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The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario in 1812 and 1813.

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A small British naval force had been maintained on the lakes ever since the cession of Canada in 1763. This was known as the Provincial Marine or the "King's ships" and was administered by the Quarter-master-General's Department. It was organized in two divisions, one on Lake Ontario with a dockyard and depot at Kingston and the other for the service of the upper lakes with its depot at Amherstburg. A master-builder was employed at each of these stations with a certain number of shipwrights and other workmen for the construction, repair, and maintenance of these vessels after the close of navigation. As green oak timber had been invariably used in building them it was found that they became unserviceable in about eight years. An experiment had been tried to prevent rot by filling the space beneath the sheathing with salt which was pronounced fairly successful but was not generally adopted owing to the trifling expense it would cause. In time of peace the King's ships were usually employed in the transport of troops and public stores but occasionally carried civilian passengers and private merchandise. They were consequently manned by crews barely sufficient to navigate them. The nature of their service made it desirable that they should be of moderate size and light draught to enable them to cross the bars at the mouths of small rivers and approach landings in shallow water. Efficient seamen were not easily engaged, particularly since the beginning of the war with France, as the pay was low and the service monotonous with few opportunities for recreation while in port. Most of them were French Canadian *royageurs* who seldom remained more than one season. Nor were the officers of a class to inspire much confidence. Captain Steel, the senior officer on Lake Ontario was seventy-five years of age and naturally anxious to retire. Lieut. Hugh Earle, next in rank, had married a