



The Mitten

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On June 18, 1855, the steamer *Illinois* became the first boat to pass through the Soo Locks. The trip past the **rapids** of the St. Marys River took less than an hour. Although the Soo Locks were difficult to build, they soon played an important role in America's industrial growth.

For years, Michigan had urged the U.S. government to support building a canal and locks at Sault Ste. Marie. Michiganians argued it would benefit both Michigan and the nation. Not everyone agreed. During one congressional debate, a southern senator said that the Upper Peninsula was "beyond the remotest settlement of the United States" and digging a canal there would be like placing one on "the moon."

This attitude changed in the mid-1840s with the discovery of copper and iron ore in the western Upper Peninsula. The minerals had to be shipped to

Soo Locks

Cleveland and Detroit for processing. Because of the rapids, all goods had to be removed from the boats and **portaged** around the rapids. This process took time and cost money.

In August 1852, the federal government gave Michigan 750,000 acres of land to **finance** the building of the canal.

Digging began during the summer of 1853. At the height of operations almost 1,700 men were working on the canal. The men worked 12-hour days and were paid \$20 a month.

The work was hard, especially during the winter. On some wintry mornings, workers had to look for tools that were covered by the previous night's heavy snowfall. A cholera **epidemic** also killed many workers.

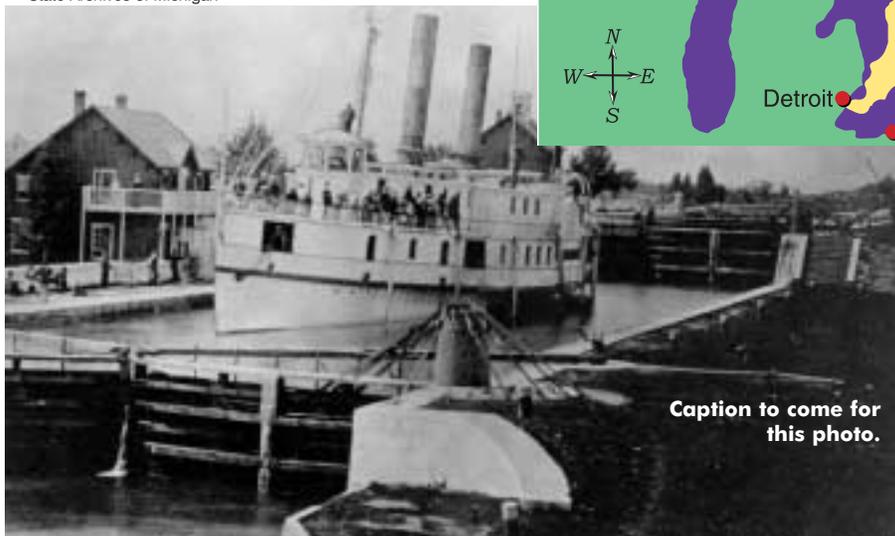
The Soo Locks were completed in May 1855. To bypass the rapids, boats went through two locks. Each lock was 350 feet long, 70 feet wide, and had a lift of 9 feet. The locks were connected to a one-mile canal.

During the first summer, boats carried almost 1,500 tons of iron ore through the locks. Five years later, that figure was 120,000 tons.

When boats got larger, bigger locks were built. The newest lock opened in 1968. It is 1,200 feet long, 110 feet wide and 50 feet deep. Today, the Soo Locks remain among the world's busiest locks.



State Archives of Michigan



Caption to come for this photo.

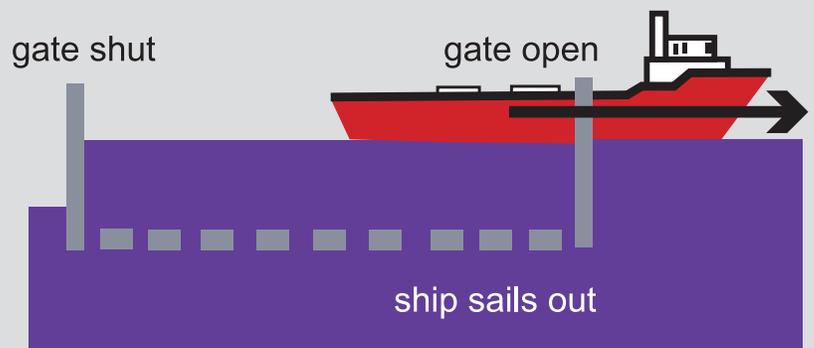
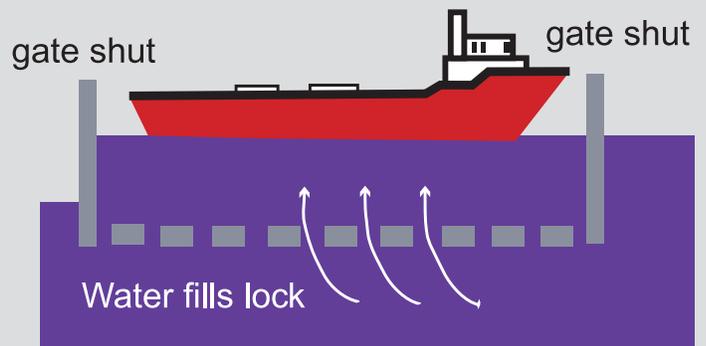


HOW THE SOO LOCKS WORK

Lake Superior is about 20 feet higher than Lake Huron. The Soo Locks raise and lower

boats as they travel between the lakes. Boats headed into Lake Superior (upbound) must be raised and boats headed into Lake Huron (downbound) must be lowered.

As a ship enters a lock, gates shut behind it, "locking" it in. Next, a valve is opened to allow water to flow either in or out of the lock to raise or lower the ship. Finally, the gate in front of the ship is opened and the ship sails on.



Where to Take Your Family

BRADY PARK is situated on the grounds of the original Fort Brady, near the corner of Ashmun Street and Portage Avenue. Informational displays tell the history of Michigan's oldest settlement. During the evening hours, visitors can enjoy the beautiful musical fountain that lights up at night (right). For more information on Brady Park and other things to see and do while at Sault Ste. Marie, contact the Sault Convention and Visitors Bureau, 536 Ashmun Street, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783 or call (800) 647-2858 or visit them on the Web at www.saultmarie.com.



Lake Superior State University/John Shibley

The Gathering Place

Today, Sault Ste. Marie is a pretty town located along the St. Marys River. It has many restaurants, boat tours, and gift shops. As Michigan's oldest settlement, it has a long history.

Over 2,000 years ago, Native Americans settled at Sault Ste. Marie because it was a good place to gather fish and furs. In the mid-1600s, French missionaries explored the area. In 1668, Father Jacques Marquette built a **mission** near the river and named it *Sainte*

Marie du Sault. It is French and it means "St. Mary of the Rapids." Today, we often just call it The Sault (pronounced "Soo").

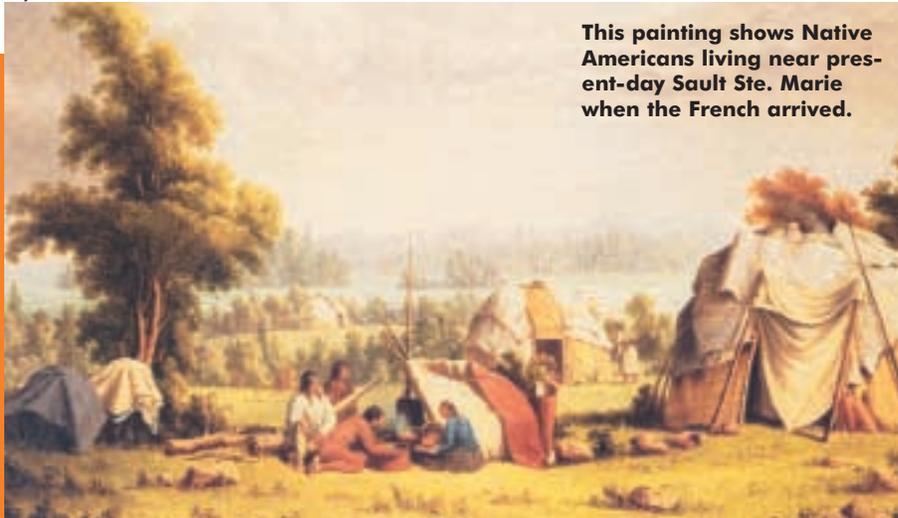
In 1783 the St. Marys River became part of the international boundary between British Canada and the United States.

In 1820, Michigan territorial governor Lewis Cass obtained land from the Ojibway Indians along the St. Marys River. Fort Brady was built so that the Americans could keep watch over the river. Today, Lake Superior

State University occupies the same grounds overlooking the St. Marys River.

The importance of Sault Ste. Marie changed with the opening of the Soo Locks in 1855. Today, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates and maintains this important waterway. The locks have been expanded over the years and are a popular tourist destination.

Royal Ontario Museum



This painting shows Native Americans living near present-day Sault Ste. Marie when the French arrived.

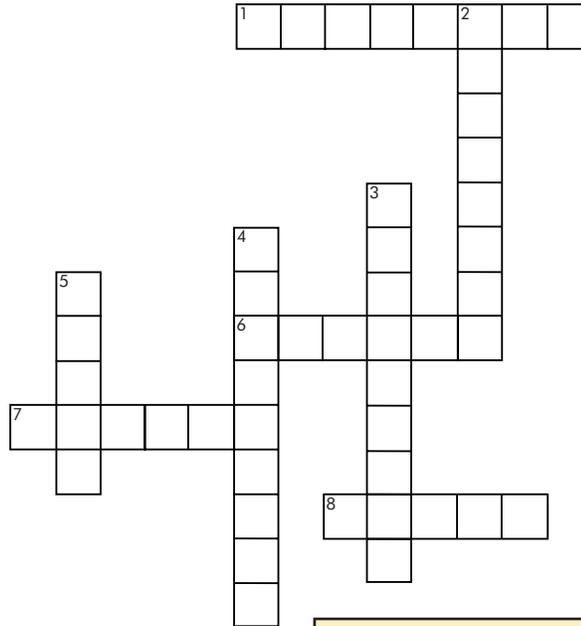
What Did You Learn?

ACROSS

- Boats headed into Lake _____ must be raised.
- A fast moving part of a river.
- Carrying boats and supplies overland between two waterways or around a barrier.
- Name of the fort that was built along St. Marys River.

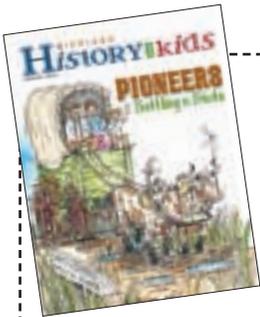
Word List
(in random order)

RAPIDS
PORTAGE
MARQUETTE
BRADY
ENGINEERS
ILLINOIS
SUPERIOR
HURON



DOWN

- This steamer was the first boat to pass through the Soo Locks.
- The U.S. Army Corps of _____ operates and maintains the locks today.
- Father _____ built a mission near St. Marys River.
- Boats headed into Lake _____ must be lowered.



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Vocabulary WORDS

Mission: a place where missionaries teach their religion

Rapids: a fast moving part of a river

Portage: carrying boats and supplies overland between two waterways or around barriers

Epidemic: disease that spreads quickly

Finance: to raise or provide money

The Mitten is produced by the staff of Michigan History magazine, which is part of the Michigan Historical Center. The Michigan Historical Center is part of the Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in Michigan, the department also includes the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, the Library of Michigan, the Michigan Film Office, and the Michigan Council of Arts and Cultural Affairs.

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