

## Canadian Car & Foundry

Canadian Car & Foundry Company (Can-Car) was incorporated on October 29, 1909 in Montreal, QC. A few years later the company was looking for a location for a railcar manufacturing plant. Both Port Arthur and Fort William were interested. Fort William made the better offer and it was chosen as the site of the new plant. On April 24, 1912 The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported that the first draft of an agreement between the City of Fort William and the Canada Car & Foundry Company had been completed. The article included details about the plant to be built and the number of people to be employed.



Fort William Daily Times Journal - April 24, 1912, pg.1

On April 26, 1912 an article was published giving facts about the company:

- it was organized under the Dominion of Canada
- location of general offices
- names of the director, president and vice-president
- it was incorporated under the Companies Act of Canada
- it was made up of three larger manufacturing companies
- the dollar amount of the capital assets



Fort William Daily Times Journal - April 26, 1912, pg.1

Can-Car would be an expensive agreement for Fort William, so there was a plebiscite. On July 10, 1912 Fort William taxpayers voted and the results were published in the July 11<sup>th</sup> newspaper. Fort William voted yes for Canadian Car & Foundry, 1609 to 379. This article also stated that, "The construction of this plant involves an expenditure of a million dollars and the regular employment of 1000 men."

ALL THE BYLAWS OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSED		
Waterworks Improvements, Street Railway Extension and Canadian Car Works Projects Lead in the Vote to Give City an Unprecedented Period of Activity.		
THE VOTE		
Bylaw	For	Agst.
Canada Car & Foundry Co. ....	1609	376

Fort William Daily Times Journal - July 11, 1912, pg.1

Although construction had already begun for the factory, the official groundbreaking ceremony was held on July 17, 1912. The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on July 18<sup>th</sup> that the official groundbreaking ceremony took place with city officials, the chairman of the Dominion Railway board, the vice-president of Canadian Car & Foundry and his official staff. At this ceremony it was also announced that the first order for railcars had been received from Grand Trunk Railway.

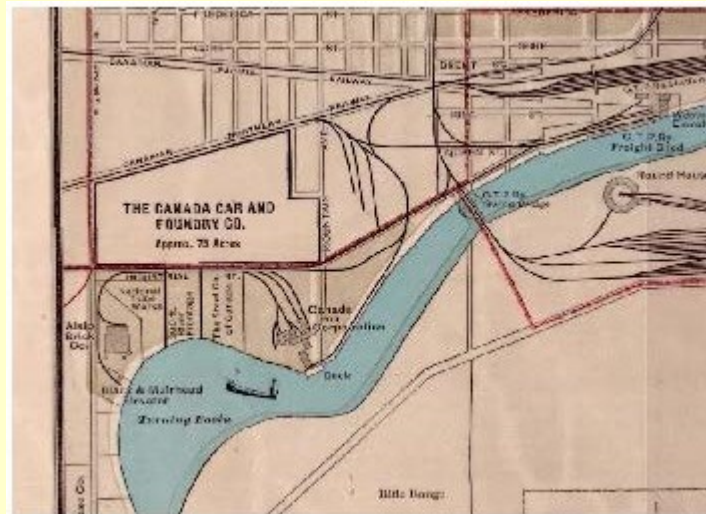


Groundbreaking ceremony. Photo courtesy of Thunder Bay Archives and Records.

## GRAND TRUNK PLACES FIRST ORDER WITH CITY'S NEW CANADIAN CAR CO

Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 18, 1912, pg.1

The Can-Car site was near Mountain Avenue and Superior Street. Today these streets are Mountdale Avenue and Stapleton Street. Below is a section of a map from 1912 showing the location of Can-Car. This map of Fort William can be found at the Brodie Resource Library in the Reference department.



Construction of the plant began in 1912 and although it was scheduled for completion by July, 1913, Can-Car would not be completed until 1917. During this time, the First World War began. Railcars were no longer a priority, demand and sales dropped – this included the Grand Trunk Railway order. Canadian Car & Foundry didn't have enough resources to warrant opening another factory. The City of Fort William and Can-Car tried to get orders for munitions but were unsuccessful. When Can-Car accepted the city's offer, the agreement included that the company provide ten years of work for 1000 men or more. The city insisted they keep this promise.

The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on April 19, 1916 that Montreal officials from Canadian Car & Foundry met with city council on April 18th. The company officials reported that they had tried to get orders to help with the war effort but were unsuccessful. They had even tried, unsuccessfully, to get orders from Russia. What Russia did need though was a factory. Can-Car officials tried to convince city council to send the Fort William plant to Russia. Council members discussed the issue without the company officials present before giving their response. The resolution voted on was, "That this council is not favorable to the removal of the car plant of the Canadian Car and Foundry Company." It was unanimous. Fort William city council voted no, they would not send the factory to Russia. This was no surprise to the company – as they waited one of the officials had drawn a sketch, described in the news article and shown in the book *Can-Car: A History 1912-1992*.



Fort William Daily Times Journal – April 19, 1916, pg.1



Sketch courtesy of *Can-Car: A History 1912-1992*, pg.6

Although The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on July 22, 1916 that the plant would be completed, articles on August 21st and 25th were informing readers of reports of machinery being removed from the plant. The city protested and

there were communications between city solicitors and the trust company of Can-Car.

## **TO COMPLETE CAR WORKS FOUNDRY**

Fort William Daily Times Journal - July 22, 1916, pg.1

**CITY TO CONTEST  
CAR CO.'S ACTION**  
  
Mayor and Council Will Endeavor  
To Stop Removal Of Plant  
From the City

Fort William Daily Times Journal – August 21, 1916, pg.1

**CAR COMPANY TO  
CEASE REMOVALS**  
  
Bonding Company Brings Pres-  
sure To Bear and Company  
Will Look Into Matter

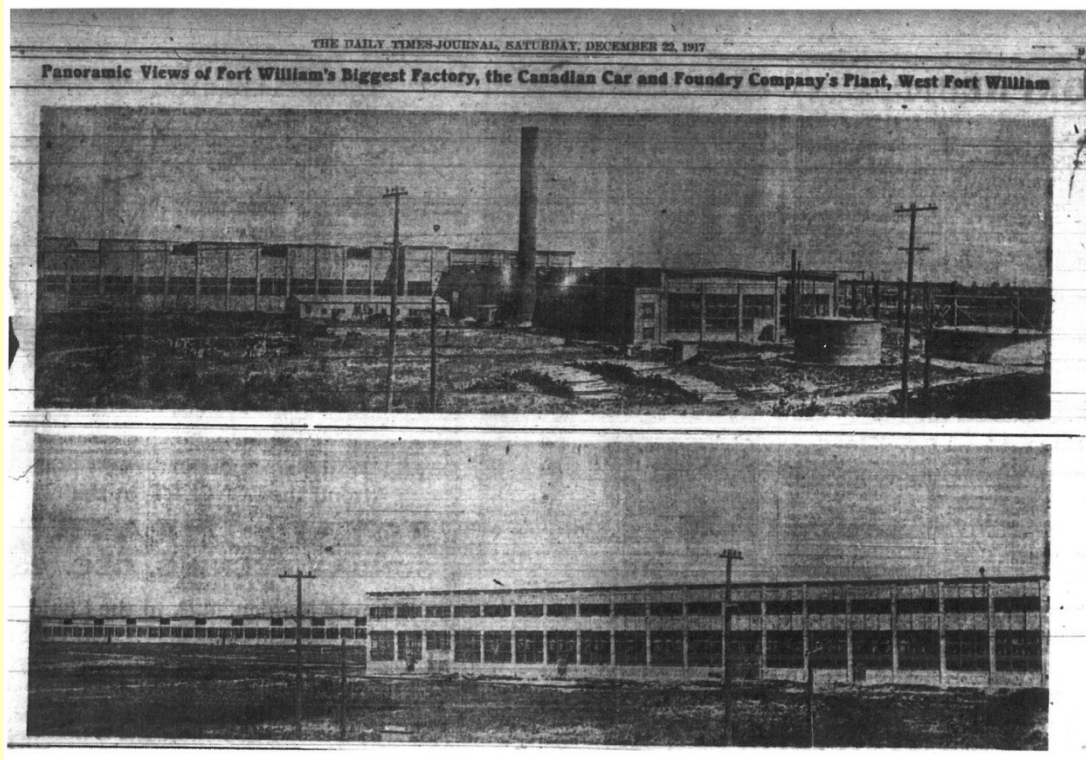
Fort William Daily Times Journal – August 25, 1916, pg.1

The situation turned around for Can-Car. On December 22, 1917 The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on the Fort William plant. The mayor and aldermen had obtained an order from the Canadian Government Railway for 2000 boxcars. It was expected that the plant would employ 1500 to 1700 men and that 25 boxcars would be produced per day. The article also gave a brief history of the local factory and a description of its buildings. A panoramic view of the factory was also published.

**JANUARY WILL SEE CANADIAN CAR AND  
FOUNDRY COMPANY A HIVE OF INDUSTRY**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 22, 1917, pg.9





Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 22, 1917, pg.9

On January 29, 1918, a Fort William Daily Times Journal article announced a new factory was to be built at the Canadian Car & Foundry site. Can-Car would soon be building wooden and steel ships for the United States. The Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society's *Papers & Records VolXVI 1988*, pg.32 states that the contract for the minesweepers was with a shipbuilding company from the United States and that the ships were for the French government.



Fort William Daily Times Journal - January 29, 1918, pg.1

Work was to begin in May and on February 18<sup>th</sup> it was reported that the contractor E. G. Penniman would start work on the shipbuilding plant. An article from February 20, 1918 gave leading facts about the factory and information on what was in production. 3000 boxcars were being produced for the Canadian Government Railway and then work would begin on twelve mine-sweepers. The Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on May 16, 1918 that the Canadian Government Railway ordered 450 Hart-Otis dump cars.

**E. G. PENNIMAN STARTS EXCAVATING  
WORK FOR NEW CAR WORKS BUILDINGS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – February 18, 1918, pg.1

**CAR COMPANY GETS  
ANOTHER ORDER FOR  
450 HART-OTIS CARS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – May 16, 1918, pg.1

Contracts were being completed, worked on and new contracts were being ratified. On July 8 and 29, 1918, articles informed readers of the progress being made at Can-Car.

**CARS WORKS FINISHES BOX CAR  
CONTRACT; MORE WORK COMING**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 8, 1918, pg.1

**NEW CAR CONTRACTS AT FORT WILLIAM PLANT**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 29, 1918, pg.1

On July 29, 1918 the first minesweeper, the Navarin, built at Canadian Car & Foundry was launched into the Kaministiquia River. Newspaper articles on July 29 and 30 reported on the launching. Can-Car officials and representatives from the French government were in Fort William for the event. France's Captain C. Denier's speech was published in full in The Fort William Daily Times Journal. Not only did he thank the workers and toast the mayor but he spoke of how they were all "fighting for the ideal humanity." Ending his speech he said, "I lift my glass to Canada and her boys over there in England, to the United States, to France and all her allies, to the soldiers of humanity and their final victory."

**WILL SOON HEAR BOOM OF NAVARIN'S GUNS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 29, 1918, pg.1

**KEEL FOR SEVENTH MINE SWEEPER  
LAID THIS MORNING RIGHT AFTER  
NAVARIN WAS PULLED FROM BERTH**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 29, 1918, pg.1



Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 29, 1918, pg.3



Fort William Daily Times Journal – July 29, 1918, pg.1



The Navarin. Photo courtesy of Thunder Bay Archives and Records.

The launch was a success with the newspaper reporting that numerous photos and a “moving picture” were taken of the event. All the minesweepers would be testing their guns by shooting at targets on Thunder Bay. Work continued on the other minesweepers until all had been launched by October 1918. Below are the specifications of the minesweepers:



SPECIFICATIONS OF CAN-CAR SHIPS	
FRENCH MINESWEEPERS	
Overall length:	43.6 meters.
Length between perpendiculars:	42.4 meters.
Moulded breadth:	6.9 meters.
Moulded depth:	N/A
Hull weight at launching:	204 tonnes.
Displacement:	570 tonnes
Watertight compartments:	6
Engine:	Triple expansion 560 hp steam engine.
Speed:	12 knots.
Armament:	Two 120 mm cannon, fore and aft.
Crew:	37

Courtesy of *Can-Car: A History 1912-1992*, pg.20

The war ended in November 1918 and the twelve minesweepers built at Can-Car for France did not end up doing any military service. The ships were disarmed and sold, except for two that suffered a tragic fate: the Inkerman and Cerisoles were lost on their maiden voyage on Lake Superior.

From December 3rd to the 12th, 1918 the Port Arthur News Chronicle and the Fort William Daily Times Journal reported on the disappearance and search. Many rumours and conspiracy theories circulated about the loss of the ships. Their disappearance and location remain a mystery.



Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 3, 1918 pg.1



Port Arthur News Chronicle – December 4, 1918, pg.1



Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 4, 1918,



# **INKERMAN AND CERISOLLES LAST SEEN FIGHTING "SOU'WESTER" OFF KEEGENAW POINT, THE "GRAVEYARD" OF SUPERIOR**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 5, 1918, pg.1

# **NO NEWS OF MINE SWEEPERS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 6, 1918, pg.1

# **NO TRACE FOUND OF MINE SWEEPERS** (Special to the Times-Journal) SAULT STE. MARIE, Ont., Dec. 7.—No word has been received from the French mine sweepers, Cerissoles and Inkerman, which probably sank with their crews of 38 men each on the night of November 24. The coast guard boats which have searched Keweenaw beach for two days and nights in a blinding snowstorm have had no success.

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 7, 1918, pg.1

# **HOPE FOR TWO TRAWLERS ALL BUT GIVEN UP**

Port Arthur News Chronicle – December 7, 1918, pg.1

# **WRECKAGE MAY BE FROM TRAWLERS**

Port Arthur News Chronicle – December 8, 1918

# **WRECKAGE MAY BE THAT FROM MINE SWEEPERS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 9, 1918, pg.1

# **TUGS FIND NO TRACE OF MISSING MINE SWEEPERS**

Fort William Daily Times Journal – December 10, 1918, pg.1

# **TRAWLERS STILL MISSING**

There is no word of the missing trawlers in local harbor circles today. Searching tugs report having covered the shores very carefully but have found no trace of the vessels. As usual wild rumors are out about the ships having been located, but there is absolutely no foundation for these rumors.

Port Arthur News Chronicle – December 12, 1918

The loss of the minesweepers continues to be newsworthy more than ninety years later. The story appeared in a Chronicle Journal Looking Back piece in 2009. Also, in 2010, the Sault Star reported that the search for the minesweepers continues. The Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society's *Papers & Records Vol. XLII* (2014) also highlights the mystery of the ships built at Can-Car. The minesweepers story is complex as they were built in Canada, belong to France and sunk in American water.

Canadian Car & Foundry's story between 1912 and 1918 continued to be written about. The Fort William Daily Times Journal from February 22, 1947 published articles on the Fort William factory's start and their work on railcars and minesweepers. Can-Car's interesting history continued after the First World War, eventually becoming a National Historic Site of Canada in 2010.



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