

link that connected Montreal with the west. In summer it was the St Lawrence, the southern bank of which, where it was narrowest, was American, so that boats going up were exposed to capture, and were often made spoil of. In winter, the troops and material landed at Montreal had to make their way westward by sleigh or wagon along a backwoods road that skirted the north bank of the river. To inquire why the American plan of campaign of 1812 did not include a movement upon Montreal to snap that link, instead of wasting strength on the shores of lakes Ontario and Erie, is beyond the scope of this monograph. Having realized the importance of gaining Montreal the Washington war department bent all its energies in preparation. These were directed by Gen. Armstrong, the secretary of war, who intended taking command of the expedition.

In 1813 Montreal was a town of small dimensions, consisting of a few narrow streets perched on the margin of the St Lawrence, in which dwelt less than 15,000 people. It had no defensive works, and the worst an invader could expect would be hastily thrown up batteries along the river front. The strength of the little town lay in its inaccessibility. Situated on an island, surrounded by deep and wide stretches of water, it could only be reached by boats. An army, however strong it might be, would be powerless to effect its capture unless accompanied by a fleet of boats. This Armstrong fully realized, and while he issued orders to bring together an army such as the Republic had never before attempted, he also made preparations for the building of boats. Where they should be built was maturely considered, when it was decided Sackett's Harbor, at the eastern extremity of lake Ontario, was the only place that combined security from attack with a commodious bay. While the snow was on the ground the felling of trees was started and the sawing of their trunks into plank. Attracted by high wages, carpenters crowded to the little village and a beginning was made on the boats. These were flat-bottomed scows of such simple construction that they were quickly put together. Over 300 were to be built. Depending upon the current of the St Lawrence to sweep them to the island of Montreal, the oars placed in them were more for steering than rowing; crews to manage them were drawn from the sailors of New England ports and New York. French Canadian voyageurs, who volunteered freely, were secured as pilots. What was going on was not unobserved by the British, and an attack on Sackett's Har-