# The Keefer Lakehead Terminal

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**T**he completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway has had highly important effects upon the general Canadian economy. To mention but two, it has made possible the economical transpiration of Canadian ore from Quebec and Labrador in large bulk carriers to steel plants on Lakes Erie, Ontario and Michigan and has reduced the carrying charges for export grain from the Canadian West as to enhance Canada's export position in world markets.

During the years of negotiation between the two partners in the project and even before one shovel of earth had been turned, almost every port on the Great Lakes was awake to the possibility of enlarging its place in the new transportation facilities that were ahead. There was immediate consideration given to the deepening of channels and harbors, the building of new docks and the enlarging of their loading or unloading facilities, the dredging and straightening of rivers and channels, all involving heavy expenditures.

The federal governments of the two participating nations have each made enormous expenditures on the project, but municipalities also, looking to their future, have in many cases gone beyond what might have been expected of them in order to be ready for whatever benefits might come with the opening of the Seaway. This local enterprise still continues.

The government of Canada was quick to see the likely effect of the Seaway upon the eastward movement of western grain from the twin harbors of Fort William and Port Arthur at the Lakehead. As early as 1958 an Act was passed by the Parliament of Canada to combine the harbors into one unit, to be known as the Lakehead Harbor, and to incorporate a Lakehead Harbor Commission with appropriate powers. New harbor limits were established taking in more shoreline than was originally included in the two separate units. Provision was made for future expansion and all navigation in the harbor was placed under the control of the Commission which took full control in the spring of 1959.

Both Fort William and Port Arthur have interesting backgrounds. The historian Francis Parkman records that about 1678 the French explorer Du Lhut built a trading post on the north shore of Lake Superior, at the mouth of a river entering Thunder Bay, where the city of Fort William stands today. La Hontan gives its name as Cananistigoyan, while Perrot speaks of it as Kamalistigouia.[1]

The French erected another fort with the name Kaministikioa in 1717 but it was abandoned during the Seven Years War. British traders built a new fort at this point in 1807, naming it Fort William after William McGillivray, principal director of the North West Company, and until this company was merged with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 the directors met here annually to exchange goods for furs with the Indians. These gatherings were said to have brought together at one time as many as 3,000 people. This fort was seized by Lord Selkirk in 1816 in retaliation for the massacre at Seven Oaks, a bloody episode in the rivalry of the two fur trading companies.

Fort William fell into obscurity after the merging of the two fur companies and shoals later blocked the river harbor. Not until the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880's did the place again assume importance. Extensive dredging cleared the river and today Fort William has grain elevators with a storage capacity of 38 million bushels.[2]

Port Arthur had a much more recent beginning. Originally it was a small silver mining settlement near the north shore of Lake Superior, the first house being built about 1856. In 1869 the Dominion Government projected a road westward toward the Red River settlement. This was known as the Dawson Road. When work began on the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880's the little settlement became a landing place for supplies and received the name Prince Arthur's Landing. Prior to its incorporation in 1884 and for a year after, Port Arthur could be reached only by water. This was before the coming to the Lakes of the three big Scottish-built Canadian Pacific Railway steamers which later brought in thousands of newcomers proceeding to the western prairies. The first grain from the West left Port Arthur in 1883 on the steamer *Erie*. A dispute between the town and the C.P.R. during the eighties led to later, greater railroad development of Fort William as a port.

Port Arthur's protected harbor area today occupies approximately seven miles of shoreline, while about five miles of breakwater creates a sheltered basin now being dredged to a depth of 27 feet to meet Seaway draft requirements. Along this open roadstead are Port Arthur's 15 grain storage

units, its ore docks, pulp mills, freight sheds, shipyards and other industrial plants. The elevator units have a total storage capacity of 68 million bushels. To date the government of Canada has expended approximately $15,000,000 on the Port Arthur section of the lakehead harbor.

Fort William's harbor facilities are located on three small rivers which empty into Lake Superior and which have been dredged to navigable depths and widths since 1884 involving, with breakwater construction, an outlay by the Canadian Government of almost fifteen million dollars. In earlier days only the Kaninistikwia River was used for harbor purposes and on its southern shore stood the picturesque chapel and other buildings of a Jesuit Indian mission. Today, however, two other streams, the Mission and McKellar Rivers, are parts of the harbor. In all, there are five and a half miles of navigable river channels of a depth up to 25 feet. Grain elevator storage capacity at Fort William is approximately 38 million bushels for the eleven plants located along its rivers. In addition, there are oil storage and refinery plants, paper mills, coal docks, etc., with adequate railway facilities to and from the water front.

The Canadian Government, recognizing the necessity of augmenting existing handling facilities at the Lakehead, undertook to construct a fully modern Seaway Harbor Terminal which, when completed, will have cost approximately $8.5 million. This was officially opened On June 23, 1962, by Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, and Hon. Walter Dinsdale, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources of Canada. The site of the Terminal was provided by the City of Port Arthur and embraces 180 acres, adequate for docks, freight storage areas, rail connections, etc. Also included is a substantial acreage for warehousing and appropriate industries.

The terminal facilities include a spacious transit shed 900 feet in length and 135 feet wide for lake freighter service, and a transit shed for ocean freighter service of 450 by 135-foot dimensions. They have a storage area of 120,000 square feet for the lake service and 60,000 for the ocean service. In both cases there are clear span steel trusses without interior columns. In addition, there are track loading platforms with roof cover to accommodate 96 cars at the lake terminal and 20 cars at the ocean freight shed. Two spacious truck loading sheds for road transports provide accommodation for 40 trucks loading simultaneously. Railroad marshalling yards will be ready to receive up to 200 cars with rail connections for both Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways.

Surveys made of the tonnage handled through existing Lakehead facilities between 1950-57 show an average of 631,000 tons. The consulting engineers have estimated that the effects of the Seaway and the natural development to be expected in the Western Provinces might increase the average tonnage by 1970 to 1,345,000, or more than double the present. This is entirely apart from the movement of grain through the elevators of both cities.

The name "Keefer", given by Ottawa to the Lakehead Terminal, honors a Canadian family which, for more than a century, has been intimately connected with improvement of transportation facilities in the Dominion.

George Keefer (1773-1858), a Loyalist born in New Jersey, came to Upper Canada with his widowed mother in 1792 and settled in the Niagara district, later founding the town of Thorold. He served in the Lincoln County militia during the War of 1812 and later joined with William Hamilton Merritt in the building of the Welland Canal. He was the first president of the Welland Canal Company.

Samuel Keefer (1811-1890), civil engineer and fourth son of George Keefer, was chief engineer of the Department of Public Works in Canada, 1841-53; later became government inspector of railways and deputy commissioner of public works; in the latter capacity he prepared the plans for the Parliament Building at Ottawa. Retiring to private practice in 1864, he achieved much fame in 1869 by constructing the suspension bridge over the Niagara River.

Thomas Coltrin Keefer (1821-1915), civil engineer, son of George Keefer, was born at Thorold. He was employed in the building of the Erie and Welland Canals and became one of the leading hydraulic engineers of the continent.

George Alexander Keefer (1836-1912), the son of George Keefer, Jr., was born at Cornwall and also became a civil engineer. He was employed on surveys for the Grand Trunk Railway in Ontario and on the surveys for the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Rockies. In 1900 he became resident engineer for the Canadian government in British Columbia.

Francis Hugh Keefer (1860-1928), the fifth in this list, was not, like the others, an engineer but was a lawyer who lived most of his life in Port Arthur. His chief interest was in promoting the deep waterway to the sea and to this end he wrote and distributed pamphlets and booklets, delivered speeches, and in conjunction with his close friend, Charles P. Craig of neighboring Duluth, brought about the organization of the Canadian Deep

Waterways Association and the American Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Tidewater Association, the purpose of both being to promote the idea of an international highway to the sea. Francis Keefer was, for one session (1917-21), a member of the Canadian House of Commons, becoming under-secretary for external affairs. He also sat in the Ontario Legislature (1923-27), and was legislative secretary for Northern Ontario. He was born at Strathroy, Ontario, July 24, 1860, a grandson of the original George Keefer, and when called to the bar in 1884 removed at once to Port Arthur. He died in Toronto December 4, 1928, and was buried at Thorold, Ontario. The application of the family name to the Terminal was as much a tribute to Francis Keefer as to his engineering forebears.

In keeping with the spirit of his predecessors, he was a staunch advocate of the St. Lawrence Seaway. In 1927 he prepared for international distribution an authoritative pamphlet on improving and deepening the Great Lakes system to accommodate ocean vessels. This pamphlet summarized the data gathered by various joint commissions and associations and strongly criticized sectional objections and opposition.

For the historical record it may be noted that the first ship to utilize the Keefer Lakehead Terminal was a German motor vessel, the *Catherine Sartori* of the Michigan Ocean Line (German), which docked at 5 P.M. on May 8, 1962, the 17th anniversary of VE-Day and the close of World War II in Europe. She was commanded by Captain E. Klunder and was brought in by trans-lake pilot Captain A. F. Rico. Her cargo consisted 300 tons of structural steel and general merchandise for delivery locally and to Western Canada.

The *Catherine Sartori* is 298 feet long, 1,840 gross tons and was built in 1954 at Rendsburg, Germany. Her registry is from Kiel and she is one of five ships belonging to this company which bear the surname *Sartori*. It may be recalled that it was a sister ship, the *Christian Sartori*, which heard the "Mayday" call of the sinking *Carl D. Bradley* on Lake Michigan on the late afternoon of November 18, 1958. The *Christian Sartori* proceeded at once to the location of the lost vessel, the disappearance of which had been observed by her captain, and there assisted in the search for survivors or bodies of those drowned.

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[1]  Francis Parkman, *La Salle and Discovery of the Great West* (11th ed.; Toronto: 1901), p. 256 footnote. Parkman also notes various spellings the explorer's name, p. 257.

[2] The writer of this article recalls seeing in the Fort William railroad yards, about 1901, an old round blockhouse which stood between the tracks and was then being used to house section men's shovels and tools. It was probably a last remaining portion of the North West Company's fort.

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# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Keefer Lakehead Terminal* by Fred Landon]