

# Alex Grant and the Big Ditch

## Building the Welland Ship Canal

### [Record]

Robert a M. Styran and Robert R. Taylor

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URI <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041283ar>

DOI [10.7202/1041283ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1041283ar)

Digital Publication : Oct. 6, 2017

An article of the journal [Ontario History](#)

Volume109, Issue2, Fall, 2017, p. 167-183

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## Abstract

*The technological history of the building of the Welland ship canal (1913-1932) is well recorded with photographs, documents, maps and plans in various archives. On the other hand, the social history of this saga is harder for the reader to discover because the engineers, contractors, and labourers have left little trace of their experiences “on the ground.” Fortunately, a diary kept by the engineer in charge, Alexander J. Grant, has come to life. Covering the longest period of construction, it chronicles the day-to-day problems of a hard-working, intelligent professional -- but also offers glimpses into the emotional and social life of the man. It will be a valuable source for a future biographer of this*

remarkable engineer.

## Résumé

*L'aspect technique de l'histoire de la construction du canal de Welland (1913-1932) est amplement documenté. Nous avons à notre disposition des photographies, des documents écrits, des cartes et des plans dans divers dépôts d'archives. Par contre, il est plus difficile de saisir l'aspect social de cette saga car les ingénieurs, les entrepreneurs et les ouvriers ont laissé peu de traces de leurs expériences. Fort heureusement, le journal d'un des ingénieurs responsables, Alexander J. Grant, a récemment vu le jour. En y décrivant la plus longue période de construction, l'auteur y fait non seulement la chronique des problèmes quotidiens d'un professionnel intelligent et dédié à son travail, mais laisse aussi entrevoir sa vie sociale et émotionnelle. Ce journal sera une source précieuse de renseignements pour tout futur biographe de cet ingénieur remarquable.*

## Biographical notes

**The late Roberta M. Styran had a B.A. and an M.A. from McMaster University and a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (in History). She was a co-founder of the Welland Canals Preservation Association and served as president of the Canadian Canal Society. She was editor of the Society's newsletter for several years and was an Honorary Life Member. A director of the American Canal Society, she was also on the governing council of Inland Waterways International. In 2009 she was given the W. Gordon Plewes Award by the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering. With Robert R. Taylor, she was the co-author of several books, including *The Great Swivel Link. Canada's Welland Canal (U. of T. Press)*, *This Great National Object. Building the 19th-Century Welland Canals (McGill-Queens U.P.)*, *The Welland Canals Corridor Then and Now (Looking Back Press)*, and the forthcoming *This Colossal Project. Building the Welland Ship Canal (McGill Queens)*.**

**Robert R. Taylor has B.A. and an M.A. from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. from Stanford University (in History). He is Professor Emeritus at Brock University where he taught European history. He is the author of books and articles on the history of German architecture, on the cities of St. Catharines and Victoria, and, with Dr. Styran, on the Welland Canals. He was a co-founder of the Welland Canals Preservation Association and Founding Secretary of the Canadian Canal Society of which he is an Honorary Life Member. Recently, he has served as a docent with the Art Gallery of Victoria, B.C.**

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FFF, in conclusion, I would like to add that Augustine's political doctrine will be

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