleeve." She drew at the time of making the passage, about five feet of water and came down the rapids under a full head of steam."

Providing safe excitement, running the St. Lawrence Rapids became a quintessential Canadian Victorian experience. Numerous steamboats were constructed to service this new market. In 1853, the trip between Kingston and Montreal could be taken by the "New Era," the "St. Lawrence," the "Ottawa," and the "Lord Elgin," skippered by Captain Farlinger.

As time progressed these boats were replaced by larger and grander vessels such as the "Corsican," and the "Britannic," built in 1866 and scrapped in 1937. For many locals, however, river transportation is forever linked to the "Rapids Queen," launched in 1892 as the "Columbian," "Rapids King" built in 1907, and the "Rapids Prince," constructed in 1910. Today the hull of the "Rapids Queen" is a visible breakwater for one of Toronto's islands.