

## **A conversation with Tom Grasso, President of the Canal Society of New York.**

*LET'S TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT SOME OF THE USES HERE. FIRST OF ALL, HOW CAN YOU USE A CANAL YEAR ROUND AND ARE PITTSFORD AND FAIRPORT LIVING EXAMPLES OF THAT?*



OH, THEY ARE VERY GOOD LIVING EXAMPLES OF IT, I MEAN, WESTERN NEW YORK AND REALLY FROM WAYNE COUNTY ALL THE WAY THROUGH TO NIAGARA COUNTY AND EVEN INTO BUFFALO NOW, THEY ARE STARTING SOME DEVELOPMENT. WE ARE LEAGUES AHEAD OF THE REST OF THE SYSTEM. PLACES TO THE EAST AND THE MOHAWK VALLEY ARE JUST GETTING STARTED NOW WITH TRYING TO DEVELOP THEIR CANAL SIDE COMMUNITIES AND, IN LARGE MEASURE THE REASON FOR THAT IS WE STILL HAVE THE OLD CANAL GOING THROUGH THE VILLAGES. WHEN THEY BUILT THE BARGE CANAL IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, THERE WAS NOT A LARGE NATURAL RIVER FROM, SAY, PALMYRA TO TONAWANDA THAT THEY COULD FOLLOW, YOU KNOW, SO THAT THEY COULD ABANDON THE CANAL AND MOVE IT AND PUT IT INTO A RIVER. THEY JUST MADE IT WIDER AND DEEPER, VIRTUALLY, SO THE CANAL STILL WENT THROUGH FAIRPORT AND STILL GOES THROUGH PITTSFORD AND SPENCERPORT AND BROCKPORT, AND HOLLEY. AND SO FINALLY WE'VE TURNED BACK TO THE WATER. WE VIEW IT NOW AS A VERY, VERY IMPORTANT RESOURCE FOR TOURISM AND REGENERATION FOR PEOPLE USE AND THAT KIND OF THING.

*LOOKING AT THE POPULARITY OF CANALS IN EUROPE, WHATS THE POTENTIAL HERE?*

OH, GREAT, I MEAN, THE CANALS IN EUROPE ARE JUST FANTASTIC. WHAT THE FRENCH HAVE DONE, VERY SUCCESSFULLY I MIGHT ADD, IS TAKE COMMERCIAL VESSELS, BARGES, MAKE THEM IN TO HOTEL BARGES SO PEOPLE ARE RIDING ON A CLEARLY COMMERCIAL VESSEL AND YOU SEE IT COMING DOWN THE CANAL AND YOU THINK, WOW, THAT'S ANOTHER GRAIN BOAT OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT BUT IT'S REALLY A HOTEL BARGE AND IT CARRIES MAYBE 8 PEOPLE, PERHAPS 12, DEPENDS ON THE SIZE OF THE BOAT, AND THEY WINE AND DINE THEM FOR A WEEK. I PRESUME IT'S RELATIVELY EXPENSIVE TO DO THAT. BUT GUESS WHAT? 95% ARE AMERICANS. I TALKED TO 3 DIFFERENT BOAT COMPANIES AND THEY ALL SAID THE SAME THING, 95% ARE AMERICANS. NOW, WHY ARE THEY GOING ALL THE WAY TO FRANCE TO DO THIS WHEN WE CAN WINE AND DINE'EM RIGHT HERE? SO WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS GET OURSELVES A BARGE AND MAKE STATE ROOMS OUT OF IT AND GET A TUG AND START PUSHING IT AND I THINK IT WILL BE A GREAT THING.

*TELL ME ABOUT THE CANAL SOCIETY.*

THE CANAL SOCIETY IN NEW YORK STATE IS ALL VOLUNTEER. IT'S AN ACADEMIC SOCIETY. WE'RE DEDICATED TO SCHOLARSHIP AND PRESERVATION. WE'RE TRYING TO WORK ON REDEVELOPING AN AREA IN CENTRAL NEW YORK NEAR PORT BYRON, HOPEFULLY AS AN INTERPRETIVE CENTER AND A MUSEUM. WE PUBLISH BOOKS, GUIDE BOOKS. WE PUBLISH THINGS ON THE CANAL, WE HAVE 2 FIELD TRIP MEETINGS A YEAR AND WE PUBLISH A GUIDE BOOK EACH TIME WE HAVE A MEETING. IT COVERS THE GEOLOGY OF THE AREA, THE HISTORY OF THE AREA. WE HAVE MAPS, HISTORIC IMAGES IN THESE GUIDE BOOKS. WE HAVE A WINTER MEETING AT M.C.C. EVERY FEBRUARY, MARCH SOMETHING LIKE THAT WHERE PEOPLE COME IN AND PRESENT LECTURES. SO WHAT WE TRY TO DO IS EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CANAL AND WE TRY TO PRESERVE WHAT'S LEFT OF IT, THE OLD CANAL IN PARTICULAR AND WE TRY TO ACT AS A RESOURCE. WE HAVE A LOT OF EXPERTISE AND I THINK WE LEND THAT EXPERTISE TO WHOEVER WANTS IT AND WE DO IT RATHER WELL, I THINK. WE HELP, FOR EXAMPLE,

WITH THE CANAL CORPORATION. WE HELP WITH THEIR SIGNAGE PROGRAMS BECAUSE WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THE STORY IS TOLD RIGHT, YOU KNOW, AND THAT THINGS ARE DONE WELL BECAUSE THE FUTURE-WHAT WE DO TODAY IS GOING TO BE THE HISTORY OF TOMORROW SO WE BETTER DO IT RIGHT NOW.

*THE ERIE CANAL WAS NICKNAMED "CLINTON'S DITCH" BUT IT COULD JUST AS EASILY HAVE BEEN CREDITED TO SOMEONE ELSE?*

JESSIE HAWLEY, THAT'S RIGHT. JESSIE HALLEY WAS A FLOUR MILLER IN GENEVA AND GOT INTO TROUBLE BECAUSE HE COULDN'T GET HIS FLOUR TO MARKET VERY EASILY. THAT WAS ONE OF THE PROBLEMS AND SO HE SPENT SOME TIME IN DEBTORS PRISON. HIS FIRST ESSAY IS A REALLY GOOD ONE BECAUSE IN THIS FIRST ESSAY, HE SIGNED ALL THESE "HERCULES", AND MAYBE IT WAS A HERCULEAN TASK THAT LAY AHEAD OR PERHAPS HE IDENTIFIED WITH THAT DEITY, I'M NOT SURE, BUT ANYWAY, HE WROTE IN HERE ABOUT HOW THERE IS A SURPLUS OF MONEY IN THE TREASURY IN WASHINGTON, AND WE CAN ALL SLEEP WELL KNOWING THAT, AND THAT THAT MONEY COULD BE WISELY SPENT ON IMPROVING INTERNAL NAVIGATION. HE PREDICTED THE ROUTE IT SHOULD TAKE AND HE WAS PROBABLY THE FIRST ONE TO RECOGNIZE HOW LAKE ERIE WOULD BE THE GREAT RESERVOIR AND WE COULD TAP LAKE ERIE ARTIFICIALLY DIVERT IT, COME SOUTH OF LAKE ONTARIO. HE PREDICTED THE ROUTE, HE PREDICTED THE COST ALL FROM THIS DEBTORS PRISON. HE WAS SPECTACULAR. MAYBE WE OUGHT TO CALL IT HALLEY'S DITCH IN MANY RESPECTS BUT ITS CLINTON'S DITCH ISN'T IT.

*THE CANAL FACED MANY DIFFERENT OBSTACLES, NOT ALL OF THEM FROM NATURE?*

AT THE TIME, THE VETO POWER DID NOT RESIDE WITH THE GOVERNOR. IT WAS A COMMITTEE OF 5. AND AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, 2 WERE OPPOSED AND 2 WERE FOR IT AND 1 MAN HUNG IN THE BALANCE AND HE WAS THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT, CHANCELLOR JAMES KENT. THEY'RE DEBATING THIS ISSUE AND ACCORDING TO THE STORY CHANCELLOR KENT LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE WAS AGAINST THEM AND HE WOULD PROBABLY VOTE IT DOWN BECAUSE HE FELT LIKE THOMAS JEFFERSON BECAUSE THEY DID APPROACH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN 1800, EARLY 1800S, AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SAID YOU PEOPLE HAVE GOT TO BE CRAZY. THIS THING IS GOING TO BANKRUPT THE ENTIRE NATION, LET ALONE A STATE. I THINK YOU OUGHT TO COME BACK IN 1900 AND WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT. SO ANYWAY, KENT WAS DEFINITELY AGAINST THIS THING BUT INTO THE CHAMBERS COMES THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, FORMER GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK DANIEL TOMPKINS AND HE SAYS SOMETHING LIKE "MAY I ADDRESS THE COUNCIL OF REVISION" AND CHANCELLOR KENT SAYS "YES YOU MAY." HE (Tompkins) SAYS "YOU PEOPLE ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND. YOU WANT TO SPEND MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ON A CANAL WHEN WE JUST FINISHED A WAR WITH ENGLAND, JUST 2 YEARS AGO. 1815 THEY SIGNED THE TREATY. AND WHAT WE NEED ARE ARMS, WE NEED SOLDIERS, WE NEED CANNONS, WE NEED AMMUNITION, WE NEED GUNS, BECAUSE WE ARE GOING TO WAR WITH ENGLAND IN A LITTLE WHILE." AND KENT SAID "ARE YOU QUITE SURE, SIR" AND DANIEL TOMPKINS SAID "I CAN GUARANTEE IT. ENGLAND WILL NEVER FORGIVE US OUR VICTORIES, WE WILL BE AT WAR WITH ENGLAND IN A MATTER OF A YEAR, PERHAPS 2." AND WITH THAT KENT POUNDED HIS FIST ON THE TABLE, LOOKED THE VICE PRESIDENT IN THE EYE AND SAID "IF WE MUST HAVE A WAR OR A CANAL, I VOTE FOR THE CANAL" AND SO IT PASSED AND SUPPOSEDLY THAT IS A TRUE STORY AND THAT'S HOW IT CAME TO BE.

*WHAT FASCINATES YOU ABOUT THIS CANAL?*

THERE ARE SO MANY ASPECTS TO IT. FIRST A LIVELY HISTORY, I MEAN JUST THE WHOLE NOTION OF HOW IT ALL CAME TO BE AND HOW THEY BUILT IT. THERE WAS NO SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING ALTHOUGH WE RELIED HEAVILY ON EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY, PARTICULARLY THE ENGLISH. HOW THEY ARTIFICIALLY CHanneled WATER. HOW LAKE ERIE WATER FLOWS PAST HERE MIXED WITH GENESEE RIVER WATER AND HOW THEY CAN CHANNEL THIS ARTIFICIALLY AND HOW YOU CAN GET LOCKS BUILT TO MOVE BOATS UP AND DOWN OVER HILLS AND HOW LARGE AQUEDUCTS CAN, BOATS CAN JUST VAULT MAJOR STREAMS DOWN ON THE MOHAWK VALLEY OR THE SENECA RIVER AT MONTEZUMA, HUGE AQUEDUCT TO CARRY BOATS OVER THE SENECA RIVER SO THE RIVER CAN FLOW BENEATH AND YOU COULD CROSS ABOVE IT WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT UP WITH THE CURRENT OF THE RIVER AND THAT KIND OF THING. THE WHOLE NOTION OF PEOPLE AND HOW THEY MOVED AND THE EFFECT IT HAD ON THEM IS A FASCINATING STORY. AND THE IDEAS THE CANAL CONVEYED, YOU KNOW, HOW VARIOUS RELIGIOUS IDEAS WERE SPAWNED BY THE CANAL AND MOVED ALONG THE CANAL. THE FANTASTIC GROWTH THE CANAL OFFERED AND WAS THE CATALYST FOR. SO IT'S THE ENGINEERING, IT'S THE HISTORY, IT'S THE WHOLE STORY OF THE CANAL, ITS EFFECT ON THE STATE, ON PEOPLE. TODAY, IT'S JUST SO FASCINATING TO SEE THE DEVELOPMENT THAT'S GOING ON NOW AND THAT'S A WHOLE NEW STORY OF HOW PITTSFORD AND FAIRPORT AND BROCKPORT AND HOLLEY AND SO FORTH ARE ALL, ARE ALL TURNING ATTENTION BACK TO THE WATER TO DEVELOP IT WHERE PEOPLE CAN ENJOY THEMSELVES, AS I SAID, EITHER WALKING, HIKING, BIKING, SITTING, PICNICKING, BOATING, DO WHATEVER YOU WANT. AND ONE OF THE THINGS THAT'S JUST LOVELY, JUST TO WALK, IT'S SO PEACEFUL, YOU CAN GET IN PLACES, RIGHT NOT FAR FROM HERE, WHERE YOU WOULDN'T EVEN REALIZE, IF DIDN'T KNOW IT YOU WERE IN NEW YORK STATE, YOU WERE IN THE THIRD OR SECOND MOST POPULOUS STATE IN THE NATION AND IT'S SO GORGEOUS. ONE PERSON REFERRED TO IT AS IF YOU'RE CRUISING ON THE CANAL AND YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE BANKS IT'S LIKE, YOU'RE LIKE IN A JUNGLE ALMOST, YOU KNOW. YOU SEE THIS GROWTH AROUND YOU THEN YOU ROUND THE BEND AND THERE IS A VILLAGE AND THERE'S THIS DEVELOPMENT AND IT'S QUITE STRIKING, IT'S QUITE BEAUTIFUL.

*HOW REMARKABLE IS IT THAT AFTER 175 YEARS THIS THING IS STILL ALIVE AND VIABLE?*

IT IS VERY REMARKABLE BECAUSE OF OH, I'M GONNA GUESS AT PERHAPS 30 CANALS THAT ATTEMPTED TO BREACH THE APPALACHIAN CHAIN, THAT ATTEMPTED TO CONNECT THE ATLANTIC SEABOARD WITH THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY. THIS IS THE ONLY ONE THAT SURVIVED. IT WAS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND IT JUST CONVEYED SO MANY PEOPLE, GOODS, AND THANK GOD FOR TEDDY ROOSEVELT CAUSE IT COULD HAVE, IT COULD HAVE GONE UNDER IN THE LATE 1890S AND HE'S THE ONE THAT SAVED THE DAY AND TURNED IT ALL AROUND AND WE KEEP SAYING 175 YEARS, AND THAT'S GOOD, I MEAN, IT'S 175 YEARS SINCE THERE'S BEEN A WATERWAY BETWEEN LAKE ERIE AND THE HUDSON RIVER, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. BUT IT WAS 100 YEARS AGO, LAST APRIL, THAT TEDDY ROOSEVELT SIGNED AN ACT THAT CREATED THE STUDIES, THE IN-DEPTH, MAMMOTH REPORT BY EDWARD BOND THAT PROJECTED THE ROUTES, ANTICIPATED THE COST, COST ESTIMATES VERY DETAILED, THAT WAS THE BARGE CANAL. IT WAS THE HUGE REPORT AND THAT WAS THE FOUNDATION THAT LATER WAS USED TO BUILD THE BARGE CANAL. SO, THANK GOD FOR TEDDY ROOSEVELT CAUSE HE'S, VERY MUCH RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING WATER FLOWING TOWARDS, FROM LAKE ERIE TOWARDS MONTEZUMA.

*IF YOU ALLOW YOURSELF TO DREAM, TO HOPE, WITH ALL OF THE THINGS THAT ARE BEING PLANNED NOW, WHAT'S THIS GOING TO BE LIKE IN 10 YEARS?*

OH, IN 10 YEARS I WOULD THINK WE'RE GOING TO SEE MORE TOUR BOATS, MORE BOAT RENTALS, MORE LAND SIDE USE, MORE MARINAS, MORE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE CAN TIE

UP, MORE LAND SIDE USE, I THINK YOU'LL SEE MORE LITTLE RESTAURANTS AND BED AND BREAKFASTS POPPING UP HERE AND THERE. BUT AT THE SAME TIME CONTROL, IN A SENSE THAT I DON'T THINK WE ARE GOING TO SEE WALL TO WALL OR END TO END CONDOS AND THERE WILL STILL BE THE GREEN AREAS, THE PRISTINE AREAS, THE AREA WHERE YOU THINK, MY GOD, THERE IS NO ONE HERE BUT ME. AND THAT DEVELOPMENT WILL BE LOCATED IN LARGER MUNICIPAL AREAS OR VILLAGES LIKE PITTSFORD AND ROCHESTER AND SO FORTH.

AND I THINK IT'S GOING TO GET MORE AND MORE USE. AND EUROPEANS WILL COME HERE SO THERE WILL BE GREAT TOURISM I THINK, AND THAT'S PART OF THE REASON WE ARE BRINGING THE WORLD'S CANAL CONFERENCE HERE IS SO THAT WE CAN SHOW THE WORLD WHAT WE HAVE HERE AND ONCE THEY COME I THINK THEY'LL COME AGAIN. SO IT'S GOING TO BE MORE INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AND I THINK ALSO MORE HOME GROWN TOURISM. THERE ARE PROBABLY SOME PEOPLE IN NEW YORK CITY THAT DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT THIS CANAL EXISTS AND IF WE CAN JUST GET A PERCENTAGE OF THE PEOPLE FROM NEW YORK CITY TO COME HERE AND LOOK AT THIS, THEY'LL COME BACK AND THEY'LL SPEND SOME MONEY.