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THE CHIMNEY ISLANDS

An Interesting and Instructive
Historical Sketch.

Also Much Valuable Information Con-
cerning Military Operations on this
part of the St. Lawrence in the early
days of the Country.

(Reprinted from The Brockville Recorder of
August 3rd, 1901.)

Dear Sir,—I noticed, with a feel-
ing of no small surprise, that my
hurried sketch of a "Voyage Around
the Horn," published in your great
family newspaper of the 13th ult.,
has produced quite a sensation in
the literary and archaeological at-
mospheres, both at home and abroad.
I had a double object in writing that
sketch. I desired (without fee or re-
ward) to draw public attention to
the delightful weekly trip which the
steamboat Brockville makes "Around
the Horn," and to supply some ori-
ginal matter, during the hot spell,
for the benefit of your numerous
readers. My object, sir, in inditing
this fresh epistle to you is to as-
suage the public curiosity which I
so innocently excited, to clear up for
all time the hitherto unfathomable
mystery of Chimney Island, and to
plainly explain its archaeological
and historical environments.

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To begin legitimately at the beginning, permit me to state that there are two Chimney Islands amid the pellucid waters of the Upper St. Lawrence. One of these, according to the archives of St. Mary's College, Montreal, lies just $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles below the lighthouse at Ogdensburg; the other island is situated 11 miles and 700 feet westerly from the C. P.R. wharf at Brockville, 2 miles from the extreme western end of Chippewa Point, on the American shore, and 850 feet from the Canadian mainland. Each island has its own distinctive history, geographically and otherwise. The story of the Chimney Island below Ogdensburg comes first in the order of time, and takes us back to the period when the great historical drama of the Conquest of Canada was drawing towards a close. Wolfe still held forth before Quebec, trying to solve the difficult problem of how to bring Montcalm to a decisive battle, the memorable 13th September, 1759, had yet to come and go, and it still remained for the victor and the vanquished to die the deaths of immortal heroes. In the last days of August the Chevalier de Levis (afterwards the successor of Montcalm), who commanded the French forces from Montreal westward, ascended the St. Lawrence to make a careful inspection of the defences. At Ogdensburg, where a flourishing mission settlement had been founded in 1751 by the Abbe Piquet, a Sulpician father, half monk and half soldier, he carefully examined Fort la Presentation, situated on a high bluff close by the Oswegatchie river, and a few

hundred yards from the St. Lawrence river, and came to the conclusion that it was of no account as regarded the prevention of the passage downwards of an enemy. He accordingly determined to construct a new and much stronger fort on the island called by the Indians Orakouenton, which he re-christened Isle Royale. Desandrions, a military engineer, laid out the lines of the new fort, which was called Fort Levis, and work was immediately commenced thereon, steadily prosecuted throughout the ensuing winter, and completed in the spring of 1760. The command of Fort Levis was given to Pouchot, a brave and skilful soldier, who had already greatly distinguished himself by his defence of the fort at Niagara. His force consisted of 200 regular troops, 100 habitant militia, and several hundred Indians, under the Abbe Piquet, who garrisoned the island immediately below Isle Royale. The guns and stores were removed from Fort la Presentation, and that post was entirely abandoned. On the 10th of August, General Amherst embarked his army, composed of 10,000 regular and provincial troops, and 700 Indians, at Oswego, on an enormous boat and batteaux flotilla en route for Montreal, and arrived before Fort Levis on the 19th. Pouchot refused to surrender, and made such a vigorous defence, both by land and water, that Amherst was compelled to undertake regular siege operations. On the 22nd the British batteries opened their fire, which was so heavy that Pouchot was soon convinced of the hopelessness of further resistance, and surrendered at dis-

cretion on the 25th. Amherst completely destroyed the works at Fort Levis, leaving only a solitary chimney standing. On the 7th of September he found himself at Montreal, and on the following day the Marquis de Vaudreuil signed the capitulation, which severed Canada from France forever. It will thus be seen that the history of the Chimney Island below Ogdensburg covers only the brief period of a single year.

An intervening period of thirty-nine years succeeds the fall of Fort Levis, and the history of Chimney Island above Brockville commences to unfold itself, by the settlement thereon of the two half-breeds, and the French-Canadian and his beautiful companion, the only memorial of which event is the solitary chimney still standing, despite the repeated attempts, in recent years, of Brockville vandals to blow it up with gunpowder or batter it down. And here I had better perhaps explain that in my brief narrative of the catastrophe which took place on the island in 1800, there is one error (whether made by the printer or myself, I cannot say, for I have not the M.S. by me) in my terming the district judge of Kingston Peter Cartwright instead of Richard, and who, by the way, was an amiable and likeable gentleman, and the ancestor, but not precisely the prototype, of the present Dominion Minister of Trade and Commerce.

Another historical gap, this time of twelve years, ensues, and the coming war between Great Britain and the United States looms darkly upon the horizon. Every student of Canadian

history should be aware of the causes leading to that fratricidal struggle. If he still needs information on that point I would refer him to the third edition of McMullen's History of Canada, volume 1, page 321, where he will find all the information needed. Canada was then a poor and sparsely settled country. In the lower province there were only 220,000 inhabitants all told, in Upper Canada 80,000. On the other hand the population of the United States stood at about eight millions, and their resources were enormous. The odds were terrible—twenty-seven or so to one. There were not quite six thousand troops in Canada to defend a frontier fifteen hundred miles in extent, while the Mother Country was then engaged in a life and death struggle with the great Napoleon. Congress, when it declared war on the 19th of June, 1812, against Great Britain, thought the affair would be a mere walk-over. At the close of a three years struggle the United States did not hold one inch of Canadian soil. Their export trade had dwindled down from \$120,000,000 per annum to \$7,000,000, three thousand of their merchant vessels had been captured, and fully two-thirds of their mercantile and trading classes had become insolvent, while the Union itself was threatened with disruption by the secession of the New England States. On the other hand the war gave a great stimulus to the prosperity of Canada, and at its close she was in an infinitely better position to defend herself than at the beginning of the contest.

When hostilities commenced in 1812

there was no military port of any importance from Kingston to Prescott. Owing to the foresight of General Brock a fort was in rapid process of construction at the latter point as an offset to Ogdensburg, where Fort La Presentation had been thoroughly repaired and strengthened, and where the building of vessels of war was promptly commenced. Brockville was then a small village of about 350 inhabitants and had no defences whatever. On his way west from Prescott Brock landed here, and was met by some of the principal citizens, among whom was Adiel Sherwood, then a young man, and afterwards sheriff of the united counties, who was my informant as to what took place. You have a pretty village here, said the general. Would you like me to give it a name to distinguish it from the township? We shall be glad to have you do so, general, was the response. Brock directed his drummer to beat the advance, and at its close made proclamation that the name of the village should be Brockville, and Brockville it has been from that day to this. That was 89 years ago.

Between Brockville and Gananoque the river front was still mostly a wilderness, with only a few settlements here and there. Gananoque was still a mere hamlet of about half a dozen houses, mostly log ones. But its river had already attracted outside attention, draining as it did much of the interior lake country, and being the only good water power between Kingston and St. Ann's. Colonel Joel Stone, a Connecticut U.E. Loyalist, with strong claims upon the government, had asked for

a grant of land at both sides of the river, so as to get full control of the water power, and Sir John Johnstone (the son of the celebrated Sir William Johnstone), who had raised a regiment for the crown during the war of Independence, had petitioned to the same effect. The gordian knot of the situation was cut by giving Colonel Stone 400 acres on the west side of the river, and Sir John a large grant on the east side, and making the middle of the river the boundary line between the two. By and by Charles McDonald, a good-looking young man, of Scotch parentage, made his appearance in the little settlement, fell in love with Mary Stone and married her. His next operation was to lease the water-power from his father-in-law, and to put up a grist and saw mill. In 1812 he opened a small country store. He was joined by his brother, John, in 1817. The McDonald firm eventually acquired all the Stone and Johnstone properties, and flourished greatly for many years as lumbermen, millers and general merchants. They had a wide reputation for probity and business worth, and trained many young men in their own ways, among whom was the late Sir John Abbott, the whilom Premier of the Dominion. The war proved a gold mine to Charles McDonald, just as it did also to Billa Flint, of Brockville, and thousands of other business men throughout the country. In the fierce struggle which it produced for the naval supremacy on Lake Ontario the McDonald saw mill was kept going to its utmost capacity, in order to supply lumber for the government dockyard at Kingston, which even-

tually turned out a great man-of-war of 100 guns, which so terrified the enemy that his fleet had afterwards to keep close under his forts at Niagara and elsewhere. The farmers living along the course of the Gananoque river, and on its tributary lakes and streams, were kept busy during the winter getting out pine and oak logs for the McDonald mill, and in afterwards floating them thereto when the spring floods were at their full. In this way British gold, then so lavishly spent in Canada, gave a great stimulus to the prosperity of all classes, and lifted its people from their impoverished condition.

On the 6th of February, 1813, two companies of the American rifle corps at Ogdensburg proceeded up the river in sleighs, the ice being very strong, and made a night attack on Brockville. After wounding the solitary militia sentry, the houses in the village were ransacked, and nearly all the adult male inhabitants, to the number of 52, were carried off as prisoners. The jail was also visited and 16 prisoners there released. 140 muskets, in store for the militia, and a quantity of ammunition, were also captured by the enemy. Major Forsythe, who then commanded at Ogdensburg, released most of the Brockville prisoners in a few days as he found them to be non-combatants. A few nights afterwards the Americans made an attack on Gananoque, which was entirely defenceless, killed one of the inhabitants, and captured there one keg of powder, a chest containing 30 muskets, and a few army stores in the shape of old straw beds and blankets. They were very anx-

ious to capture Colonel Stone, who was particularly obnoxious to them, but he managed to escape. Mrs. Stone, however, was badly wounded in the hip by a shot fired through her bedroom window. James, the English historian of the war, describes the hamlet as consisting of a tavern, a saw mill, and a log hut temporarily occupied by Colonel Stone. There were, however, a few other houses at a little distance from the river, which James did not notice in his narrative. Major McDonnell, of the Glengarry Fencibles, who commanded at Prescott, sent a flag of truce to Forsythe at Ogdensburg to remonstrate with him about the depredations committed on the Canadian frontier by his troops. His remonstrances, however, were met by taunts and jeers, and a challenge to fight out the quarrel on the ice. Sir George Prevost, the Governor-General, who happened to be at Prescott at the time, would not permit McDonnell to accept this challenge, which he was very anxious to do, his Highland blood having been well set going, but instructed him to retaliate at the first favorable opportunity. McDonnell speedily availed himself of this permission. Morning after morning he drilled his forces with much ostentation on the ice opposite the fort to lull the suspicions of the enemy. On the morning of the 23rd of February, at seven o'clock, the usual parade of 280 regulars and 200 militia took place, but presently, instead of returning to land as hitherto, a sudden dash was made for Ogdensburg. After about an hour's hard fighting the British forces completely carried the enemy's position,

defended by 500 regular troops and militia, capturing 11 guns and all his stores, and 4 officers and 70 men. Two armed schooners and two gunboats were burned, as well as two good barracks for troops. The fort was also rushed, the enemy fleeing out of one gate into the woods as the British entered the other. Fortunately for the fugitives McDonnell's Indians were absent from the battle, having been sent by him on other duty, as otherwise many more of them would have been killed. McDonnell in his despatch that evening to Sir George Prevost (which lies before me as I write) describes the enemy's loss as very heavy. His own loss was 8 killed and 52 wounded.

The capture of Ogdensburg completely crippled American offensive operations on the upper St. Lawrence, but Sir George Prevost, with the view of making the frontier more secure against future predatory attacks, directed that stout blockhouses be built at all the principal points along the river and garrisoned by efficient bodies of troops. One of these blockhouses was erected on a small island opposite Brockville, near the easterly corner of the C. P. R. wharf. Charles McDonald got the contract for building the blockhouses at Gananoque and on Chimney Island. At the latter point he also constructed a substantial wooden causeway covering the 850 feet to the mainland, as well as a small earthwork. He repaired and utilized the chimney which was still standing, but the island itself was almost as bare of vegetation as the conflagration of 1800 had left it, or as it is to-day. A detachment of

regular troops, whose lead coat buttons are still picked up about the place, was stationed on Chimney Island during the remainder of the war, and another detachment at Larue's Mills, about four miles farther up the river. Brockville blockhouse was re-garrisoned during the troubles of 1838-9, and a small body of Royal Canadian Rifles was kept there until the corps was finally disbanded about 1852, if I recollect aright. What eventually became of the blockhouse at Chimney Island, I am unable to say, but most probably it was burned down in some way, after it had been finally abandoned at the close of the war; or possibly some settler on the mainland utilized the stout timbers of which it was built to make a log house for himself. Some old farmers up there should know all about its final fate. Passing row boats now move freely above the remains of the old submerged causeway, pieces of which are still picked up by the curious. I may add that Chimney Island was never occupied for any military purpose whatever, during the French regime before the conquest. Their military posts were situated on islands farther west, and during the invasions of the Iroquois fierce fighting took place around these posts. According to Jesuit records Father Pierre Potier, in July, 1744, travelled by canoe from Montreal to Detroit. He mentions in his journal La Gallette (Prescott) Pointe a Baril (Maitland), where he camped for the night, and Gananoque, but says not a word about Chimney Island, which lay directly in his course, and which he must

have noticed, if there was a military post there. So much for the antiquities and the history of Chimney Island! With the final fate of the Brockville blockhouse I happen to be personally acquainted. After the detachment of the Royal Canadian Rifles had left, it remained locked up for several years. About the beginning of the sixties, the gallant Brockville Artillery Corps amused themselves occasionally by firing solid shot at it, forming, as it did, an excellent and safe target. By and by, when the navvies were leveling down the island for B. & O. purposes, the work came to a sudden standstill at the blockhouse, for the government of Canada had never given any authority for its removal or right to the land, and have never done so subsequently. Some railroad people, however, were equal to the occasion. One night about that time, there was a sudden alarm of fire, and next morning every sign of the old blockhouse had disappeared, and the navvies (among whom were two recent immigrants from the "ould sod," who subsequently became great railway magnates and millionaires) resumed their work at blasting down the hard granite rock. The end.

J. M. M.

Brockville, Aug. 2nd, 1901.