

Brief History of the Welland Canal and the Welland Recreational Canal

Date	Events
Pre-recorded history	<p>Neutral and Mississauga Indians were the original inhabitants. The Welland River was frequented by Archaic, Middle Woodlands and to a lesser extent, Late Woodlands Native peoples.</p>
After 1780	<p>United Empire Loyalists arrived after the Revolutionary War in the 1780s</p>
	<p>‘waves of immigration’ – after the United Empire Loyalists came the Irish labourers, Scottish stone masons, and by the end of the 19th century, settlers from eastern and southern Europe surpassed immigrants from England</p>
1824	<p>William Merritt founded the Welland Canal Company – financed by government and private sources First sod turned – November 30, 1824 at Allanburg (west end of Bridge #11)</p>
1829-1844	<p>The first Welland Canal Welland Canal was the first segment of the modern St. Lawrence Seaway. The first up-bound transit was the schooner ‘Ann and Jane’. Initially, the canal followed the route of the Twelve Mile Creek from Port Dalhousie on Lake Ontario, through St. Catharines to Merrittown and up the escarpment to Port Robinson on the Welland River. The route proceeded east on the Welland River to Chippawa and continued up the Niagara River (south of the fall) to Lake Erie. As traffic increased, the canal was extended from Port Robinson to Lake Erie (at Gravelly Bay, now Port Colborne). This cut was completed in 1833. 44 kms long, 40 wooden locks (minimum of 110’ x 22’) and a depth of 8’. In 1839, the federal government began proceedings to purchase the Welland Canal Company, with the sale being completed in 1841. Water to fill this original canal came from the Grand River via an ‘arrow-straight’ channel called the Feeder Canal. Where the canal crossed the Welland River (now at a different height) an aqueduct had to be constructed. Around this structure would grow the City of Welland (originally called Aqueduct). Industry began to settle along the banks of the canal. Mills producing timber and grain and later, textiles sprung up in Thorold, Merrittville, St. Catharines and Port Colborne. The canal encouraged a thriving shipbuilding business with yards producing hundreds of vessels in Port Dalhousie, St. Catharines, Port Robinson, Port Colborne, Welland, and on the banks of the Welland River.</p>
1845-1886	<p>The Second Welland Canal Plans began for improvements to the Welland Canal and locks on the St. Lawrence River to provide a direct route from Montreal to the interior. Lock depth was increased to 9’ and the number reduced to 27. The new locks were masonry (26.5’ x 150’). In 1870, a government-appointed commission recommended canal improvements to accommodate the larger steamers that could carry wheat, lumber, copper and iron from the upper lakes. There was a smaller feeder canal that came in from the southwest and entered the main canal on the west side just south of Broadway Avenue. Today, there appears to be a drainage ditch along all or most of the route. A road called Feeder Road parallels this ditch from well to the west of Welland. Feeder Road is bisected by the east-west</p>

	<p>railway line that travels through the ‘plug’. Feeder Road continues for a short way on the north side of the ‘plug’ over Humberstone Road to Johnson Avenue. It appears that the old route of the feeder canal and Feeder Road has remained undeveloped from this point up to the Recreational Canal. The old feeder canal was filled in in the vicinity of Welland. However, there may be some of the original earth and stone works remaining under the fill, especially where the feeder canal would have entered the Welland Canal. Apparently, Niagara College and/or Brock University has begun an investigation into possible excavation in the area where the Feeder Canal entered the Welland Canal. The WRCC owns the land in this area.</p>
1887-1931	<p>The Third Welland Canal This third canal played an important role in the development of Canada’s grain export trade and its steel industry. The new canal followed the route of the Second Canal from Lake Erie to a point 3 miles above the escarpment, where it then left the Twelve Mile Creek and followed a more direct route to Port Dalhousie. Now 26 stone cut locks measuring 45’ x 270’ and the depth was increased to 14’. New locks opened in 1881 and by 1887, the new depth was available along the entire length. The Great Lakes ‘canaler’ bulk carriers were developed for use on the Welland Canal. Larger ships would off-load onto the smaller canal ships at Port Colborne. Between 1907 and 1912, plans were made to enlarge the canal once more. The entrance from Lake Ontario was moved east to Port Weller and an artificial harbour was created. Construction of the new canal began in 1913, was interrupted by WW 1 and resumed in 1919 and continued until 1932.</p>
1932-present day	<p>The Fourth Welland Canal Overall length: 27 miles (43.4 kms) Total lift: 326.5’ Eight locks (80’ x 766’) Depth of water in locks: 30’ and 27’ in channels</p>
1959	Remnants of the four canals were taken over by the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority
1967	<p>Welland Canal Rehabilitation Program (the Welland By-pass or Fifth Canal) The St. Lawrence Seaway Authority began construction of a bypass, complete with two tunnels to take road and rail traffic under the canal. \$175 million and seven years to complete</p>
March, 1973	By-pass through Welland opened - last ship passed through the ‘urban Welland route’ (now the Welland Recreational Canal)
1971	With the completion of the Welland River siphon, the redundant part of the Welland River at the north end of the city was filled in.
1976 or 1977	Ownership of the abandoned 7.5 km portion of the fourth canal was ceded to Public Works Canada
1981	Welland Canal Advisory Group was formed – to study and plan the future of the abandoned portion of the canal – the ‘old canal’. It was later re-named the Welland Canal Parkway Development Board . In 1982, the Advisory Group approved a land use plan for the Crown lands. The plan recommended the lands be redeveloped to create a major tourism, recreation and accommodation complex and comprised three

	major areas of activity: i) environmental stabilization, ii) urban fishing, and iii) a commercial infrastructure program. Work funded by PWC until 1984, comprised continued development of Merritt Island, bank improvements and a paved trail on the east bank (north of Lincoln Street), and a boat launch and swimming area south of Lincoln Street on the west bank.
1987	Federal government (represented by PWC) declared the 'old canal' and its abutting lands surplus to its needs and announced its desire to dispose of the property
1997	City of Welland took over ownership and stewardship of the 7.5 km route receiving \$12.3 million was earmarked for upkeep and maintenance, \$300,000 was for an environmental audit and \$3.5 million was for environmental clean-up
2001	Welland Recreational Canal Corporation was established to act as an advisory board and assume stewardship of the waterway and the adjacent lands (approximately 411 acres and 272 acres of water – 683 acres total) – the area from the northern boundary of the City to the 'rail cut' at Humberstone Road.
2007	In 2007, with the adoption by Council of the Welland Recreational Waterway Master Plan, a new strategic direction for the City and the Canal Corporation's first full time staff in place, the WRCC transitioned from an 'advisory board' to an active 'management board'
2007	In 2007, the WRCC negotiated control of the 265 acres of land and water that is owned by the City and Federal Government, bring the total to just less than 1,000 acres. The WRCC manages and operates the Welland Recreational Canal lands under a license from the Corporation of the City of Welland.