

The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario in 1814

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During the autumn of 1813 and the following winter the rival shipyards at Kingston and Sackett's Harbour were the scene of amazing activity. At the former two frigates were laid down early in October, the largest of these being a ship of one hundred and fifty feet in length of keel, with a moulded breadth of forty-two feet and a depth of hold of sixteen feet four inches, or nearly equal in size to Nelson's famous flagship, the *Victory*. The other, originally designed as a brig, but subsequently enlarged, had a length of keel of one hundred and ten feet, a moulded breadth of thirty-six feet and ten feet depth of hold. On the 23rd of that month Captain O'Connor, who had just returned from a fruitless mission to Lake Erie, reported:

"The vessels building would have been considerably advanced if the artificers were steadily employed on them. They are frequently removed to perform various duties represented as being of great and immediate importance, viz., completing the defects of the squadron, building and repairing gunboats, constructing a flying bridge for transporting troops and artillery between Kingston and Point Frederick, making masts, oars, &c., &c., and a floating battery. This necessarily takes up much time. . . . If shipwrights cannot be procured, axmen probably may. . . . The best arrangements respecting their pay shall be made without losing their services. Give me leave to assure you the interest of the public has always been kept in view and every exertion used to satisfy the reasonable demands of the men employed in the naval yard, but their demands have been uniformly exorbitant and will continue so, while aware how very important and necessary they are. The arduous task you justly think I have to contend with in constructing two ships of such dimensions would give me very little uneasiness if our whole attention could be directed to them. This I am sorry to say cannot be the case just yet. The buildings have been neglected in my absence, the wharves are going to destruction, while the growing defects of the *Royal George* render attention to them highly necessary to enable us, if possible, to heave her down towards the fall. It is the difficulties I have to contend with together with the serious situation of the times which prevent my requesting his Excellency to do me the favor to accept my resignation of an appointment attended with considerable trouble and vexation. So long as he is pleased to consider them useful my feeble but ardent services will be at his command."¹

¹O'Connor to Freer, Kingston, Oct. 23, 1813.