

<b>Title:</b>	William Hamilton Merritt, 1793-1862, "A Canadian Pioneer Honoured"		
<b>Creator:</b>	Ontario Editorial Bureau		
<b>Dates of Material:</b>	1974	<b>Record Group Number:</b>	RG 131
<b>Summary of Contents:</b>	A series of newspaper clippings put together in the form of a press release for the Ontario Editorial Bureau. Clippings focus on William Hamilton Merritt celebrations during Merritt week. Articles include; statue unveilings, commemorative stamps, and various celebrations.		
<b>Physical Description / Condition:</b>	Excellent condition. 43mm x 28mm. 31pp. 2 copies of the same book.		
<b>Other Notes:</b>	<p>'The Father of Canadian Transportation' is a term commonly associated with William Hamilton Merritt. Although he is most known for being one of the driving forces behind the building of the first Welland Canal, he was many things throughout his life; a soldier, merchant, promoter, entrepreneur and politician to name a few. Born on July 3, 1793 at Bedford, Westchester County, N.Y. to Thomas Merritt and Mary Hamilton, Merritt's family relocated to Canada shortly after in 1796. The move came after Merritt's father petitioned John Graves Simcoe for land in Upper Canada after serving under him in the Queen's Rangers during the American Revolution. The family quickly settled into their life at Twelve Mile Creek in St. Catharines. Merritt's father became sheriff of Lincoln County in 1803 while Merritt began his education in mathematics and surveying. After some brief travel and further education Merritt returned to Lincoln County, in 1809 to help farm his father's land and open a general store.</p> <p>While a farmer and merchant, Merritt turned his attention to military endeavours. A short time after being commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Lincoln militia, the War of 1812 broke out. Fulfilling his duty, Merritt fought in the Battle of Queenston Heights in October of 1812, and numerous small battles until the Battle of Lundy's Lane in July 1814. It was here that Merritt was captured and held in Cheshire, Massachusetts until the war ended. Arriving back in the St. Catharines area upon his release, Merritt returned to being a merchant, as well as becoming a surveyor and mill owner.</p> <p>Some historians hypothesize that the need to draw water to his mill was how the idea of the Welland Canals was born. Beginning with a plan to connect the Welland River with the Twelve mile creek quickly developed into a connection between the Lakes Erie and Ontario. Its main purpose was to improve the St. Lawrence transportation system and provide a convenient way to transport goods without having to go through the Niagara Falls portage.</p>		

	<p>The plan was set in motion in 1818, but most living in Queenston and Niagara were not happy with it as it would drive business away from them. Along with the opposition came financial and political restraints. Despite these factors Merritt pushed on and the Welland Canal Company was chartered by the Upper Canadian Assembly on January 19, 1824. The first sod was turned on November 30, 1824 almost a year after the initial chartering. Many difficulties arose during the building of the canal including financial, physical, and geographic restrictions. Despite the difficulties two schooners passed through the canal on November 30, 1829. Throughout the next four years continual work was done on the canal as it expended and was modified to better accommodate large ships.</p> <p>After his canal was underway Merritt took a more active role in the political arena, where he served in various positions throughout Upper Canada. In 1851, Merritt withdrew from the Executive Council for numerous reasons, one of which being that public interest had diverted from the canals to railways. Merritt tried his hand at other public works outside transportation and trade. He looked into building a lunatic asylum, worked on behalf of War of 1812 veterans, aided in building Brock's monument, established schools, aided refugee slaves from the U.S. and tried to establish a National Archives among many other feats.</p> <p>He was described by some as having "policy too liberal – conceptions too vast – views too comprehensive to be comprehensible by all", but he still made a great difference in the society in which he lived. After his great contributions, Merritt died aboard a ship in the Cornwall canal on July 5, 1862.</p>		
<b>Location:</b>			
<b>Source Information:</b>	Likely from the OEB collection donation from Lou Cahill in November of 1997.		
<b>Described by:</b>	Jen Goul	<b>Date:</b>	Sept. 2007