

**WHEN ST. JOHNS, QUE., WAS
"THE KEY TO CANADA"**

(Continued from page 1)

Major Preston hither early in June with instruction to build two Redoubts, one about the barracks, the other about Hazen's house. The two were linked up by a communication trench, while an inlet between them provided shelter for an armed vessel, The Royal Savage. Haste was the watchword and the little force worked in four hour shifts, reinforced by a pint of rum allowed by order of the anxious Governor, Sir Guy Carleton.

The diary of Major Preston, covering this period is full of good yarns, friction between the militia and marine authorities over trivialities, records of a court martial in which an ensign is charged with having threatened to shove a captain's pipe down his throat and afterwards "bleeding his nose." But we must hurry on. So rapidly did the works proceed that in September, Major Preston was holding St. Johns with 567 troops of all ranks, from the 7th and 26th regiments, a few Canadian volunteers, mostly French gentlemen, and some artillerymen. On September 18th St. John was invested by General Montgomery, commanding a force vastly superior to the defenders, but Major Preston at once put his forces on the defensive. The attackers reached the creek about a mile south of the Fort, still known as "Montgomery Creek", but were held in check. The rapidity of Montgomery's approach enabled him to cut the communication of St. Johns with Montreal before provisions and equipment that was expected could arrive. The defenders had only about twenty blankets for the whole garrison and were on short rations from the beginning of the siege. But they held on with true British tenacity hoping for relief from Chambly. The daily diary of the siege reveals the constant tension. On one occasion there was a midnight alarm, a general opening of fire after a sentry had shot at a moving object outside the redoubt, and in the morning a dead horse lay beyond the ramparts! A large batteau with 3 or 4 barrels of pork and as many of flour drifted down the river from the enemy's flotilla, having been released by the wind, and was a welcome addition to stores. Gradually the rations and ammunition became depleted and the men were exhausted by continuous duty in the October rains and cold. Hope of relief finally died out, only three days rations remained, and on November 3d, 1818, the Fort was surrendered

and the garrison marched out with all the honours of war. Notwithstanding the close range of the enemy the total casualties were only about 60 killed and wounded.

But we cannot leave the story of this heroic and desperate defence without referring to an incident when the articles of capitulation were being arranged. The draft sent to Major Preston by Montgomery contained a reference to the heroic stand of the garrison under his command and concluded, "I wish they had been exerted in a better cause." To this Major Preston hotly retorted that these words "be entirely erased, the Garrison being determined rather to die with their arms in their Hands, than submit to the Indignity of such a Reflection." They were erased!

Before surrendering Major Preston learned that Major Stopford, who commanded at Chambly, had surrendered that Fort. Stopford never put up a fight but opened the doors to the enemy without having fired a shot or even destroying his ammunition and supplies. Instead of being court martialed and shot for this cowardice he returned to England, and as he was the son of a British peer he was elected to the House of Commons. The seige of St. Johns in 1775 is a story full of stubborn endurance and resourceful defence worthy of the traditions of the British army.

After the collapse of Montgomery's invasion of Canada which beat out its strength on the rocks at Quebec where Montgomery lost his life, St. Johns was again occupied. I have ascertained from the Dominion Archives at Ottawa that between 1778 and 1784 upwards of £24,000 were spent in fortifications here. I also found an Engineer's report, dated 1804, saying that of these works "only vestiges remained." From that time improvements were made and considerable dock yards and defenses were built in 1814. Isle aux Noix now became a considerable naval base for those days! The present barracks were built in 1839 at a cost of upwards of £18,000. They were designed to accomodate 3 field officers 27 officers and 800 men and a hospital for 86 patients. There have been many additions since that time. The old hospital is now the Sergeants' quarters, and the present Hospital and Guard House as well as the stables are recent additions.

As I write there is lying before me an original document which recalls the troubled days of 1837 and the Papineau rebellion. It is a letter to the Collector of H. M.

Customs here to arrest certain men, Demary and Davignon who had been rescued from the authorities by rebels near Longueuil Ferry. The defiance of authority by the rescuers of Demary and Davignon marked the outbreak of the misguided rebellion that for a time raged in the lower Richelieu valley. Battles were fought between the forces and the rebels at St. Eustache, St. Ours and St. Denis, in the autumn of 1837 and finally the outbreak was quelled and the instigator, Louis Papineau beat an ignominious retreat to the United States. The point that links this melancholy chapter of our history up with St. Johns is the activity of Demary and Davignon here as among the first fomenters of trouble.

In this way St. Johns has passed through and been identified with much of military activity both against foes from within as well as from without Canada. And when the call sounded in August 1914, the squadron of the Royal Canadian Dragoons which was conducting the Royal School of Cavalry here, volunteered to a man and went over with the first contingent. The famous 22d French Canadian Regiment was mobilized and trained here. After them came the Remount Depot, 500 stalwart men mainly from the West. Then the 87th Grenadier Guards came here in the autumn of 1915 and trained for six months. They were followed by the 117th Battalion which was mobilized here and proceeded to Valcartier. In October 1916 the Engineer Training Depot was stationed here under the command of Lieut. Col. W. W. Melville, who returned to take over this important command after crossing with the first contingent and doing his bit at the front. Last winter we had the privilege of seeing thousands of Polish troops assemble here on their way to the front, and now we hear the tramp of the men from Central and Western Ontario Regiments, and the rattle of machine guns as the units at present in the town are trained to take their place and sustain the standards which Major Preston upheld here in 1775. All these are right welcome. Let them remember that the ground beneath their feet is historic, some of it has been consecrated by heroes' outpoured blood, and its associations, if known, cannot but stir the heart of every patriot to stand valiantly for the right, and to pass on to succeeding ages the heritage for which our predecessors here fought and bled and died,—that noble heritage which is the greatest boon that we can confer upon posterity,

if it be handed on unsullied and intact.

Theatre Royal

Sunday and Monday, April 21st and 22nd.—Warren Kerigan, in "Turn of Card", 7 reels.

Tuesday and Wednesday, April 23rd and 24th.—Madame Pelousy in "Pauline Frederic", 5 parts.

Thursday, April 25th.—Monroe Salisbury and Ruth Clifford in "The Red Heart", 5 parts.

The series go on as follow:—Tuesday and Wednesday, "Red Ace"; Thursday and Friday, "Bull's Eye". Every week.

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