

Toronto Telegram, May 7, 1938
Schooner Days, CCCXLIV (344)
By C.H.J. Snider

MIGHTY MEN OF THEIR HANDS

DOWN in Kingston yesterday (on a sojourn which was strictly limited to one day), the compiler of Schooner Days was honored with the privilege of making the address when Brig. Gen. Hertzberg unveiled a memorial cairn and tablet at the head of Navy Bay commemorating the officers and men of the Provincial Marine and of the Royal Navy and Army who served our country from the Kingston naval base in the War of 1812. The memorial was provided by the Dominion Historic Sites and Monuments Board and the ceremony was under the auspices of the Kingston Historical Society.

We had a good day for it, the 6th of May being the anniversary of the capture of Oswego by the fleet and forces from Kingston in 1814. And we had a good place for it, the memorial cairn being so situated on the side of the newly cut highway that it marks both Navy Bay, where the war fleet of 1812 was built and moored, and Fort Henry, which guarded this freshwater arsenal. It did give one a thrill, more of reverence and gratitude than of pride, but of pride also, to stand there under the protection of the old carronades and long guns brought out from England or captured from the French and Americans more than a century ago, and look down the unmenaced stretch of water where were launched the keels which carried our country through the storms of war to an honorable and enduring peace.

From where we stood around the cairn we could see the bleaching bones of one of the old wooden-walls of 1812. The wreck was plainly discernible at the head of the sandspit in Navy Bay, and from measurements the speaker made a year ago last summer, and material he found aboard, it must either be that of the 14-gun schooner *Prince Regent*, built at York in 1812, or of her slightly older sister, the 16-gun brig-of-war *Earl of Moira*, built at Kingston in 1805. As a patriotic Torontonionian as well as a humble researcher he cannot refrain from adding that the evidence of the tape-line is rather in favor of the *Prince Regent* identification.

Had we been in an airplane instead of on the ground we might, from this same spot, have seen the surviving remains of perhaps a dozen of the old wooden men-of-war, not one of them younger than a century and a quarter. Out to the west of Kingston harbor are mastodonic remnants of H.M.S. *St. Lawrence*, mightiest ship-of-the-line. Her sides were pierced for one hundred and two guns, and she had ten chase guns besides. She was as large as Nelson's *Victory*. She was only launched in September. Ere the year was out the whole peninsula was cleared of American invaders and the war was over. The launching ways down which the *St. Lawrence* thundered one hundred and twenty-four years ago were still in view at Point Frederick at mouth of Navy Bay, last Saturday and the gigantic timbers of the older ship, oaken beams sixteen inches square, can be seen any day the water is clear and smooth. The noblest noblest memorial that could be erected to the marine of 1812 – and the greatest tourist attraction

– would be a restoration of this mighty square-rigger, incorporating all that could be salvaged of her great oaken hull.

Other eighteen-twelves lie under the water of Navy Bay and of Deadman's Bay adjoining. This year's restoration of Fort Henry, on the peninsula between these two bays, has produced tons of material from these sunken hulls – shot-racks, nine-pounder and twelve-pounder cannon, cannon balls, lanterns, tools, deadeyes, blocks, chain-plates, powder pans, and all the paraphernalia of fighting ships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From two huge mast steps which have been recovered by the diver's skill we can be sure of the identity of at least one more of the sunken warships.

This is the *Princess Charlotte*, launched a few months earlier than the *St. Lawrence*; and this brings us back to the Battle of Oswego, which we fought and won a hundred and twenty-four years ago yesterday.

The "butcher bill" on both sides in the Battle of Oswego looks vegetarian in comparison with a Merry Christmas motor massacre in this country which the Battle of Oswego saved for us. In Ontario this year so far more human lives have been sacrificed to the insanity of swift locomotion than died at Oswego in 1814, and the maimed in this year's evidence of progress outnumber the wounded at Oswego fifty to one. Among the Royal Marines, Royal Naval forces, and Provincial Marine and the military forces who shared in 1814 the honors and arduousness of Oswego, twenty-two were killed and seventy-two were wounded. The defenders, having the wisdom to flee speedily, lost fewer than the attackers. They had six killed and thirty-eight wounded. Last year 766 people were killed and 8,951 maimed by motors in Ontario.

The finest thing about the Battle of Oswego is that it accomplished its object, but not one British sailor or soldier got drunk and not one hen's roost was robbed. The object was to break up the preparations being made at Sacket's Harbor to provide newer and larger American ships which would regain command of Lake Ontario before the *St. Lawrence*, which was building, could be launched. The British captured or carried off three thousand barrels of provisions, several miles of large rope, and seven big ship's guns. They destroyed some others and all the barracks and public buildings. They also captured three transport schooners. Not one civilian was injured, insulted or robbed. Equipment of the American ships was delayed, and although the enemy learned of the *St. Lawrence* and began a still larger ship to meet her, the war was over before this ship was launched. She was never launched. For Britain had the vital control of the lake. They knew how to make war in 1812. That is why we have had 124 years of peace and a frontier of 4,000 miles defended by fenceposts, since the Battle of Oswego. No war can be fought without bloodshed, and suffering, and death. No war has left cleaner wounds or fewer scars than the War of 1812.

When the War of 1812 began the Provincial Marine was but the semblance of a navy. In the first season it merely marked time and it marked it very poorly. When Capt. Andrew Gray, Deputy Quartermaster General, inspected one-half of it – two ships – in January, 1813, he reported the state of the *Moir* bad and the state of the *Royal George* worse. It took fifty minutes

to shoot the guns off, and the crews were dirty and not up to strength. A quarter of them were sick. As for the rest of the navy, it was up at York, dismantled. The fault was not with the men of the Provincial Marine. The service had died at the top. Its commander had been retired in 1812 with fifty years of service.

With the appointment of Capt. O'Connor of the Royal Navy as Commissioner of the Navy Department in Upper Canada, early in the second year of the war, the Provincial Marine faded from being. All persons, vessels and stores were transferred to him. The officers were told that their commissions from the governor of the colony could not be recognized in the Royal Navy. Some retired, and took service in the militia, "where," says Coffin acidly, "they were permitted to risk their lives without offense to their feelings."

One of those not so rebuffed was James Richardson, Jr., born in Kingston. His father had commanded the transport *Governor Simcoe*, which carried the prisoners from Queenston Heights. Young Richardson was a lieutenant in the maligned *Moira*. When Yeo took command he volunteered as pilot for his new flagship, the *Wolfe*, just launched at Kingston. Like the *Royal George*, *Moira*, *Melville*, *Duke of Gloucester*, *Princess Charlotte*, *Prince Regent* and *St. Lawrence*, the *Wolfe* was built by young Richardson's father-in-law, John Dennis, master builder at the dockyard.

We had with us at the ceremony the great-grandson of the same John Dennis, Mr. James Dennis, of Mount Dennis. Mr. Dennis brought with him two priceless relics, the telescope with which his grandfather, Lieut. Joseph Dennis, maintained a lookout from the crest of Fort Henry, and a rigged model of the *Royal George*, one of nine which his grandfather made of the vessels which John Dennis, the master builder, completed for the Royal Navy and Provincial Marine. Mr. James Dennis had been prevailed upon to deposit these, as loan exhibits, with the museum which forms so great an attraction in the restored fortress.

Young Richardson, who had laid aside his gold epaulets for a pilot's tarpaulin, became sailing master to the commodore, and he fought to the conclusion of the peace. A red-hot shot took off his left arm in the Battle of Oswego. As soon as the stump healed he resumed duty. He was pilot of the *St. Lawrence*, of 2,304 tons burthen and 23 feet draft, and never stranded her – the greatest feat of sailing ship pilotage ever accomplished on fresh water. With peace he became a pastor and bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As he had once ploughed Ontario's waves he now rode Ontario's forests on circuit, a one-armed horseman of the Lord.

Besides the soldiers of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 8th King's and 100th Regiment who served on board ship on the lakes, there were the Royal Marines. In the inscrutable improvidence of popular literature the marine has been cast for the clown's part. "Tell that to the marines," "Capt. Jinks of the horse marines" are jests of hoary antiquity. The foundation may be the stupidity of officers who tried to maneuver their men on board ship in battle as though they were infantry on a parade ground. The proper use of marines in a sea fight was as sharpshooters and boarders.

They did grand work at Oswego, for it was Lieut. John Hewett of the Royal Marines, who climbed the flagstaff of the fort, and captured the Stars and Stripes nailed to the masthead. It was no mere stage play. He and his company of marines had been stationed to cover the retreat should the attack fail. But he received permission to lead what was optimistically called the “forlorn hope,” his party forced an entrance and he cut his way to the flagstaff. While climbing he was wounded by several bullets. Having gained the flag he leaned against the foot of the mast, faint with loss of blood. A wounded defender on the ground raised his musket to blow his brains out. The color-sergeant’s bayonet saved the young lieutenant’s life.

When Lieut. Hewett delivered the captured colors to Sir Gordon Drummond the General said: “No one so worthy of them as yourself.” Annually thereafter, on the anniversary of this day, Lieut. Hewett’s men used to present him with a wreath of laurel. As Brig. Gen. Hertzberg did for the heroes of Oswego and of Navy Bay yesterday.

[Transcribed: G.B.M Sept. 10, 1976.]

(Caption) “ROYAL GEORGE” BOW AND STERN

Two views of the model of the first full-rigged ship-of-war on Lake Ontario, made by Lieut. Joseph Dennis, son of the builder of the ship – 129 years ago. At the base of the model is the telescope of John Dennis, the master builder, and his sailor son. It bears the inscription: “Day or night. Proctor Balby and Co., London.” Mr. James Dennis, of Mount Dennis, great-grandson of John Dennis, placed model and telescope in the Fort Henry Naval and Military Museum as loan exhibits yesterday.

(Caption) THE NEW MEMORIAL CAIRN

ATTACK ON FORT OSWEGO, TAKE ONTARIO, N. AMERICA, MAY 6, 1814 Dedicated to His Majesty’s Royal Marine Forces and those employed on the Expedition. Drawn by I. Hewett, Lt. Royal Marines, London. Published May 1, 1815. Plate 1, Engraved by R. Havell. Reproduced from the Public Archives of Canada.

KEY:

- (1) Company of Glengarry Light Infantry and 2nd Flank Company of De Watteville’s Regiment, under Col. Fischer, landing.*
- (2) Battalion of Royal Marines under Lt.-Col. Malcolm forming column.*
- (3) Two-decker Prince Regent, of 60 guns, Sir James Lucas Yeo’s flagship, with Lt.-Gen. Drummond and staff. This is the only known picture of this large warship, which once floated on Lake Ontario. She was built at Kingston and launched in 1814, as was the Princess Charlotte. The other war vessels shown were built at Kingston earlier.*
- (4) Brig-of-war Charwell, covering the landing.*
- (5) American troops in line on the hillside.*
- (6) Frigate Princess Charlotte, 42 guns, with four reserve companies of De Watteville’s regiment.*
- (7) Fort Oswego, manned by 500 Americans, including artificers, and one*

naval captain, two lieutenants, thirty seamen, and some British deserters.

(8) Brig-of-war Star, covering the landing of seamen and marines under Capt. Sir William Howe Mulcaster.

(9) Town of Oswego and American vessels, including the U.S. warship Growler.

(10) Sloop-of-war Montreal, aboard which Bishop Richardson lost his arm, engaging the fort at close range.

(11) Sloop-of-war Niagara, wearing to give the fort a fresh broadside.

(12) Schooner Magnet, standing into the river mouth with Engineers, Field and Royal Marine Artillery, with rockets, and Sappers and Miners, firing on the American militia.