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1850-1950* By Pierre Camu, with preface by Hugues Morrissette

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## *Le Saint-Laurent et les Grands Lacs au temps de la vapeur, 1850-1950*

By Pierre Camu, with preface by Hugues Morrissette. Montréal: Éditions Hurtubise HMH Ltée, 2005. 616 pp. \$69.95 softcover. ISBN 2-89428-679-1.

Developed as a sequel to Pierre Camu's first monumental, award-winning work, *The Saint Lawrence and the Great Lakes in the Era of Sailing Ships, 1608-1850*, this second volume by the former seaway administrator and geographer represents another major contribution to our understanding of the economic history of this vast continental waterway system. This book, its title translated as *The Saint Lawrence and the Great Lakes in the Era of Steam Navigation, 1850-1950*, is big, at 616 pages, with 173 tables, 91 maps and graphs, and 64 black-and-white photographs, mostly of ships. It covers both Canadian and American subjects, with substantial Ontario detail. A thematic and geographic index is included along with a very generous bibliography. It is available only in French.

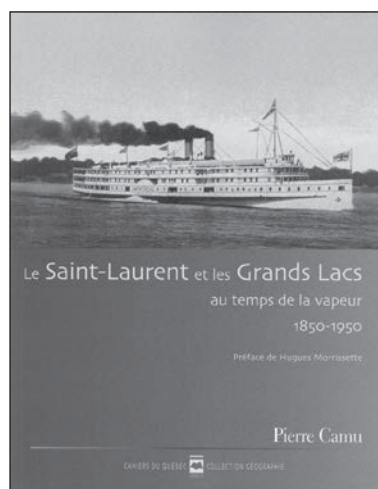
Regarding infrastructure and administration, Camu describes the many Canadian and American navigational improvements over the hundred years, including construction dates and dimensions of canals. He handles the roles of icebreakers and channel dredges excellently; the account of wharfage improvements is weaker. Lighthouses, buoys, foghorns, markers and piloting all draw his attention. Camu presents a long-needed analysis of tolls and subsidies, and provides an extensive table of the companies receiving the latter. These financial measures figure into the costs of construction and maintenance, and had to be balanced by the competitive nature of the Erie Canal and the even more powerful railway

competition. I am particularly impressed by the annual graphs of net tonnage and ship registrations for all Ontario ports and by an account of the ups and downs of Canada-US joint administration.

Much of this book is devoted to ships.

Camu provides a rare glimpse into the largely unknown Canadian shipbuilding industry. The coverage is extensive and is one of the book's major scholarly achievements.

He has devoted considerable research time to tabulating and understanding marine accidents. Suffice it to say that navigation in the nineteenth century was a very perilous business. Description of every category and type of vessel which plied the system fills an entire chapter. Schooners, passenger vessels, ferries, Coast Guard vessels, lake freighters, and foreign and Canadian ocean-going ships all receive the attention one would expect of Camu, the ship enthusiast. Among the impressive gems here: a wonderful table on schooner traffic by region, details of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company fleet since 1845, and records of Allan Line and Canadian Pacific oceanic



steamships. How many Ontario immigrants reached these shores in the hands of those companies? This chapter leaves one lingering for more.

A large portion of Camu's study is focused on the passenger and freight traffic patterns of individual regions and ports. Eastward, he groups his evidence into a few sections: the Gulf of St Lawrence, the lower St Lawrence River, and the stretch between Quebec City and Montreal. Tables and graphs abound in true Camu style, with a detailed breakdown by commodity for 1953. Ontario readers may be attracted to the exhaustive study of inward and outbound tonnage, products, and passengers recorded in five-year increments for every single canal grouping on the St Lawrence, Ottawa, Rideau, Trent-Severn, Burlington, Welland, and Sault-Ste-Marie systems. Camu follows with an illuminating discussion of Erie Canal and New York Central Railroad competition, as well as providing a look at American maritime traffic throughout the Great Lakes. His analysis and tables make significant contributions to knowledge of transportation during this crucial 1850-1950 period. The Ontario ports material focuses on characteristics of all river and lake ports from Cornwall to Fort William. Georgian Bay and Lake Erie are treated summarily, but Kingston, Toronto and the Lakehead receive special treatment. Of unusual interest is Camu's mapping of the hinterlands of each Ontario port for the 1906-1910 period.

"The American maritime picture on the Great Lakes" tackles the other transportation reality, the one that tried hard to deny the priority of the St Lawrence River valley by successfully diverting its traffic towards New York via the Erie

Canal in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. American railways took over the challenge, while US maritime traffic reverted to providing internal lake transport. And then, in the twentieth century, the St Lawrence system gradually emerged victorious over the American one, leading to the reluctant joint construction of the Seaway in the 1950s.

Pierre Camu's contribution to the understanding of the Great Lakes-St Lawrence water transportation system is nothing short of huge. His monograph, written in the French classical tradition of descriptive historical geography, attempts to cover everything and everywhere at least with regard to economics. This he does through a massive marshalling of data spanning one hundred years and presented systematically through synoptic tables. The text is less rigorous, sometimes revealing, sometimes superficial, always informative. The analysis of Canadian-American competition, always evolving, is one of the most original contributions. Camu's love of the actual vessels which plied the system is a bonus, supported by a variety of photographs and tables of fleets; ship enthusiasts will be delighted. If you seek to understand the workings of Canada's great continental waterway system from 1850 to 1950, this study is for you. It will remain a benchmark for years to come. The 173 tables alone are worth the price!

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### *Bibliography:*

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