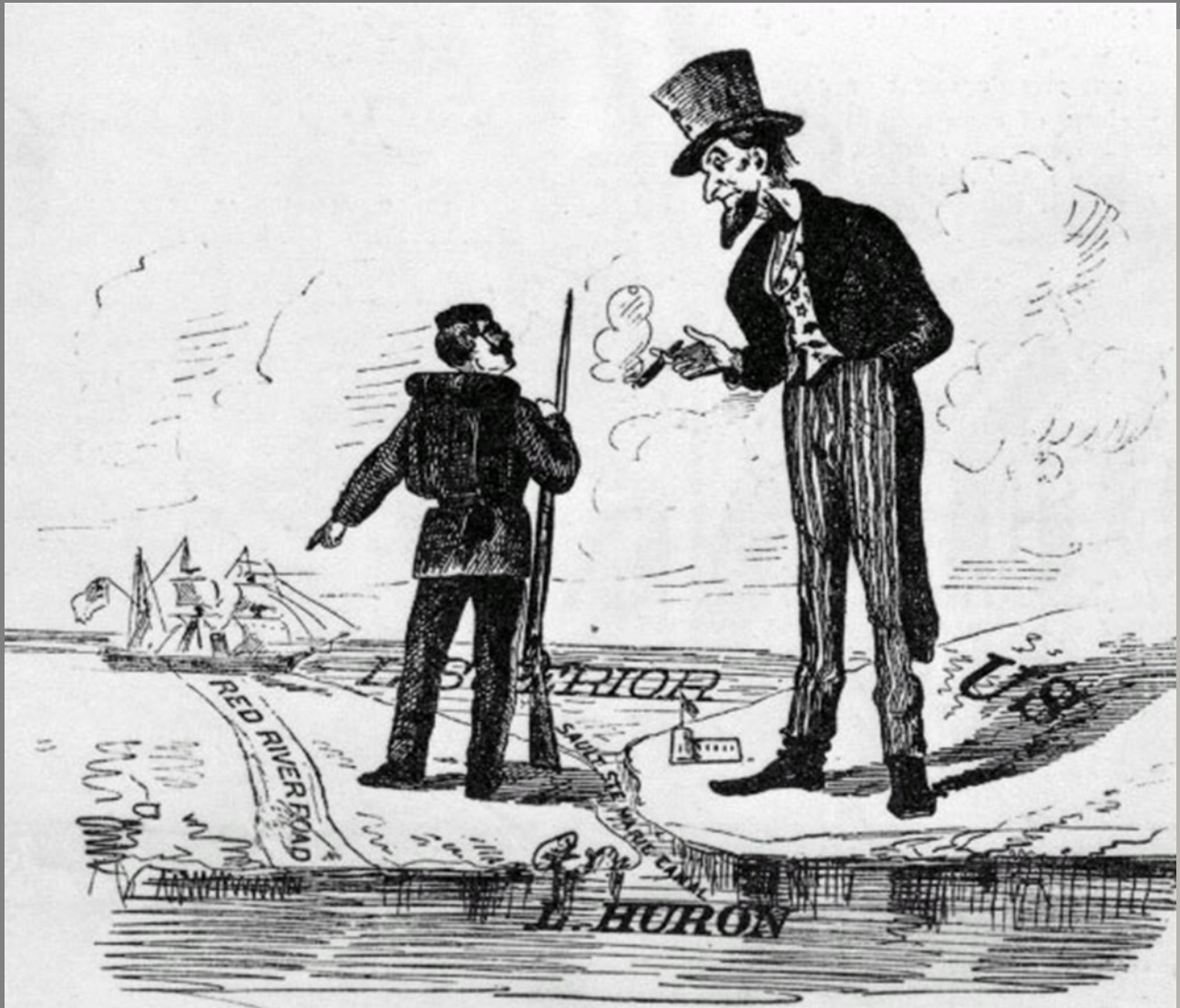


SHOWDOWN WITH UNCLE SAM

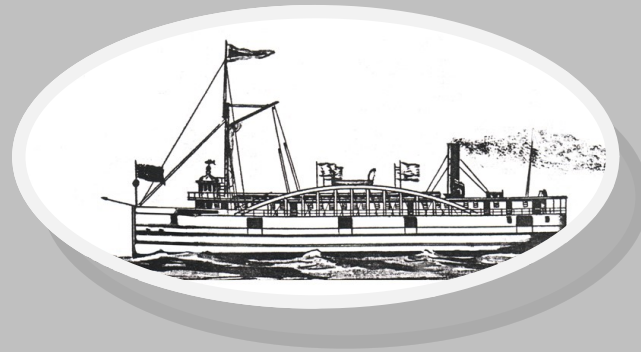


YOUNG CANADA.—“ Never mind, Uncle, I think we can go without your canal.”
UNCLE SAM.—“ Du tell! Wal now, I never thought of that!”

THE CHICORA AFFAIR

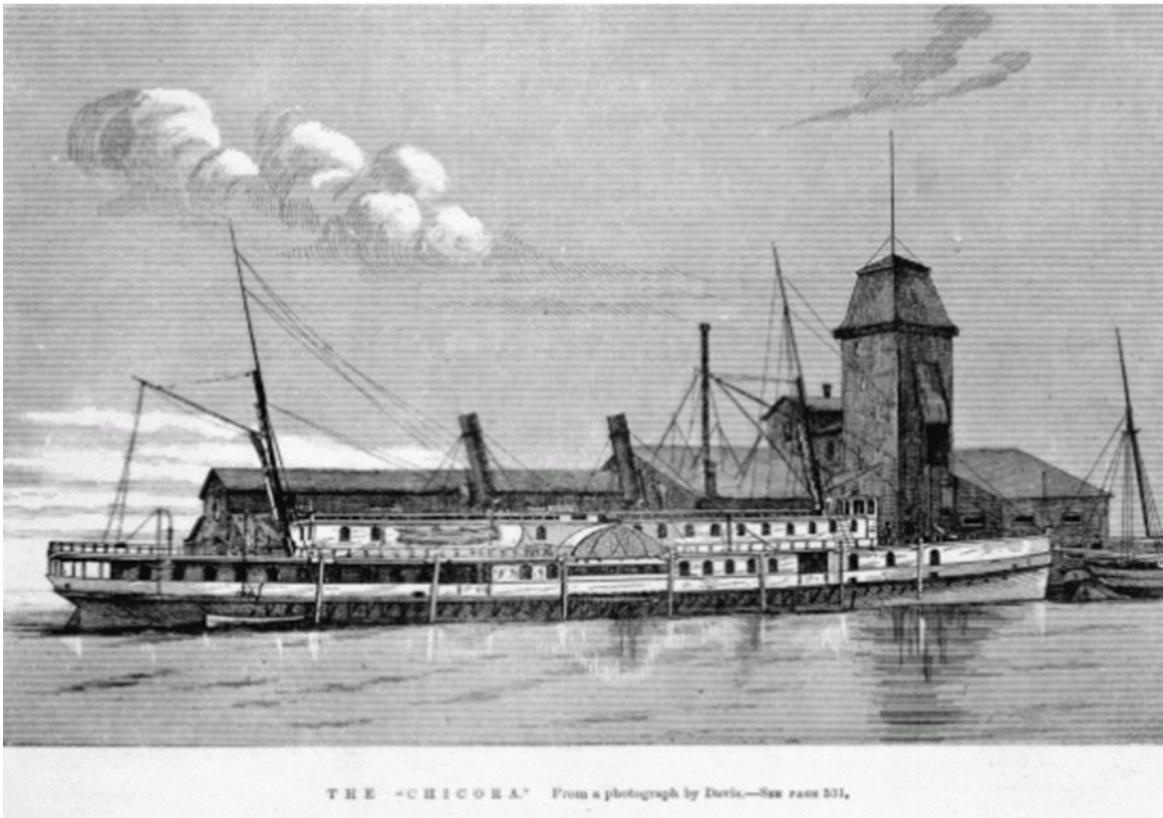
STEAMBOAT STORIES

A collection of stories featuring vessels and events on the Upper Great Lakes in the 19th and early 20th centuries



Showdown with Uncle Sam

One of a series of
Georgian Bay Stories



The steamer *Chicora* at Collingwood. *Chicora* carried military supplies for the Red River Expedition 1870

The Chicora had a History

The American Civil War (1861-1865) left a bitter after taste about Canada in the mouths of the politicians of the Northern United States. The bad taste was brought about because the English had openly supported the South in order to preserve their sources of cotton. Cotton was a mainstay of British textile production in the view of industrial and mercantile interests in the UK. The supply line had to be protected. True, cotton production was supported by slave labour and true, the English had terminated slavery back in 1833, but business was business.

Confederate spies were active in Toronto and Halifax during the war and there was even a plot hatched in southern Ontario (Upper Canada) to free over a two thousand captured Confederate soldiers imprisoned on Johnson Island in Lake Erie. A

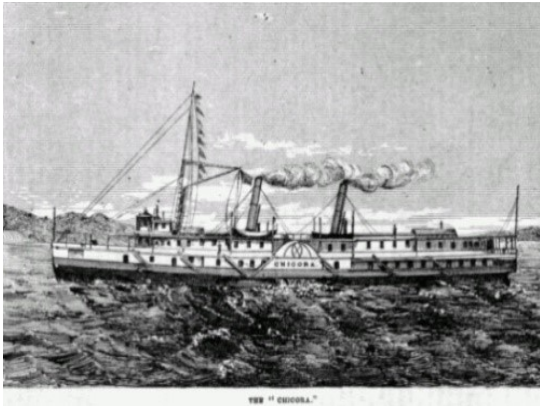


Johnson Island in Lake Erie held several thousand Confederate prisoners during the US Civil War. A plot was hatched in Canada to free these prisoners.

number of Canadian business men supported the South and some of those supporters were in the shipping business on the Great Lakes. Confederate plots against the North found fertile ground in Upper and Lower Canada.

Into the mix were several flash points between the North and their relations with Britain. The Trent Affair in 1861, the Chesapeake Affair in 1863, and the St. Albans Raid in 1864, were the most notable. Although Canadian confederation was not concluded until 1867, the newly formed country was the most accessible target, for U.S. bitterness after the Civil War was over.

During the war the North set up a blockade to prohibit trade with the Confederate



The *Chicora* was a Confederate blockade runner in 1865

states. The South responded by having blockade runners pierce the cordon enforced around its ports and at times engaged Union gun boats in battle.

The *Chicora* was one of those blockade runners on the Atlantic coast during the war. At the end of the Civil War the ship found her way to the Great

Lakes in 1868. She was rebuilt and repurposed at the dry dock in Collingwood Ontario. Now she

became a mail carrier and general purpose vessel for passengers and freight to Lake Superior ports from the rail head of the Northern Railway at Collingwood.

Canadians for their part were nervous about the Fenians (Irish nationalists), who imagined that disturbances in Canada would somehow result in changes in British



Upper Fort Garry 1870. The building beyond the flagpole was where Louis Riel and his council planned their strategy to resist what they believed was the aggression by the Government of Canada

Painting by W.H. Strong

policy in Ireland). The Fenians found shelter in the U.S. and initiated sporadic raids across the border.

An additional concern was that the 200 year old charter for Rupert's Land given to the Hudson's Bay company by Charles II in 1670 was up. It was uncertain what would happen to this huge tract of land. The Company was pressured by the British into deeding the vast territory to Canada for 1.5 million dollars in 1869. Part of the deal included making treaties with the indigenous people living in the territory. That included the Metis living in the Fort Garry region of the Red River. Canada did not conclude the treaties immediately and therefore could not complete the legal transfer. Until the legalities were completed a political vacuum was created. Louis Riel regarded the Canadian takeover of the land as aggression against the Metis.



Rupert's Land (marked in green) was leased to the Hudson Bay Company for 200 Years in 1670. The land was sold to Canada for 1.5 million dollars in 1869

Troubles in the West

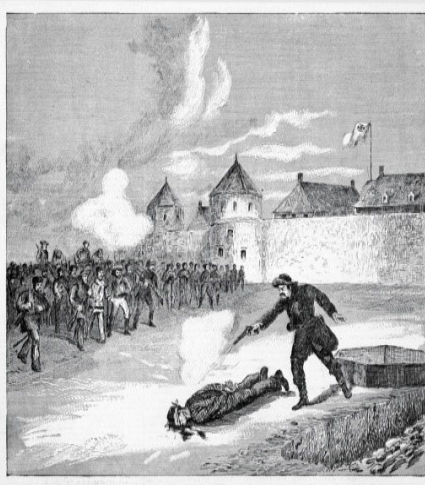
Over the fall of 1869, events in the Canadian northwest developed into a national political crisis. Louis Riel, was about to challenge the new Dominion of Canada over the territory in the Red River. The Government of Canada was swept into a crisis in what was called the "Chicora Affair" in the spring of 1870.

The Metis, in Manitoba with Louis Riel as their leader posted a List of Rights to protect Metis culture, not only from English Canadian immigration pressure but from fear of expansionist sentiment in the United States. Riel was frustrated by the lack of action to his List of Rights by the Canadian government so he proclaimed a "provisional government."



Louis Riel proclaimed a provisional government for the Métis

That did not stop the Canadian Government from sending surveyors west in the fall of 1869 to survey lands the Metis considered their own. The surveyors of course were surveying for future Canadian land development and settlement. These surveyors were not the best diplomats. Instead they created friction despite direct orders from the Prime Minister John A. Macdonald show respect for the Metis. The land certainly was not legally Canadian at this point.

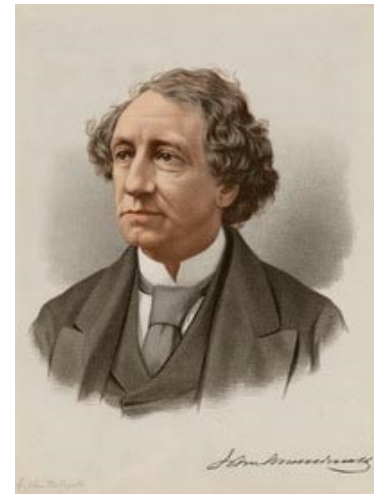


The Canadian Illustrated News drawing of the execution of Thomas Scott

An incident where surveyor Thomas Scott, an Irish Orangeman from Ontario, was arrested, jailed, and eventually shot in March of 1870 resulted in stirred up emotions in Ontario.

The Globe newspaper in Toronto riled passions of their English Protestant base in editorials about the execution stating that Scott was “murdered”.

Prime Minister Macdonald of the three year old Dominion of Canada was under huge political pressure to bring the Metis to heel and to quell what was seen by English Protestants in Ontario as a “rebellion”. French Catholic Quebecers saw otherwise. They viewed the issue as a struggle by a French speaking Catholic minority attempting to preserve their culture. Macdonald’s decision to send an



John A Macdonald and his ministers planned for a response to Riel’s proclamation



Metis gather to listen to the list of demands by the provisional government

expeditionary force to Red River was a major test for the new nation.

The Red River was over 1500 miles away from Canada’s capital. There was no all Canadian road, railway, or other viable way to send soldiers to the area we now call Manitoba. There was a rail link though the USA but given the hard feelings and the insecurity it generated, that plan was out of

the question. Landing soldiers on the shores of Hudson’s Bay and then following the old trade routes to Fort Garry on the Red River was considered but also rejected. It would take two years to get there, do the job, and get out given the distances involved. Besides the British, who promised to send troops, agreed only to a one year commitment. The bottom line was, Canada needed the support of the British military to do the job. . Eventually the decision was made to send troops in the spring by steamboat to Fort William then overland on a newly

constructed road.

The planning involved collecting equipment and supplies for the completion of a road west from Fort William to Fort Garry. It was a huge job under the supervision of engineer Simon Dawson. Scows had to be built and dozens of small boats suitable for moving across the inland lakes were needed. Additionally there was the task of assembling personnel tough enough to deal with the rigors of road building in difficult terrain and unpredictable weather. And those pesky “Little Black Flies”.

In early February 1870, Macdonald’s government and military planners initiated serious preparations for the expeditionary force. They would assemble a Canadian militia plus regulars from Britain in Toronto for basic training. As soon as the ice left the lakes they would be dispatched to Collingwood on Georgian Bay then travel steam boat to Fort William at the head of the lakes.

From there the force would follow a newly built Dawson road through the swamps, forests, lakes, and hills of Northwest Ontario to Fort Garry.

However there were thorny diplomatic challenges waiting. There was no canal on the Canadian side of the St. Mary’s River. The only lock into Lake Superior was under American control. How would the U.S. government react to British and Canadian “foreign” military troops sailing through their locks?

It was assumed there would be trouble.

And there was.



Colonel Wolseley was named commander of the combined force of British lars and Canadian militia

by



Hamilton Fish Secretary of State
USA

GETTING READY

Colonel Garnet Wolseley was charged with a duty to carry out what seemed like an insurmountable task. His job simply stated, was to establish Canadian control in the west. He had to manage a very complex military project.

His logistics operation had to oversee the transport of road builders, horses, feed, food, soldiers, military equipment and day to day supplies for the entire operation.

Colonel Wolseley commanded a combined force of British soldiers and Canadian militia. It was agreed that the British troops on the expedition would return to central Canada before the shipping season closed in late October. The Canadian militia would remain in the Red River as a garrison after the campaign concluded. The force consisted of the following:

Detachment of Royal Engineers	1 officer	19 rank
Detachment of Royal Artillery	1 officer	19 rank
1 st Battalion 60 Royal Rifles	26 officers	351 rank
Army Service Corps	0 officers	26 rank
Army Hospital Corps	0 officers	8 rank
1 st Ontario Militia	28 officers	350 rank
2 nd Quebec Militia	28 officers	350 rank

By the end of April 1870 Colonel Garnet Wolseley was ready to move his forces to the northwest as quickly as possible. It was an ambitious and complex military project and steamers, schooners, scows, and barges were to play an important part in the logistics. They would have to transport the entire personnel and material almost 600 miles from Collingwood to Fort William at the western end of Lake Superior.

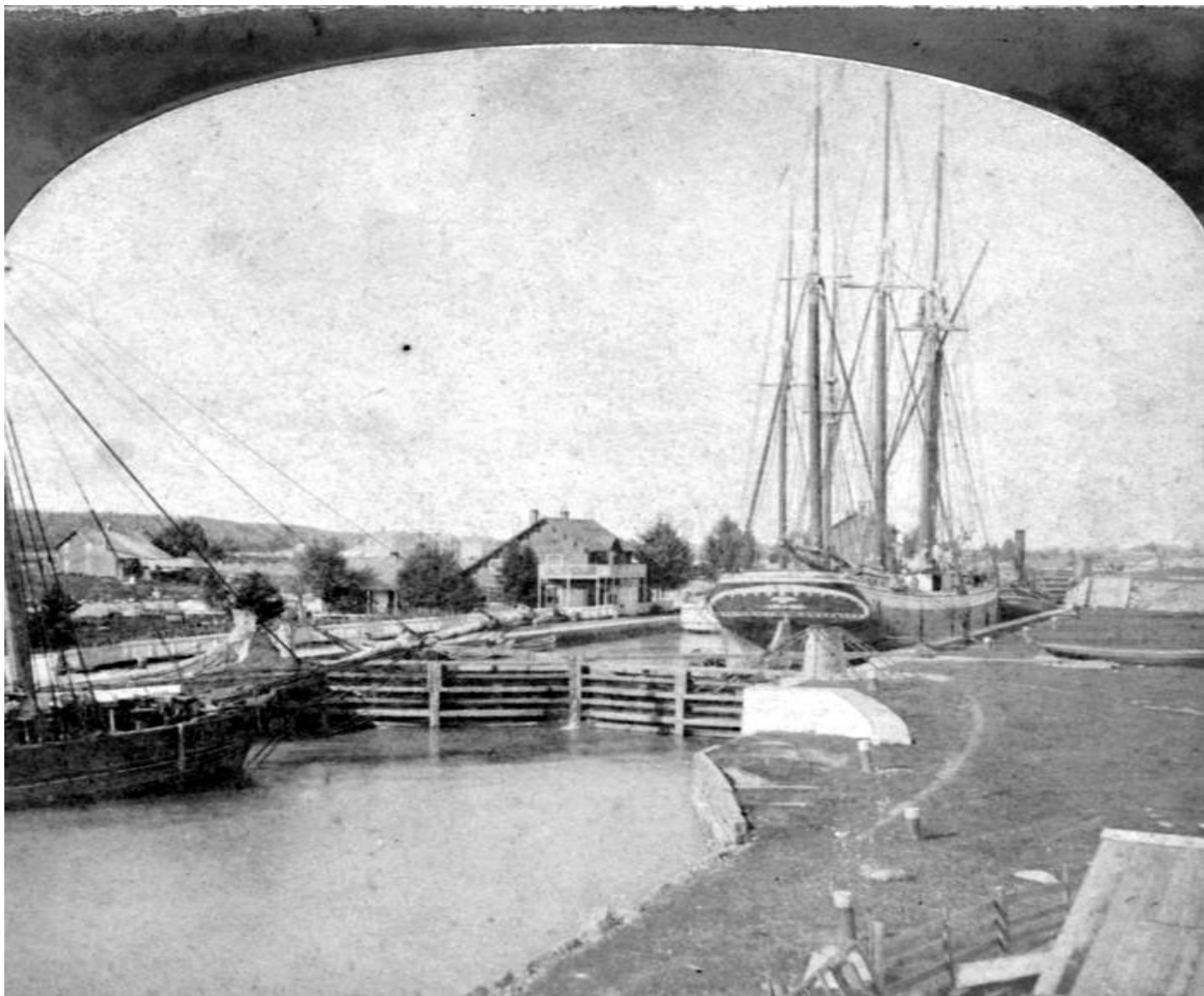
To fully comprehend the broader political and economic scope of the mission into which the steamers of the Great Lakes were about to be drawn into, it is necessary to turn the clock backwards and understand the Riel issue in the context of some of the diplomatic pressures and political issues in the U.S. and Britain.

The proponents of the Northern Pacific Railway in the USA had visions of a rail line from Minnesota to the Pacific and a spur line into Canada. Their lobbyists operating in Washington had the ear of President Ulysses S Grant and Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. Their expansionist views were well known by the government of Canada, however President Grant was not willing to publicly support the expansionist position. The U.S. administration was astute enough to realize that construction of the Northern Pacific Railway just south of the border



Canadian Illustrated News of July 7, 1870 showing the *Chicora* passing through the Soo Locks

would make any attempt by Canadians to build a solely Canadian railroad in the future an economically risky business. Thus the potential growth of the Canadian west might simply fall into American hands through economic expediency. Secretary of State Fish believed that Britain wanted to get rid of the burden of Canada anyway because it was a drain on their treasury. Further, he had reports that Confederation was weak and not functioning well. There was dissatisfaction with the new government in the Maritimes. British Columbia was making overtures to join with the USA. In short, there was every reason to believe that Canada might implode on its own without running the risk of offending the British by provocative expansionist moves. The Canadian west might just happen to fall



Locks on the American side at Sault Ste. Marie

into U.S. hands of its own accord because it was a drain on their treasury. the new government in the Maritimes. British Columbia was making overtures to join with the USA. In short, there was every reason to believe that Canada might implode on its own without running the risk of offending the British by provocative expansionist moves. The Canadian west might just happen to fall into U.S. hands of its own accord.

The proponents of the Northern Pacific Railway in the USA had visions of a rail line from Minnesota to the Pacific and a spur line into Canada Their lobbyists operating in Washington had the ear of President Ulysses S Grant and Secretary of State Hamilton Fish. Their expansionist views were well known by the

government of Canada, however President Grant was not willing to publicly support the expansionist position. The U.S. administration was astute enough to realize that construction of the Northern Pacific Railway just south of the border would make any attempt by Canadians to build a solely Canadian railroad in the future an economically risky business. Thus the potential growth of the Canadian west might simply fall into American hands through economic expediency. Secretary of State Fish believed that Britain wanted to get rid of the burden of Canada anyway because it was a drain on their treasury. Further, he had reports that Confederation was weak and not functioning well. There was dissatisfaction with the new government in the Maritimes. British Columbia was making overtures to join with the USA. In short, there was every reason to believe that Canada might implode on its own without running the risk of offending the British by provocative expansionist moves. The Canadian west might just happen to fall into U.S. hands of its own accord. That Canada was planning an expeditionary force to deal with Riel, the U.S. cabinet decided that if the British requested moving troops and military equipment through the USA, permission would be denied as a bargaining tool for the eventual resolution of the *Alabama* dispute. Fish informed the British Ambassador, Sir Edward Thornton of the decision to deny troop movements through the Sault locks. He also informed Thornton that shipping military supplies through the locks at the Sault was out of the question.

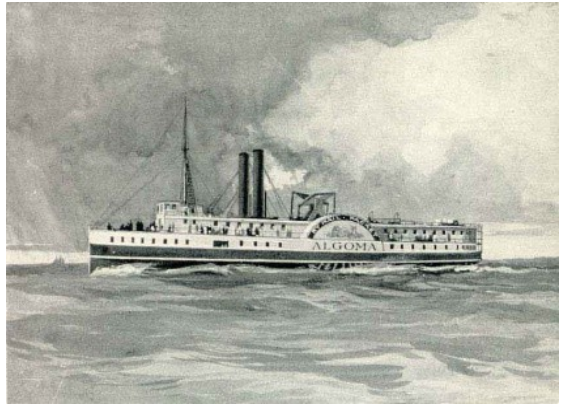
Thornton responded by proposing several scenarios.

1. Allow ships to pass through the Sault locks with men and equipment
2. Allow ships to pass through the Sault locks with material only
3. Allow ships to pass through the Sault locks with neither.

Thornton reminded Fish that Union ships had been allowed to pass through the Canadian Welland Canal between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario during the Civil War without impediment. Fish saw no parallel. Clearly the Canadian steamers were sailing into trouble.

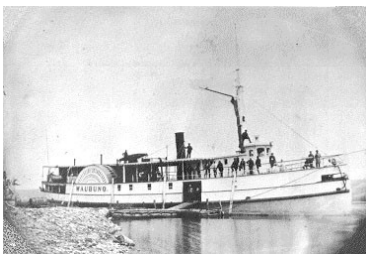
Confrontation

The *Algoma* was the first ship to sail for Fort William at the head of the lakes, on May 3. On deck the French Canadian voyageurs sang “pour la patrie” a French patriotic song from the 1847 uprisings in France. *Chicora* followed the *Algoma* on May 7. At the same time, on the other side of the border, U.S. officers were instructed to deny passage through the locks to all ships carrying military supplies. Before the orders were implemented by May 10, the *Algoma*, laden with a "chaos of military stores" had slipped past the authorities at the American locks. She was now in Lake Superior where she would remain over the summer. The *Chicora* arrived at the Sault locks five days behind the *Algoma*.



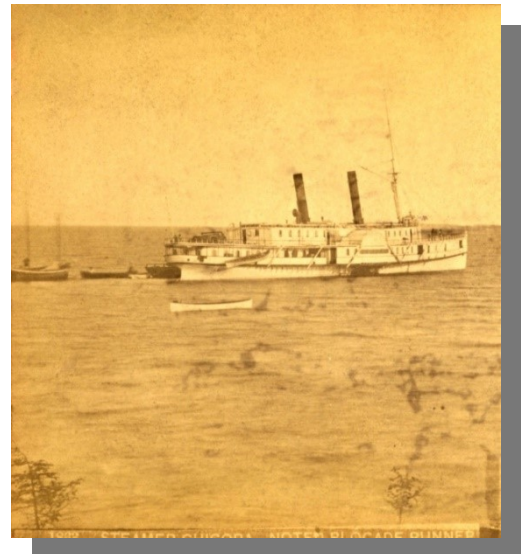
The *Algoma* left Collingwood for the Sault May 3, facing heavy ice still on Georgian Bay

Because the *Chicora* had a history as a blockade runner in the Civil War, it was assumed by Canadian officials there would be difficulty at the



The *Waubuno* was old and slow but good enough to get troops to the Sault.

locks for her. Hamilton Fish, US Secretary of State told the U.S commander at the locks that no military force be allowed to pass through the locks without government approval. The *Algoma's* cargo was deemed non military. Canadian officials knew



The *Chicora* was a mail carrier, freight and passenger steamer on the Great Lakes

Chicora's cargo would not be so considered. It was therefore decided that *Chicora* would discharge her passengers and military stores below the rapids on Canadian soil. The initial plan was that Indians would load small boats and pole them through the Canadian rapids then load equipment and stores directly onto a waiting steamer. It would be hard work moving these stores not only because the rapids were tumultuous at this early part of the spring season, but because the current even above the rapids was strong and further up the water was relatively deep. Poles would be no use and paddles would be ineffective. Thus after the *Chicora* discharged her military cargo and military personnel below the locks everything would have to be portaged to a point above the rapids and reloaded before heading on to Fort William. In anticipation of a problem for the *Chicora*, the government of Canada early in the year went to great lengths to hide the fact that she had been chartered to move military men and stores. To accomplish the ruse, the *Chicora* was given a mail contract for \$4900, an unheard of sum for a mail contract at the time. The addendum to the contract stated the *Chicora* was to carry "such men and stores as the Government may desire to send.

"When the *Chicora* arrived at the Soo (the name the British insisted on calling Sault Ste. Marie), tensions were high. On the Canadian side was a soldier's encampment at the Hudson's Bay post to watch for possible incursions from "Yankee-Fenians". On the American side at Fort Brady was a garrison of 250 regulars from the 1st American Infantry with orders directly from the President not to allow military supplies through the locks. *Chicora* arrived at the Soo on May 8th and duly unloaded her military supplies and troops.

Chicora then left the Canadian shore and proceeded to the locks. American officers were waiting. They inspected the ship and found several wooden boxes labeled "hardware". After inspection and a four hour negotiation, passage was

denied because the *Chicora* was obviously carrying "military supplies". Captain McLean of the *Chicora* returned to the Canadian side and unloaded the remainder of his "hardware" and returned to Collingwood. Meanwhile Lieutenant-Colonel W.F. Bolton the commanding British officer at the Sault chartered some U.S. tugs to haul flour and other foods by barge to soldiers waiting above the locks. This too was disallowed.

What happened next was a series of diplomatic moves initiated by Bolton. He contacted Ottawa. Canadian government officials let it be known to Secretary of State Fish that unless there was some positive resolution, they might in turn close off the Welland canal. President Grant blinked. He ordered Governor Henry P. Baldwin of Michigan to henceforth allow vessels like the *Chicora* passage as long as they carried no military troops or supplies.

By May 17, the political issue was resolved. Canadian ships with passengers and commercial cargo would be allowed to pass the locks. Military supplies and anything related to Wolseley's expedition on any vessel must be portaged from below the rapids to a newly constructed wharf above the rapids. The results of the negotiations were telegraphed back to Collingwood and the 135 foot *Waubuno* immediately departed for the Sault with two companies of soldiers under Major Wainright. Piled high on the decks were 15 wagons. Below were hundreds of bags of flour, oats, hay, and nine yoke of oxen. The Government of Canada then hired a U.S. vessel, the *Brooklyn* to pass with no cargo through the locks into Lake Superior. She would work alongside the *Algoma*, moving portaged

equipment and men to Prince Arthur's Landing near Fort William from above the Sault locks. Because of the *Brooklyn's* U.S. registry and the captain's protestations that he was not in the employ of the Canadian Government, she managed to get through the locks without American intervention and scrutiny.

With the resolution of the diplomatic issue at the Sault, all seemed to be in order for the transfer of materials around the locks to Lake Superior.

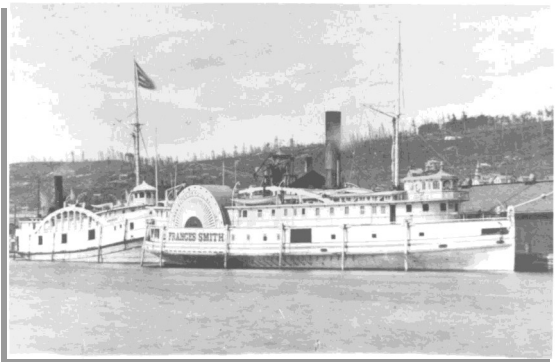
Meanwhile, the *Frances Smith* completed her regular run from Parry Sound to Collingwood on May 20, sailed to her home port,

Owen Sound, then returned to Collingwood on May 21, arriving at 8 a.m. ready to enter the service of the Government of Canada, transporting troops to the lakehead. Overnight the ship's carpenter and eight workers built stalls for 40 animals and outfitted the *Frances Smith* for her new job. She would carry Colonel Wolseley's supplies for the looming conflict with Riel

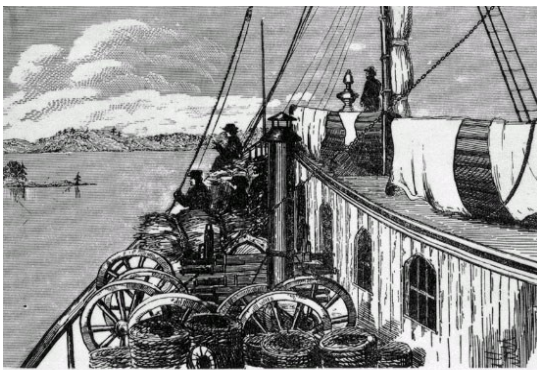
Excitement at Collingwood



The Schickluna was used as a tow boat hauling schooners laden with military supplies



The *Frances Smith* was chartered to haul supplies and soldiers to the Sault. Captain W.H. Smith had serious disagreements with officials over pay



Chicora fully loaded leaves Collingwood on May 7 1870

As the greening of spring spread over the Blue Mountains, Collingwood was filled with excitement and life all week. Visitors, children, and residents swarmed around the wharf hoping to get a glimpse of the soldiers. Special freight trains arrived day and night, blowing their whistles as if to announce a holiday. As a result, the citizenry got very little sleep. The clatter of wagons and shouts of teamsters created a hubbub that transformed the town into a bustling seaport. On the docks there was no time for idlers or spare talk. Workmen were busy hauling heavy bales, rolling barrels of provisions, and packing cargo on board the *Frances Smith* and the returned *Chicora*,

now tied up at the wharf. Hand trucks pushed by rain drenched men clattered over planks and through the gangways, and onto the forward deck. The freight was dropped into the hold where it was stacked high along the ship walls. Only a few oil lanterns gave enough light to complete the tasks. The work was brutal and relentless.

Between 8 a.m., Saturday, May 21 and early evening the *Frances Smith* was loaded with 200 half barrels of pork, 300 barrels of biscuits, 100 barrels of sugar, 300 half barrels of flour, enough

tents for a battalion of 350 men, camp equipment, 300 bags of oats, 40 horses with their teamsters and tons of pressed hay. There were caskets of tobacco, bags of beans, and chests of tea crowded into the main deck. The *Chicora* tied up a few meters away was likewise loaded.

In spite of rain all day, a large throng met the troop train at the station. The first troop train arrived from Toronto two hours late with three hospital corps, a company of the 60th Rifles and a contingent of staff offices. When the train pulled into Collingwood station with whistle blowing, the rain stopped and the sun appeared. It was a moment of magic. Smart looking officers, their brass buttons shining, marshalled onto the platform. After them, the soldiers fell into formation. Each soldier carried a bedroll over one shoulder and a rifle on the other. After inspection the soldiers marched to the pier with their kit and their new bibles, donated by the Upper Canadian Bible Society. The crowd cheered and the soldiers cheered and waved back to the crowds elated by their enthusiastic send off. While they lined up to board the waiting ships a heavy fog rolled in from the frigid bay obscuring the horizon in a white line of low slung clouds.

It is common in spring for heavy fog to hunker over the shoreline and the horizon while inland, warm temperatures and clearing skies prevail. The departures were delayed. By 5:30 p.m. the fog lifted slightly and *Chicora*, taking advantage of the break in the weather, departed for Sault Ste. Marie, her decks overcrowded with barrels, wagons and soldiers. There was barely room to move on deck. The people of Collingwood witnessed a grand sight as Queen Victoria's forces sailed from the docks toward the distant fog bank.

Because of bad weather and apparent unfamiliarity with the route, the *Frances Smith* arrived at the Sault two days late. The weather remained foggy and rainy



Captain Smith was accused of being drunk on arrival at the Sault.

forcing Captain Smith to pick his way slowly through the North Channel. An on board accident in which a drover was gored by one of the oxen caused some concern on the ship, further distracting Captain Smith from his duties. At the Sault, Lieutenant Colonel Bolton was not pleased about Smith's late arrival. He was less pleased on hearing the report from Major Robertson, commanding officer on board the ship. Major Robertson reported that there were no life preservers on board, there were only two lifeboats, and these could not be lowered into the water because of equipment deficiencies. More damning, was his report that the compasses did not work. Most damning, Major Robertson reported that Captain

Smith had been drunk during the entire voyage.

As the cargo and troops were unloaded for transport around the Sault portage, Bolton and Smith got into an argument. Smith refused to lock upbound through the canal to complete the trip to the lakehead unless the government covered his vessel with \$65,000 insurance against possible loss. Captain Smith then stated, "In the event of your not complying with my request within two hours, I shall charge for the *Frances Smith* at the rate of 500 dollars for every twenty-four hours after 10 p.m. tonight." Smith further demanded a pilot for the unfamiliar Lake Superior waters. To this latter demand, Bolton agreed. He refused all other demands.

Captain Smith's position was stated clearly in his letter to Bolton.

"Sir.

NOT having received any instructions before my departure from Collingwood to proceed beyond the 'Sault,' I did not effect insurance upon the 'Frances Smith' for Lake Superior, and the insurance now held on the 'Frances Smith' only covers as far as this point, consequently I could not think of proceeding to Fort William without a special guarantee of 65,000 dollars, and also a stipulated amount for conveyance."



Hudson's Bay Post at Sault Ste. Marie 1870.

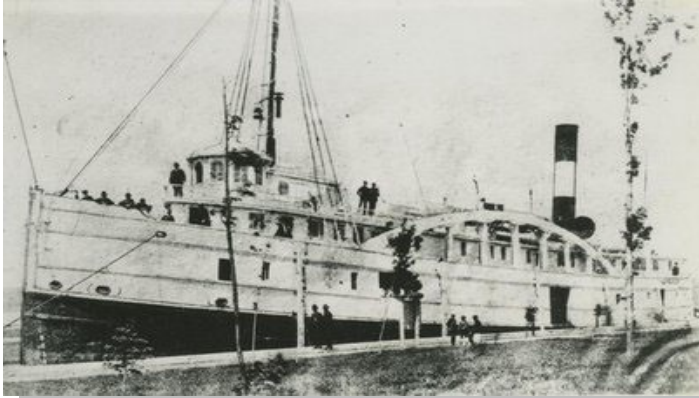
Smith also threatened to hold freight unless Bolton certified his manifest.

In the end, Bolton signed the manifest and ordered all passengers and their non-military cargo off the *Frances Smith* at Sault Ste. Marie. Freight and passengers were transferred to the *Algoma* and the *Brooklyn*, awaiting departure orders above the Sault locks

Over the course of the summer a shuttle service was initiated to get around the

locks. The Canadian Government chartered a US steamer *Arctic*. She joined the *Algoma* and *Brooklyn* on Lake Superior to ferry military personnel, military hardware, and military supplies to the lakehead camp, at Port Arthur named in honour of the third son of Queen Victoria.

This logistics resolution was easier said than done. The water was too shallow



The *Arctic*, a U.S. steamer that ran between Buffalo NY and Lake Superior was chartered by the Canadian government for the month of July to transport troops and supplies on Lake Superior

above the sault rapids. Dawson's men were put to work in early May even before sailing to the west. Once the wharf was in place the Lake Superior transports waited at Pointe aux Pins where there was a good anchorage until signaled to proceed to pick up their cargo at the newly built makeshift wharf. It was a work intensive operation.

Below the locks the *Chicora* continued to move men and equipment from Collingwood. The aging previously contracted *Waubuno* and the *Shickluna* were pressed into service. The *Shickluna* was used as a tow boat to tow barges and the schooners *Orion* and *Pandora* to the landing below the Sault. The *Waubuno* carried everything from oxen to hay as well as men to support for the ambitious expedition.

Beginning May 24 with the diplomatic, political, and logistic solutions in place Wolseley's forces were ferried to Fort William over the summer

Although Uncle Sam blinked in allowing ships related to the expedition to pass through the locks, Canadians got a wakeup call to build their own canal to insure complete independence from U.S. restrictions on the future free flow of trade in Canada. The showdown was a draw.

Selected Sources

Community Waterfront Heritage Centre, Owen Sound

Correspondence, Red River Settlement, Journal of Operations, London

Toronto Globe

Toronto Leader

Toil & Trouble, Military Expeditions to Red River, George Stanley

Frances Smith, Palace Steamer of the Upper Great Lakes,

Scott L. Cameron

Library and Archives Canada

Canadian Illustrated News 1870

Owen Sound & North Grey Public Library

Maritime History of the Great Lakes