

THE PROCEEDINGS OF NEW YORK STATE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
VOLUME XIII—1914

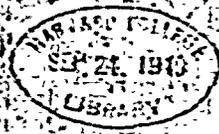
THE BAY OF QUINTE SETTLEMENTS  
DURING THE WAR OF 1812

BY

CLARENCE M. WARNER

President Ontario Historical Society  
Napane, Ontario

1915



W. A. D. O. V. A. N.

## THE BAY OF QUINTE SETTLEMENTS DURING THE WAR OF 1812.

---

By Clarence M. Warner, President Ontario Historical Society,  
Napanee, Ontario.

---

Taking a map of Upper Canada made about the year 1812 and looking particularly at the Bay of Quinte District one notices that the bay begins immediately west of the then Village of Kingston and that the townships bordering on the bay are Kingston, Ernesttown, Fredericksburgh, Adolphustown, Marysburgh, Sophiasburgh, Ameliasburgh, Sidney, Thurlow and Richmond. These municipalities had formerly been known as First Town, Second Town, Third Town and on up to Tenth Town. The six following Kingston were named for children of King George the Third. Their settlement was one direct result of the American War of Independence. Kingston, although but a village of a few houses, many of which were built of logs, was the largest and most important settlement in what is now Ontario. Till about 1825 it was larger than York.

Properly to understand the condition of the settlers occupying these districts when war was declared in 1812 it is necessary to know who the settlers were and how they had spent the time during their years of residence in Canada.

The first systematic settlement began in 1783 when First Town was selected by a number of refugees from New York under Captain Grass as a suitable place for their new homes. This company, with others, had left New York in seven vessels and after a voyage of nine weeks landed at Sorel, Quebec. The women and children were left there until the men had chosen the district for settlement and after a winter all were moved to Kingston. Thus it was in the summer of 1784 that the first township was occupied.

The Governor, who had authorized Captain Grass' company to occupy the first township, gave to Sir John Johnson of the second battalion of the 84th regiment and to his men—designated by the United States soldiers as the "Royal Greens"—the next choice of lands. Sir John took the second township, Ernesttown, and some of his men under Col. Rogers, the third township, Fredericksburgh.

A party of Loyalists under command of Captain Vanalstine, who had also sailed from New York, settled the fourth township, Adolphustown.

The fifth township, Marysburgh, was settled by Captain Archibald McDonell and others of the 84th regiment, a few from the regular army and a party of about forty Hessians.

The sixth township, Sophiasburgh, was mainly settled by Loyalists who moved from Adolphustown or Ernesttown, and by emigrants from the United States who disliked the new order of things in that country. Ameliasburgh, the seventh township, was settled in like manner.

The first settlements in Sidney, the eighth township, were in 1757. The lands here were gradually occupied by settlers from various parts, the first being unquestionably attracted by the prospect of trading with the Indians.

Thurlow, the ninth township, was similarly settled. In both of these townships many refugee Loyalists found homes and after gathering their families, located near the mouth of the Moira River.

Richmond, the tenth township, was settled about the year 1786 by friends of those in the front townships.

In the years following these first settlements there were many emigrants from the United States, particularly from the northeastern part of the State of New York, who came to Canada, partly because of a lack of sympathy for the new Republic and partly because their friends, and in some cases their relatives, wrote in glowing terms of the productive nature of the soil.

Thus we find a strip of country bordering on the shores of the Bay of Quinte fairly well settled in 1812. Included among these settlers were many officers and soldiers, who had fought for the British flag and had received liberal grants of land from the Government, so their natural sentiments were against the

United States. This part of the country was first known as the District of Mecklenburgh and afterwards as the Midland District.

From the time of the first settlement in 1784 until war was declared, a period of nearly twenty-eight years had elapsed and during those years great progress was made by the pioneers. The land was cleared, houses were built, saw and grist mills erected wherever water falls afforded the necessary power to run the wheels, and many stores were opened.

The Court of Quarter Sessions was established in 1789 and the New England system of town meetings in 1791. These settlers were of American origin and when Town Meetings were first established it was rather in defiance of the authorities at Niagara, whom the American revolution had led to distrust democracy. The first held in Adolphustown were more than a year before they were authorized by the Legislature of Upper Canada. Three bills were introduced into the House before the Council and House were satisfied and came to an agreement, and even the third was amended by the Council before being finally accepted. One authority states that "It was the conception of law that was fostered in the men of Ontario by their town meetings which led in a large measure to the establishment of Responsible Government in this Province."

By 1812 many roads had been made, schools were started, churches built and quite an air of settled conditions prevailed around the bay. Communication with the east was by the St. Lawrence River during the months when navigation was open and by means of a road along the north shore of the river in winter. With the western part of the province the lake route and a road to York along the north shore of the lake were similarly utilized. The route taken during the war years by the batteaux in going from Kingston to the western part of the country was through the Bay of Quinte to the "Carrying Place", the name still applied by the older settlers to the narrow neck of land connecting the County of Prince Edward with the main land, which isthmus is now cut by the Murray Canal. Here these flat-bottomed boats were hauled out of the water, placed on rollers made of wood and hauled across to the waters of Lake Ontario at Brighton Bay. In the winter the main line of transport was up the bay shore to a point opposite the Stone Mills (Glenora) across the ice to the mills

and on west by way of Picton and the isthmus to which reference was made above. Another route, but one less used, was from Kingston in almost a direct line to Napanee, then west through the Mohawk settlements, to the settlements in Sidney and Thurlow, around the mouth of the Moira River and then west. One strong objection to the use of this route was the difficulty encountered in crossing the rivers Napanee, Shannon, Moira and Trent, where bridges of a reliable nature were yet to be built and where solid ice could not always be relied upon. Kingston, with its fort, was the military and naval headquarters and general distributing point.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Lower Canada called out the Canadian Militia in June, 1807, shortly after the incident of the Leopard and the Chesapeake, when there was much talk in the United States of invading Canada, and when the new Governor-General of the Canadas, Sir James Craig, landed in Quebec on October 18th, 1807, he found the settlers in Upper Canada preparing to meet such an invasion. When the call to duty came the old soldiers around the Bay immediately responded and the retired officers were commissioned to raise regiments and drill them for active service. The war feeling developed very rapidly after Governor Craig landed in Canada. He was a soldier and with Colonel Isaac Brock in command of the garrison at Quebec, they soon had the people of Upper Canada filled with the idea of defending their country. Early in December, 1807, a request was sent to each commanding officer for a careful estimate of the men "ready for actual service on one hour's notice" and the result of the reports from the various sections of the Midland District, with the exception of that from the Quaker settlements around Picton, was most satisfactory. The Quakers, though loyal to Great Britain, would not take up arms. It is unfortunate that all of these reports are not available. They would make interesting study, particularly those portions dealing with the number of Indian volunteers. One is apt to forget that the Mohawks were living in considerable numbers on the edge of the settlements of the Canadian pioneers and that portions of the north shore of the Bay of Quinte were in their possession. They have held part of that shore ever since, and when visiting the Bay at the present time, one of the show places is the Mohawk Reserve just west of

Deseronto, with its small Anglican church and the communion service presented by Queen Anne to the Indians—the communion service which was presented shortly after the visit of the four Indian chiefs to England in 1710 and which has always been so highly prized by the Indians. This service when there was danger of its being seized by the enemy during the troubles in 1776, was buried in the earth, the plate being wrapped in the communion cloth. After the close of the war it was recovered and the precious relics taken to Canada and divided, between those Mohawks who settled on the Grand River near the present City of Brantford and the smaller branch that settled on the Bay of Quinte. Upon each piece of the service the following is engraved:

"The Gift of Her Majesty Queen Anne by the  
Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland,  
of Her Plantations in North America. Queen of Her  
Indian Chapel of the Mohawk."

That a number of Indians did offer their services is proven by original records which the writer has seen.

The strength of the militia was gradually increased as time went by and conditions did not improve in the United States where the war party, composed principally of the Congressional representatives from the south and west, finally forced President Madison to declare war on June 19th, 1812.

Very shortly after this date the volunteers of the various Battalions were ordered to hold themselves in readiness for actual service and they were supplied with arms by the Quarter-Masters of the different districts. The order to march to Kingston soon followed and before the middle of July we find that stronghold well surrounded with the camps of the volunteer militia. An attack upon the fort was expected to be one of the first moves made by the enemy and it was deemed advisable to concentrate a large force there, not only to protect the large quantity of stores and ammunition for the army but to hold the key of the line of transport to the western settlements.

When it was seen that Kingston was in no danger of immediate attack many of the volunteers were ordered home. The first call proved to the officers in command that they could rely upon the colonists for aid when needed and after this time, although

the men were constantly trained by their officers, most of them were left at home except when urgently needed. There were a great many soldiers to feed in Kingston and it was necessary that the farmer-soldier should remain at home and care for the crops and thus have as much grain and provisions as possible stored up for the winter months to avoid a famine and to provide fuel for the winter.

On August 8th, 1812, three days after Tecumseh defeated the Americans at Brownstown, orders were given in several parts of the Bay district for extra men to be prepared with sufficient provisions to take them to Kingston and furnished with other requisites for remaining there on actual service. The enemy was operating extensively along the St. Lawrence below Kingston and small raids and counter-raids were frequent. Gananoque was attacked on September 21st and on October 4th the British were repulsed at Ordensburg.

On October 20th, 1812, orders were sent out requiring those men of the Bay of Quinte district who had been away on furlough to return to duty at once. The reason given for this hurry call was the desire to have sufficient men on hand to guard a number of American prisoners who were taken at Queenston Heights and who were hourly expected to arrive at Kingston. This was probably true in part but there were also persistent rumors of an expected attack upon that base of supplies and men to defend it were required.

The attack took place on November 10th, 1812, when the fortifications were bombarded by the American fleet. The "Royal George," a vessel of 340 tons, and two schooners in returning from a trip to the other end of the lake, where they had taken both soldiers and supplies, were chased into the Kingston harbor by the American fleet and the ships of the squadron opened a heavy fire against the fortifications. Shortly after the commencement of the action a snow storm started and Chauncey, the commander of the American fleet, having met with a spirited fire, deemed it prudent to retire. One authority claims that the defence of the fort on that occasion was the reason for no other attacks being made upon Kingston during the war.

Those in command appear to have had considerable difficulty in keeping on duty the men who were not allowed to return to

their homes on the Bay during the harvesting season and orders for the apprehension of deserters were frequently issued.

There were also a few whose loyalty was questioned. Orders were sent out late in October requiring all the inhabitants from the age of sixteen and upwards, who had not already done so, to take the oath of allegiance as prescribed by the last Act of the Provincial Parliament. A letter from a nephew of one of the Canadian officers who lived in the United States informed his uncle that all British subjects who resided in that country were required to swear allegiance or leave. Thus we see that some of the same difficulties faced both countries.

During the winter months there was very little activity about Kingston and on March 27th, 1813, Col. Richard Cartwright issued orders allowing more of the Bay of Quinte men to return to their homes. The officers stationed in different parts of the district were ordered to drill the men at regular intervals. They were usually required to drill fully equipped for war and on some occasions were required to have blanket and provisions for the journey to Kingston.

The news of the capture of York on April 27th, 1813, took considerable time to reach the Bay of Quinte and the victories at Sackett's Harbor on May 29th and at Stony Creek on June 5th followed by the surrender of the American force at Beaver Dam on June 24th more than counteracted the gloom over the loss of York.

This summer passed quietly and most of the men were allowed to return to the duties of the farm.

In the early fall there were again rumors of a possible attack on Kingston and hurry calls were issued for the men of the Bay district to report for duty at once. Most of them obeyed the call, but there were many who were tired of the work and who deserted. This occasioned a special call on November 10th, 1813, for the apprehension of deserters. This serious condition was brought to the attention of Colonel Cartwright who, appreciating the fact that the danger had not been a real one, issued orders that the men be given more frequent reliefs and on December 25th, 1813, followed these with a new order allowing the various detachments to be relieved every two months.

That careful records were kept is apparent from the rolls

taken in October, 1813, which give most complete returns of the males in the district with a special list of all those under sixteen years of age.

The battle of Chateaugay on October 26th and that at Crysler's Farm on November 11th had a very beneficial influence on the militia and particularly on those from the Bay of Quinte. The main detachment to meet the enemy at Crysler's Farm was made up of about six hundred regulars taken from Kingston on November 8th and the fact that these men, who had been comrades of the Bay of Quinte men for many months, did such good work served to inspire the whole district.

After October, 1813, these Bay of Quinte men were used almost entirely in connection with the transport of the commissariat. As stated above, in the winter months there was a long haul between Kingston and York, through a district with very few settlers and over a very poor road. This problem became more serious the second winter, as the westerners, and particularly those about Niagara, had not much opportunity to raise crops in 1813. On November 28th, 1813, Col. Cartwright issued orders requiring a careful estimate to be made of all the horses, oxen, carts, wagons and sleighs in the district. He wanted to be ready to send what supplies he could to help the westerners. The men of the district did not take very kindly to this work, particularly under strict military discipline, and the majority of the orders for the following months dealt with difficulties encountered in making them do the work required. They had evidently lost interest in the war as they believed that American attack was no longer probable.

An order of April 10, 1814, tells of the importance of immediately forwarding a quantity of provisions to Burlington Heights and calls for forty privates with a steady officer who was "used to the water" to man the King's batteaux.

Another order which had considerable bearing on the Bay of Quinte men was issued April 24th, 1814. It tells of an arrangement made by the President for an exchange of prisoners. By this order all men who were prisoners of war on parole, with a very few stated exceptions, were released from their obligations from the 15th of May.

In June another careful return was made of all the men available for duty in the district.

During the summer of 1814 conditions continued to improve and by the end of August reports confirmed the belief that the war was nearly over and even at this early date talk of peace was in the air. The Bay of Quinte men were nearly all at home attending to the duties of their farms.

The Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24th, 1814, news of it reached America on February 14th, 1815, and it was ratified on February 18th, 1815, by the President of the United States, Mr. Madison. This brought peace.

After the war there was much work to be done, but the communications between the Commanding Officers have more the air of Commercialism than Militarism. When such work was desired the question of pay was first considered and when provisions or supplies were wanted prices were always mentioned. The writer has not found a single instance where pay is mentioned in the papers and letters during the danger period of the war. This shows that these men knew that they were working to save their homes and their country.

The work proved a great boon to the settlers about the bay during the winter months and although under a certain degree of military discipline they were well paid and they eagerly performed the duties required of them.

There was a great and increasing demand for supplies and prices ranged so high that the late enemy, recognized even at that date as keen for business, soon entered the market with his surplus. A letter of March 13, 1815, states that the Americans were flocking to Kingston with their produce at very reasonable prices and asks what the Bay of Quinte farmers are going to do with that which they have kept back at great price.

An order issued April 28th, 1815, requires the collection of all arms and accoutrements in the hands of the militia, and instructions were given to have everything cleaned, and repaired when necessary, and then sent to the store at Kingston. This appears to have been the last order issued to the Bay of Quinte men bearing directly upon the war.

Few historians in writing of the war of 1812-14 dwell on the part taken in the war by the homesteaders of Upper Canada. These men lived in log cabins on small bits of cleared land in a wilderness with none of the comforts now enjoyed by the farmers

of Ontario. They had far larger families than is the average of the present day and in many cases all the men and boys were employed as soldiers. These men, supported by brave women, in a country where everything was new, where Indians were none too friendly and always curious, and fearing an attack from an enemy at any time, lived through nearly three years of war, tilled their land, cared for their stock and served their country as brave soldiers. These were the men of the Bay of Quinte district. Their monument in history is the first century of peace between the English speaking people of America—the termination of which the two countries have decided appropriately to celebrate by the erection of a number of monuments commemorating historical events of interest to both.