

A Port In A Storm

Chronicle editor Clive Cocking, BA'62, probes the controversy over the Roberts Bank superport project.

SOUTH OF THE FRASER RIVER mouth a new sandy spit stretches out from the swampy shore. Three miles out it fades into a hazy grey blot on the blue horizon. From the shore dyke it seems remote, quiet, peaceful, like a natural part of the delta. But it is not. Out in Georgia Strait, the end of the man-made spit is alive with men and machines. Workers' multi-colored hardhats are bobbing everywhere, gravel-laden trucks are roaring back and forth, tiny tugs are nudging barges, cranes are swinging, earth-movers are swarming over sandpiles like a mass of yellow ants. . .

It is phase one of the much-praised, much-cursed Roberts Bank superport. The men are hustling to complete the dock and loading facilities in time for Kaiser Resources Ltd. to begin shipping coking coal to Japan in November. The company hopes to begin supplying Japanese steel mills then with the first of 45 million tons of Kootenay coal under a 15-year, \$650 million contract. Now 50 acres, the Kaiser port facilities represent only a tiny fraction of what is to be developed at the superport over the next 30 years. And while the port now seems so remote and peaceful from the shore, its effect has been anything but that.

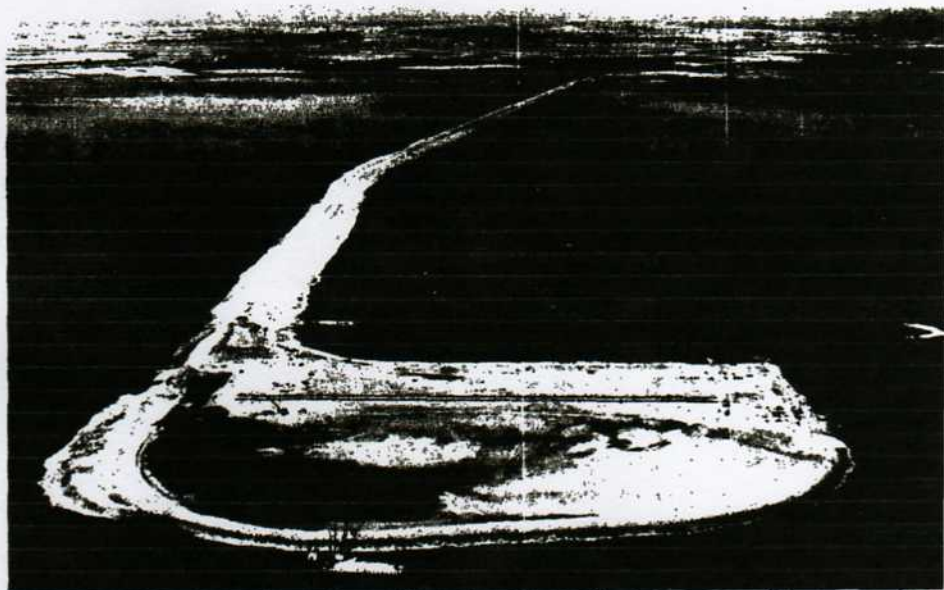
Not since the Peace River power project has an economic development caused such deep public concern and controversy. The provincial government and its crown corporations have been widely criticized for their handling of the development. Protests have ranged



Bill Loisele

Standing at the tip of the superport causeway, Delta mayor Dugald Morrison points north to wildlife habitat which could be threatened by port pollution.

Present superport causeway is only tiny fraction of the ultimate development. Photo courtesy Swan Wooster.



over everything from the provincial government's selection of a port rail route slicing through Delta, to the government's expropriation of rich farmland for port access and industry, to the threat of pollution, destruction of wildlife and possible loss of Boundary Bay for recreation. In essence, the people in the host municipality of Delta—and elsewhere—are fearful of the possible detrimental effect of the superport on the surrounding environment.

Their concerns are not unique. The Roberts Bank superport issue represents in microcosm what is happening throughout the province. Whether it be over a waterfront freeway in Vancouver, pulp mills near Prince George, strip mining in the Kootenays, or plans to divert water in the Okanagan, people everywhere are becoming alarmed at what is being done to the environment—to our water resources, wildlife and recreation potential. Many people sense that the province is on the brink of major economic developments that, while creating wealth, also have potential for destruction of our lush mountain, sea and lake environment.

This is certainly true of the superport. It offers great potential economic benefits to Delta, to the Lower Mainland and to all of Canada. In fact, the now-defunct Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board (a not uncritical agency itself) has stated that: "The port facility on Roberts Bank will perhaps be the most significant development to take

place in the Lower Mainland since the coming of rail to tide water in 1885." But, its economic contribution could be greatly diminished by its destructive effect on the environment.

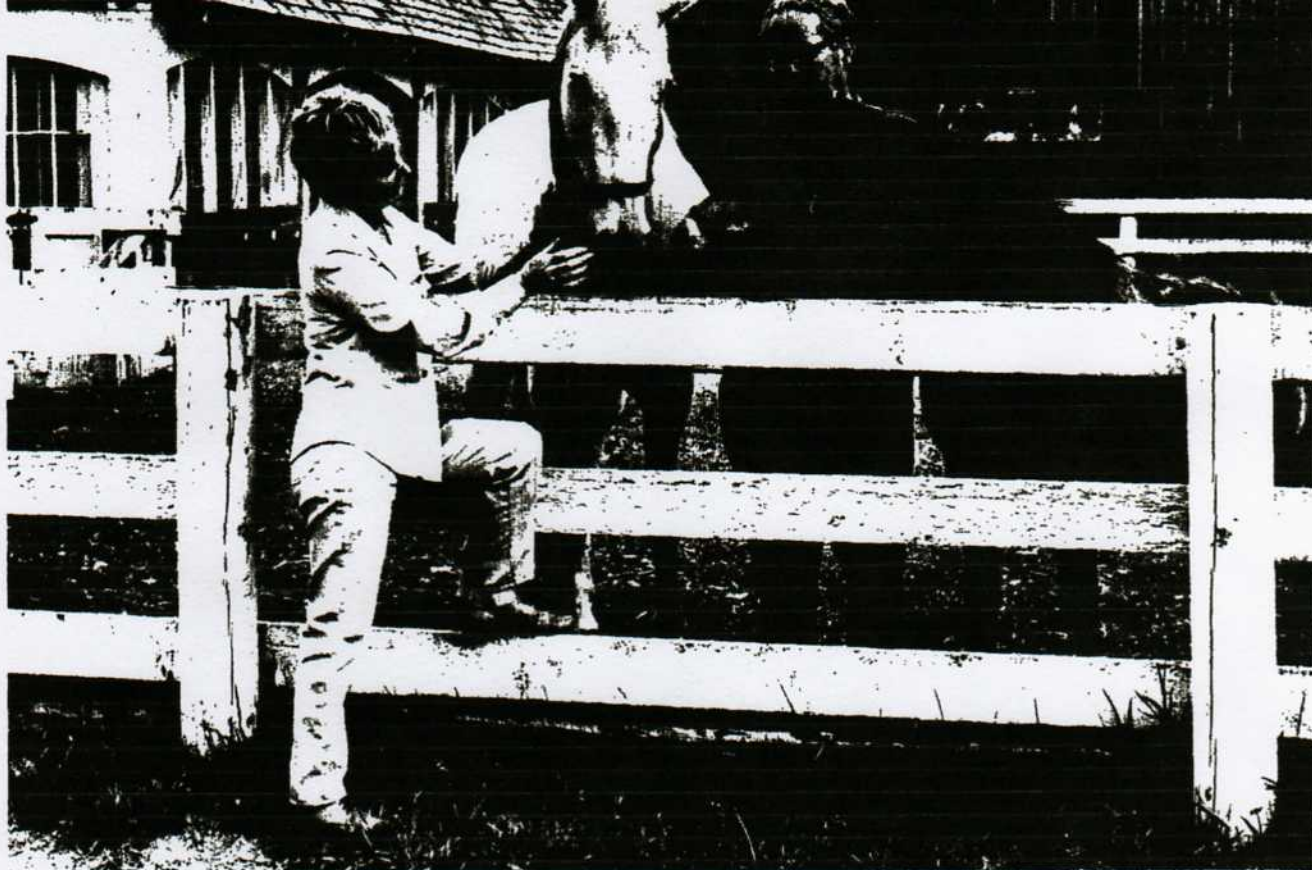
Any detrimental or beneficial effects of the superport will reverberate beyond the municipality of Delta. They will be felt in the whole Lower Mainland region. Already Delta is feeling the pressure of growth—its population stands at 29,000 and has been growing 25 per cent a year. More and more people are being attracted south of the Fraser River to live in Delta's suburban-rural environment, or to find relaxation through its beaches, fishing, wildlife—and sunshine. The population of the Lower Mainland is expected to almost double to 2 million by the turn of the century, which means such amenities as these are becoming increasingly important.

This is scarcely news. Awareness is growing of the need to husband our natural environment so that there is something left to enjoy in the coming age of leisure. In fact, the Roberts Bank superport is being received with a surprisingly mature response on the part of people who will be affected by it. There is no clamor for the project to be stopped and for Delta to remain as some kind of idyllic suburbia. Virtually everyone favors the development, but would like a little 20th century technology to be used to carry it out with a minimum of disruption.

That includes those most immediately affected, people whose lands have been expropriated.

One of these is Wray Dowding, whose 120-acre farm has been taken for the rail corridor. It's been his home all his life. "My dad and mother settled here in 1909," Dowding recalled recently. "They came out here from Grey County, Ontario. I was born here on the farm in 1912." It's been a good life, the land has been rich and the climate ideal for farming. He raises peas, hay, cats and barley. Dowding feels no bitterness over the superport development; he only wants to get enough money from the government to get another farm and continue farming. But prospects so far haven't looked too good. "I don't know anywhere in Canada where we can replace this land," he said.

Allan Wilson, chief architect for the Vancouver School Board, is representative of another class of people directly affected by the port, people who like a little elbow room for living and for keeping horses. He and his wife, Sadie, have five horses for their enjoyment and for that of their son and daughter when they come to visit. Their 7¼ acre farm was expropriated in January. "We felt sick, very sick when we first heard," said Wilson. "It came as quite a blow because we had no idea that we were being involved." Although there has been no price settlement yet, the Wilsons don't feel so bad now; they recently purchased 12 acres south of Langley



Forced to make way for superport rail corridor are Mrs. Sadie Wilson (left) and husband, Allan, (right) whose land has been expropriated. They intend to relocate on a small farm in Langley.

complete with a beaver pond and a lodge. Wilson is not opposed to the development. "I wouldn't stand in the way of progress, but I would just like to be properly compensated for being uprooted," he said.

People like Allan Wilson recognize the economic inevitability of the superport. While the Kaiser coal deal got the development going, research had shown that such a port would in any case be needed in the 1970s. According to Dave King, BCom '45, BSA'45, executive secretary of the B.C. Harbors Board, the studies indicated Vancouver would surpass Montreal as the major port in Canada in the late 1960s. And this has occurred; Vancouver now handles about 23 million tons of dry cargo annually.

"The studies indicated that by 1975, the volumes going out will double—to something of the order of 45 million tons—and that by 1985, they will nearly double again," said King. "They will be up in the order of 75 to 80 million tons. This is what dictated the need for a facility like Roberts Bank. It could be demonstrated that the Burrard Inlet area could not accommodate all the economic activity that was

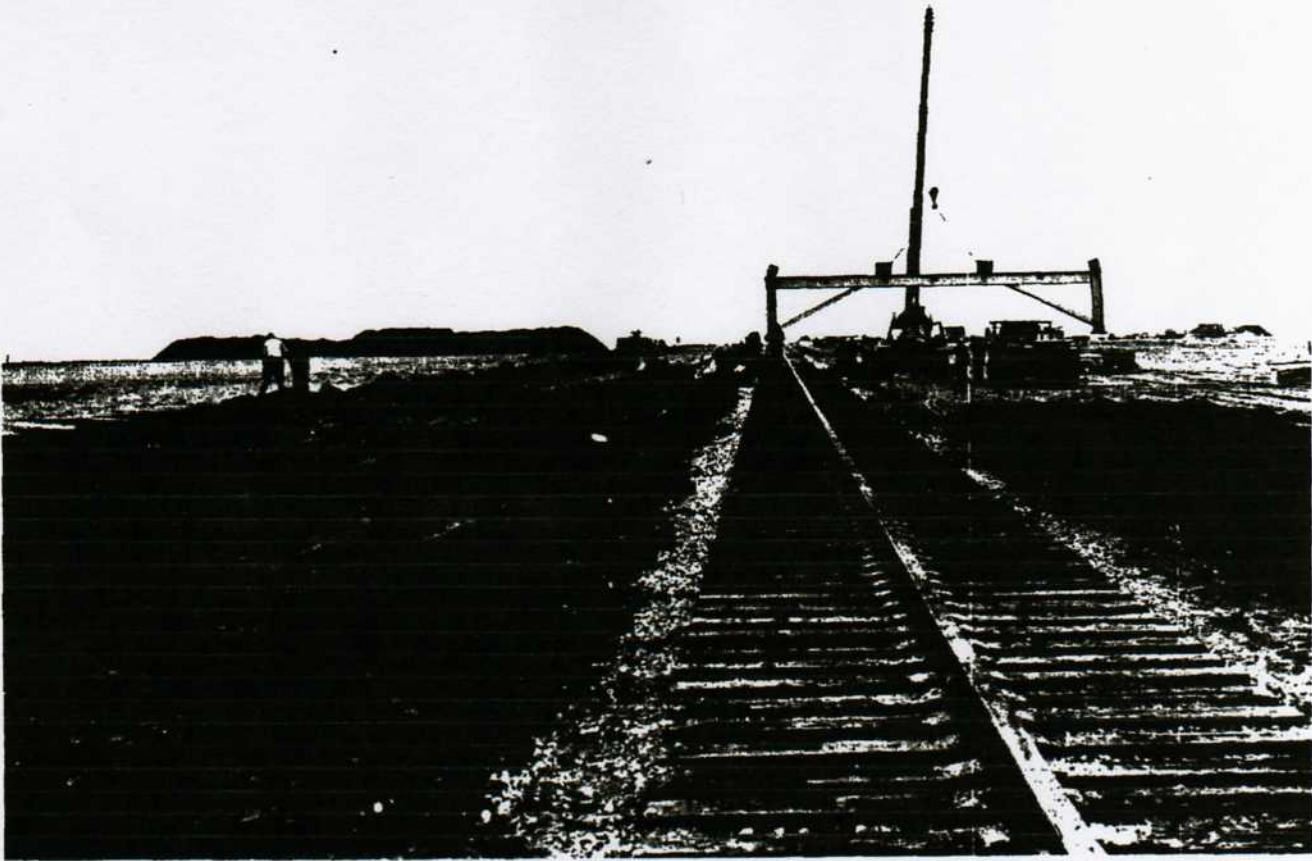
going to be brought into the area in the next 15 years."

One of the reasons for this is the anticipated fantastic demand for Canada's raw materials on the part of manufacturing nations in the early 1970s. Pacific Rim countries, in addition, are expected to have a population increase of 325 million people over the next seven years. This means that, if trends continue, the trade figure of \$700 million between B.C. and Pacific Rim countries could double by 1975.

Equally important as a factor is the technological revolution in transportation now underway. The developments in this area which have had most influence on the superport are those of unit trains—long single-cargo trains that never stop—and superfreighters in the 100,000-ton class. It is expected that, because of the great savings, the bulk of future world trade will use these systems and be carried on between a small number of superports around the world, smaller cargoes being trans-shipped by traditional means to smaller ports. The trend is already underway and it was a matter of keeping up or being left behind.

But why Roberts Bank as the site? The answer is that it is the best site in west coast North America for a superport, according to Swan Wooster Engineering Ltd. studies. Vancouver Island acts as a natural breakwater. Roberts Bank offers superfreighters needed water depths of 65 feet at berth-face, with the possibility of dredging deeper. There is plenty of backup land for quick cargo handling and direct, uncongested rail and highway access. In contrast, water depth at the Vancouver harbor entrance is an inadequate 39 feet; there is no backup land and the area is built-up and congested.

These natural assets will enable the superport to greatly expand over the next 30 years. Ultimately, it will consist of three huge causeways jutting into the sea with 47 deepsea berths and over 100 smaller berths for coastal traffic. In addition to present port access land, it will cover 5,000 acres of land reclaimed from tidal flats. Total cost: about \$150 million. "My personal opinion," said King, "is that the superport is more significant to the Canadian economy than the development of the St. Lawrence Seaway."



Steel girders are swung into place to begin erecting massive crane at the superport. Scramble is on to complete Kaiser coal-loading facilities in time to start shipping coal to Japan this November.

This may well be true. The port is also of great significance to the people of the Lower Mainland. And unfortunately there is little evidence of overall planning being undertaken to ensure that regional interests are taken into consideration. Delta municipality—which has a vital stake in the issue—has consistently complained that it has never been involved in planning the port or rail access. The Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board voiced the same complaints—before it was summarily dissolved by the provincial government. What planning being done is apparently being carried out very quietly by key ministers in the provincial cabinet, the B.C. Harbors Board, B.C. Hydro and the National Harbors Board—with technical assistance from Swan Wooster.

This is totally inadequate in the minds of people like Don Lanskaill, LLB'50, BA'50, the former chairman of the regional planning board. "This particular government has never been receptive to the idea of sharing its authority," he charged. "They feel that when they want to build a superport, they should make all the decisions and shouldn't have

to share with anybody."

What is now called, "The Great Railway Debate", raised similar suspicions in the minds of Delta officials and representatives of other groups. The debate, almost a year ago now, was over selection of the port rail route. Both the original choice and the final rail route selection ignored the provisions of the official regional plan (which the provincial government ratified in 1966) and the advice of the planning board. The route extends through the middle of the municipality, through what the official plan designated as agricultural land and ignored the rail-industrial corridor established along the Fraser River under the regional plan.

Farmers, the B.C. Wildlife Federation, Delta council, the regional planning board and some other groups opposed a rail route through the middle of Delta because it split the municipality, removed rich farmland from production, posed a threat to wildlife habitat and raised the spectre of industrial sprawl. Delta Mayor Dugald Morrison commented: "The council opposed the line along Boundary Bay because we felt that if the line came in from

the north we would be able to keep all industry in one area of Delta, instead of it spreading throughout Delta."

The protests have been of no avail. Mayor Morrison suggests the government knew where it wanted the rail route all along—despite its "second look" at the situation. "It was on the insistence of Delta that the government looked at the north and south routes," he said. "But when they got ready to build they put it exactly where they were going to put it in the first place, so I don't think there was really any question about where they were going. It was simply a smoke-screen."

The result is a rail route that will cut through 25 farms, across 14 roads, and involve construction of 21 miles of new track. The Fraser River route favored by the planning board would have involved extension of 8.6 miles of new track, upgrading of four miles of track and would leave farms virtually untouched and would involve only four level crossings or overpass situations. To the planners, the alternatives had not been examined. "The Roberts Bank rail route issue,

