



A History of the Murray Canal

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Infusing engineering history with a sense of intrigue, A History of the Murray Canal lays bare the intricacies of the canal's planning and construction.

Dan Buchanan's engaging history text *A History of the Murray Canal* is a behind-the-scenes look at the lobbying efforts that supporters used to make the structure a reality.

Completed long after other 1800s Canadian canal projects, including the construction of the Lachine and Rideau Canals, the Murray Canal was long stuck in the planning stage. In time, it connected the Bay of Quinte to Presqu'île Bay on Lake Ontario and improved shipping efforts on the Great Lakes, but it took decades of careful lobbying and planning for the canal to become a reality. The initial canal construction began on August 31, 1882; it was completed in 1889. Along the way, there were challenges, including political and technological difficulties and tensions between the canal project and railroad interests.

Though the story of the Murray Canal was previously told in the Powles Report, this book argues that the construction of the Murray Canal should not be treated as a mere historical footnote but rather as an important piece of Canada's transportation infrastructure history with rich cultural context that deserves more attention. Narrative tension is achieved as it shows how the needs of the new community of Brighton, with its farmers eager to get produce to market and shoppers looking for the latest fashions, were pitted against those of the distracted central government, whose officials were more concerned with maintaining a unified front in the face of the United States' Civil War years than they were with building another canal.

Drawing on primary sources including individuals' accounts of the canal's construction and land deeds, this is a vibrant text. And its pages further hold interest thanks to the historical figures it vivifies—including John Colborne, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, whose "moderate and careful" political approach and "folksy" style helped to put in place the initial survey of the canal in 1820. Also attended to with respect and care are the people whose land was taken to build the canal. Illustrations and photographs, including several maps used in the completion of the project, further flesh the work out.

A History of the Murray Canal is an insightful history text about how an infrastructure project completed over one hundred years ago continues to impact Canada's landscape and people.

JEREMIAH ROOD (March 26, 2024)

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