

# “This Period of Desperate Enterprise” British efforts to secure Kingston from rebellion in the winter of 1837-1838

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Article abstract

This article looks at the reaction of the British military authorities in Kingston to the outbreak of the Upper Canada Rebellion in December 1837. The revolt had come at an awkward time. The vast majority of Kingston’s regular garrison had been earlier dispatched to quell the uprising in Lower Canada leaving the town open to Patriot attack. As well, Fort Henry, whose construction had begun in 1832 and the lynch pin of a proposed system of fortifications designed to protect the province’s chief military depot, Royal Navy dockyard and the entrance to the Rideau Canal, was not yet complete. Led by Richard Bonnycastle of the Royal Engineers, a small cadre of British regulars and retired veterans took vigorous steps to organize and train the eager but raw Canadian militia and volunteers. The effectiveness of the training was realized in late February 1838 when the Patriots made their major attempt to capture Kingston.

# "This Period of Desperate Enterprise"

British efforts to secure Kingston from rebellion  
in the winter of 1837-1838

by Robert W. Garcia



*I felt it my duty to recommend the immediate enclosing of that part of the Ordnance Yard which has become insecure and easy to access, from the forming of the slopes of the glacis from the fort...which has reduced the picket fence to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of its former height thereby in opposing no obstruction to persons disposed to make a short cut from the fort towards the town, otherwise feel inclined to trespass on this establishment in which is partly enclosed one of the principal powder magazines so exposed to the designs of the evil disposed during this period of desperate enterprise.<sup>1</sup>*

So wrote James Windsor, Kingston's Ordnance Storekeeper, early in 1839, just over a year after the onset of rebellion in Upper Canada. Windsor, the Ordnance Department officer responsible for the enormous range of materiel—uniforms, tools, small arms, artillery and ancillary equipment and gunpowder—stored in Kingston's military warehouses was rightly concerned. The town was the major military depot of the province and its loss to the rebels and their American sympathizers would

have serious consequences. Despite the storekeeper's worries the British military in Kingston had made tremendous advances since December 1837 to better defend this key city against attack. This article will examine the efforts made by a small group of British officers, senior non-commissioned officers and civilian officials to improve the security of Kingston's vital military depot, to train and house the eager Upper Canadian militia and to improve the town's fortifications.

<sup>1</sup> Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG8 I vol. 447, 55. James Windsor to Fitzgerald, 16 January 1839.

## “The Key to the Province”

Richard Bonnycastle, the Commanding Royal Engineer in Kingston during the rebellion, used this phrase when describing the town.<sup>2</sup> What made Kingston so important that it became a target of the rebels? The town's strategic significance dated back to the seventeenth century when the French established Fort Frontenac on the west side of the Cataraqui River. The good natural harbour and the town's location at the eastern end of Lake Ontario, the mouth of the Cataraqui and the head of the St. Lawrence River made it a transportation and communications hub in an era before adequate roads. When the British took control in the eighteenth century they re-established facilities on the site of the old French fort and, by the 1790s, a naval yard on Point Frederick across the Cataraqui from Kingston.<sup>3</sup> During the War of 1812 the British vastly expanded operations of the naval yard launching increasingly larger warships to combat those constructed by the Americans at Sackets Harbor, New York. By war's end the Royal Navy squadron on the lake provided Upper Canada with security from naval or amphibious attack and protected the shipment of supplies to the military garrisons in the

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**Résumé:** *Nous étudions dans cet article les mesures prises par les autorités militaires britanniques en poste à Kingston, pour répondre au déclenchement de la rébellion du Haut-Canada en décembre 1837. Cette rébellion eut lieu à un moment particulièrement difficile, la plupart de la garnison régulière de Kingston venant d'être envoyée au Bas-Canada pour y éteindre la révolte, laissant ainsi la ville ouverte aux attaques des Patriotes. De plus, la construction de Fort Henry, commencée en 1832, n'était pas encore achevée ; or ce fort devait être l'un des éléments essentiels d'un système de fortifications qui visait à protéger le principal dépôt militaire de la province, les entrepôts de la Marine Royale et l'entrée du canal Rideau. Commandé par Richard Bonnycastle, du régiment Royal Engineers, un petit nombre d'officiers britanniques d'active et des vétérans du cadre de réserve, prirent des mesures énergiques pour organiser et entraîner les volontaires et les recrues encore inexpérimentées de la malice canadienne. L'efficacité de cette préparation fut mise à l'épreuve à la fin de février 1838, quand les Patriotes lancèrent une attaque majeure en vue de s'emparer de la ville de Kingston.*

western portions of the province.

To guard the naval yard, defences were established around Kingston.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> LAC, MG13, WO55/874, 263-264. Bonnycastle Memorial to Sir James Colborne, 20 May 1839.

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Preston, *Kingston before the War of 1812*, (Toronto: Champlain Society), lxxviii-lxxxix.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Mecredy, "Some Aspects of Kingston's Development during the War of 1812," (MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1982), 79-80.

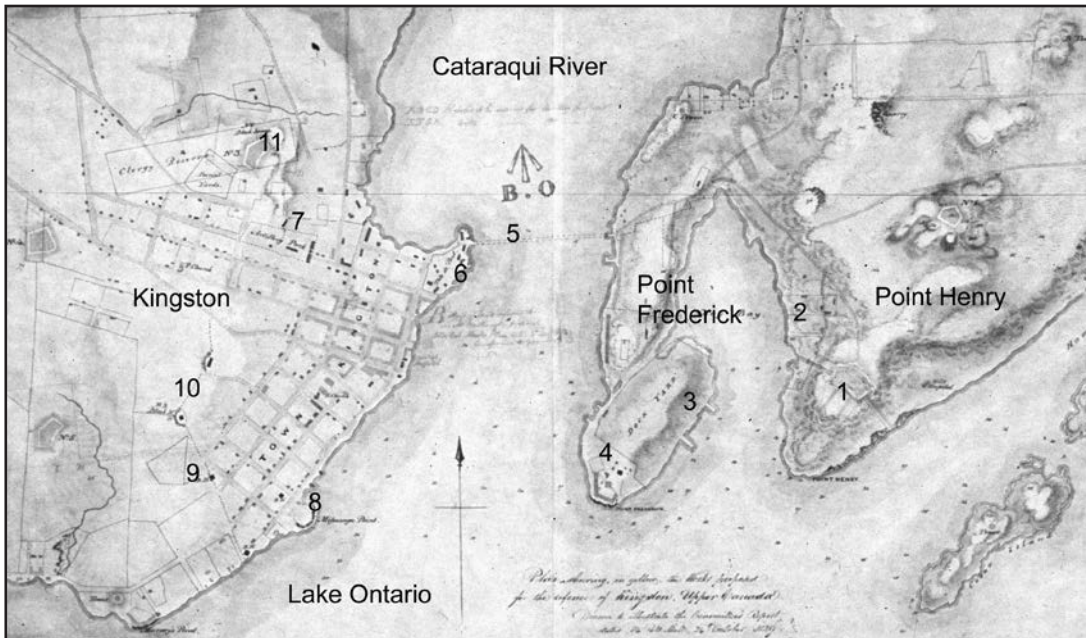


Figure 1. Kingston 1829. The plan illustrates the locations of the fortifications proposed in 1829. The following rebellion era military facilities are indicated: 1. Fort Henry, 2. Ordnance and Engineer Department Yards, 3. Naval Yard, 4. Fort Frederick, 5. Cataraqui Bridge, 6. Tete du Pont Barracks, 7. Royal Artillery Yard, 8. Mississauga Point, 9. Blockhouse No. 2, 10. Blockhouse No. 3, 11. Blockhouse No. 5. LAC, NMC 11381.

town was enclosed within a log palisade and interspersed at intervals were wooden blockhouses or earthen batteries. At the tip of Point Frederick the British erected a battery and blockhouse. To the east on Point Henry, a promontory that rises thirty metres above the lake, the Royal Engineers constructed a substantial fortification that was named Fort Henry. On the western slopes of the point under the protection of the fort were the workshops of the Royal Engineer Department, which directed military construction projects. To the south of these facilities were storehouses and a wharf of

the Commissariat Department.<sup>5</sup>

After the war, activity at the naval yard decreased, but the importance of Kingston did not lessen. Senior British military planners saw the city, and its military assets, as central to their control of Upper Canada. As early as 1818 the Duke of Richmond, Governor-in-Chief of the Canadas, wrote home to the Colonial Secretary of Kingston's significance.<sup>6</sup> In 1825 the Duke of Wellington, the most successful British general of the Napoleonic era and Master-General of the Board of Ordnance, sent a commission of Royal Engineers to British North

<sup>5</sup> The Commissariat Department was responsible for rations and pay of the troops and for the contracting of goods and services for the army.

<sup>6</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 1247, 6-10, Richmond to Bathurst, 10 November 1818.



America to make recommendations for its defence. Sir James Carmichael-Smyth's commission recommended the construction of a canal from the Ottawa River through the Rideau and Cataraqui rivers to Kingston. The canal would replace the exposed St. Lawrence River as the main supply line in case of hostilities with the United States. Along with the canal Smyth saw the need to consolidate the scattered military installations in Kingston into a compact establishment protected by a reconstructed and improved Fort Henry. Several new fortifications on both sides of the Cataraqui would provide outworks. These measures, in Smyth's estimation, would secure the southern mouth of the new canal, the depot and the naval yard.<sup>7</sup>

Workers directed by Lieutenant-Colonel John By of the Royal Engineers completed the Rideau Canal between 1826 and 1832, but construction of Kingston's new defences did not commence until 1832 delayed in part by a debate among the military engineers regarding the effectiveness of Smyth's plan. Some felt that the proposed works could not adequately protect the town. A second commission of engineers was ordered to Kingston in 1828 and proposed a larger scale of fortifications and, in 1829, yet another committee under

Sir Alexander Bryce, Deputy Inspector of Fortifications and a senior Royal Engineer, hammered out the final plan. It called for the construction of a series of six masonry forts known as redoubts, five Martello towers and three batteries to ring Kingston at such a distance that an attacking enemy (presumably the Americans) could not bombard the naval and military assets (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel John Ross Wright of the Royal Engineers began the demolition of the first Fort Henry on 18 June 1832, the seventeenth anniversary of the Duke of Wellington's most famous victory at the Battle of Waterloo.<sup>9</sup> Civilian labourers under the supervision of Wright substantially completed the new redoubt by the spring of 1837.<sup>10</sup> Construction of the advanced battery was also near completion, but by December Fort Henry was not fully armed and sections of the old fort, including the officers' quarters and magazine, had not been pulled down (Figure 2).

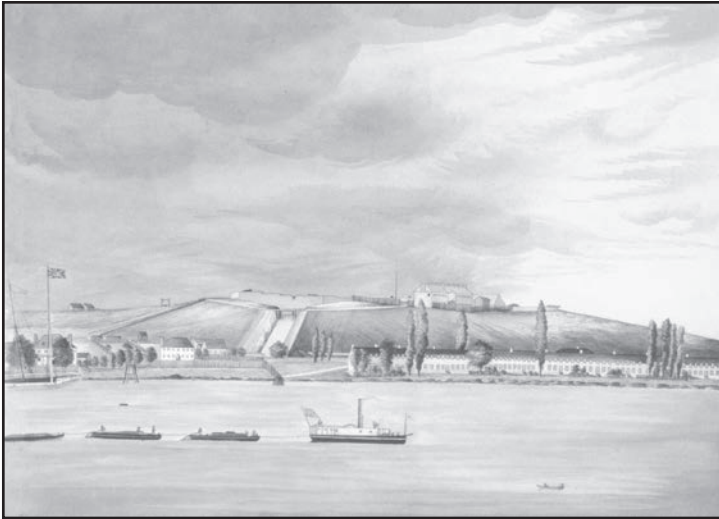
In addition to the redoubt there were numerous military structures on Point Henry in 1837. On the west side of the point clustered along the edge of Navy Bay was the principal Ordnance Department establishment for Upper Canada. Constructed between 1815 and 1817, the new yard incorporated the War of

<sup>7</sup> LAC, WO55/1551 (7B), 39-44. "Report to His Grace the Duke of Wellington..." 9 September 1825.

<sup>8</sup> Due to the enormous cost overruns incurred in the construction of the Rideau Canal, Fort Henry would be the only element of the 1829 plan to be built as conceived. LAC, MG13, WO55/1886. Bryce to Mann, 24 October 1829.

<sup>9</sup> LAC, MG13, WO44/32, 22-31. Nicolls to Bryce, 23 July 1832.

<sup>10</sup> LAC, MG13, WO55/873, 264-265. Nicolls to Mulcaster, 10 April 1837.



*Figure 2. Fort Henry, April 1839, by Henry Francis Ainslie. Looking east from Kingston the mouth of the Cataraqui River is in the foreground and Point Frederick is in the middle distance. On the hill in the background is Fort Henry. The new redoubt is on the left, the old fort's two-storey officers' quarters and magazine in the middle and the Advanced Battery on the right. LAC, C-000510.*

1812 era Commissariat Department store buildings and wharf. The Ordnance establishment, which was enclosed in a wooden palisade nine feet (2.74 m) in height, included two masonry storehouses that contained, as described above, very large quantities of military equipment. An armoury held 6,200 stands of small arms and offices for the Ordnance Department officials.<sup>11</sup> The yard also contained workshops, a magazine with a capacity of 2,200 barrels of gunpowder and residences for the senior Ordnance civilian officers.<sup>12</sup> To the north, also within palisades were the workshops and barracks of the Royal Engineer Department yard and the Barrack Department fuel yard (Figure 3).

To the west, across Navy Bay, were the

sail lofts, a hospital, barracks, icehouse, launching slips and magazine.<sup>13</sup> Senior naval officials had ordered the closure of the yard in 1834 and the sale of the remaining stores and the War of 1812 era ships.

On the west side of the Cataraqui River the main British installation was the Tete du Pont barrack complex, which as the names suggests was located at the western end of the bridge linking Kingston to Point Frederick. The Tete du Pont contained a barrack and storehouses. The Royal Engineer Department maintained yards on the shore of Cataraqui Bay and the Royal Artillery had its own compound containing barracks, stables and gunsheds to the west of the Tete du Pont at the head of Barrack Street.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 407, 13. 4 October 1819.

<sup>12</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 389, 14. Nicolls to Prevost, 13 January 1815.

<sup>13</sup> LAC, MG13, WO44/34, 256-257, 271-274. "Description and state of the sundry buildings and property belonging to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty at Kingston, Upper Canada." 16 June 1837.

<sup>14</sup> LAC, RG8 II, vol. 31. "Lands and Buildings Belonging to the Ordnance Department in Kingston, Upper Canada." 4 April 1831.

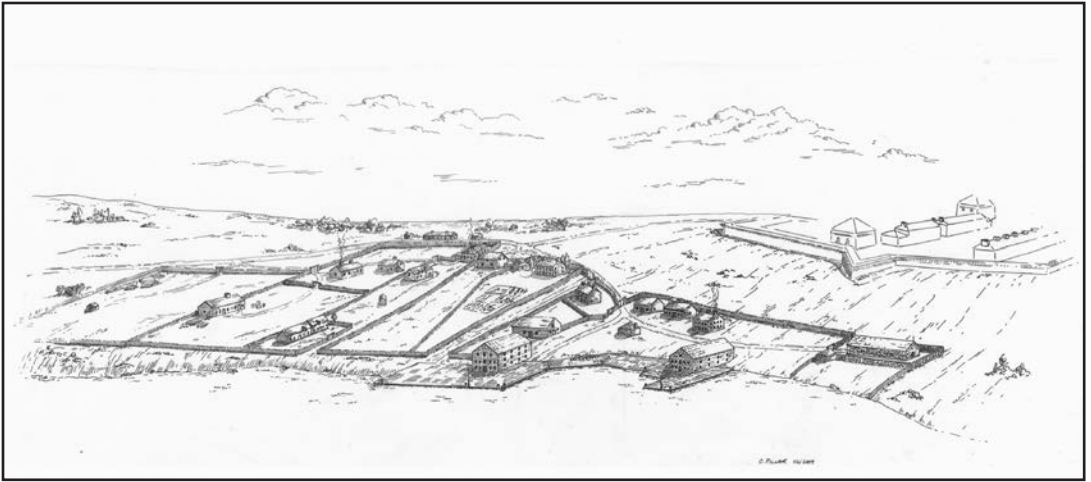


Figure 3. The west side of Point Henry, circa 1831: an artist's recreation of the Royal Engineer and Ordnance Departments Yards. The main storehouses are located at water's edge and the magazine is at the lower right. The first Fort Henry is at the upper right. Parks Canada, 2009.

By late 1837 the British military establishment in Kingston was in transition. The 1829 comprehensive plan of defence offered much greater levels of security for their main base in the province, but work had just begun. Only one of the projected six major fortifications, Fort Henry, was complete, but it had yet to have its guns mounted. The important supply warehouses were exposed to attack and the naval yard inactive.

### **“All is nothing but loyalty”— Kingston on the Eve of The Rebellion**

The weeks leading to the outbreak of open insurrection at Toronto in early December were also busy ones in Kingston. Under the orders of the

Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Francis Bond Head, the garrison had left for Lower Canada where rebellion appeared imminent. Sir Francis wrote to Sir John Colborne, Commander of the Forces in British North America, noting that he could spare the troops of the 24th Regiment, for “I have not the slightest occasion for them, particularly in the direction, where all is nothing but loyalty.”<sup>15</sup> The overall sentiment of adherence to the government was echoed in the *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette*, which assured that, “in this district [the Midland District] there exists but little of the radical combination which the arch-fiend Mackenzie, and his rebel crew, boast of in other places.”<sup>16</sup> The newspaper, however, went on to recommend that a watch be kept for possible disaffection and illegal gatherings.

<sup>15</sup> Sir Francis Bond Head to Sir John Colborne, 31 October 1837, as quoted in Richard H. Bonnycastle, *Canada as it Was, Is and May Be*, (London: Colburn and Co, 1852) vol. 1, 257-59.

<sup>16</sup> *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* (hereafter KCG), 2, col. 2. 2 December 1837.

Normally, Kingston was the station of the better part of a regiment of infantry and one or two companies of Royal Artillery. In November 1837 this amounted to 289 infantry and 106 gunners.<sup>17</sup> By the beginning of December the regulars had been reduced to a mere 44, 34 being members of the Royal Artillery and of these only three were quartered in Fort Henry, the most powerful fortification in the province.<sup>18</sup>

With the departure of the majority of the usual garrison, Kingston was left with a small cadre of regular troops. The most senior of these were the officers of the Board of Ordnance including Colonel Thomas Cubitt, Commanding Officer of the Royal Artillery in Upper Canada, Captain Richard H. Bonnycastle, Commanding Royal Engineers in Upper Canada, and acting Ordnance Storekeeper Thomas Gurley. The latter was a civil position within the Ordnance Department. The Commissariat Department in Kingston was under the command of Assistant Commissary-General A.C. Clarke.<sup>19</sup> This officer and his subordinates would be important in purchasing supplies and services for the militia throughout the crisis. While Cubitt was the senior officer, and was nominally in charge of the garrison, a chronic illness kept him from

performing those duties.<sup>20</sup> Due to his uncertain health command devolved upon Captain Bonnycastle.

Bonnycastle seemed like an unlikely choice for command at Kingston. He had a long though unexceptional career in the Royal Engineers. Born in 1791, he was the son of John Bonnycastle professor of mathematics at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. Bonnycastle entered the academy and graduated as a second lieutenant in 1808. He served in the Netherlands in 1809 and as part of the War of 1812 British expedition to occupy the Castine Peninsula of Maine. After duty in France and Britain in 1826 he was assigned to Upper Canada serving at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Toronto and Kingston. By the fall of 1837, as the senior Royal Engineer in the province, he was responsible for the construction of Fort Henry and of all other military buildings.<sup>21</sup>

Rebellion broke out in Toronto on 4 December 1837. William Lyon Mackenzie's attempt to seize the provincial capital caused much excitement and some casualties, but was dispersed by loyal militia forces, which rallied to the capital in the days after the initial rising. The triumph of the government forces was not a foregone conclusion, however, when word of

<sup>17</sup> LAC, MG13, WO17/1541, reel B-1577. War Office Returns 1837: Distribution of Troops in Canada.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> LAC, MG13, WO17/1542, reel B-1577. War Office Returns 1838: Distribution of Troops in Canada.

<sup>20</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. 1, 282.

<sup>21</sup> G.K. Raudzens, "Sir Richard Bonnycastle," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), vol. VII, 90-91.



the revolt arrived in Kingston via a rider on the night of 6 December.<sup>22</sup> The messenger carried a letter from the Lieutenant-Governor ordering the commandant of the Kingston Garrison to send arms to Toronto, arm the loyal citizens of Kingston, secure the military stores depot and ensure the safety of Fort Henry.<sup>23</sup>

### “The Mainstay of all the British Possessions in the New World”—Kingston’s Response to the Rebellion

Cubitt and Bonnycastle immediately conferred and, with his superior’s concurrence, the Royal Engineer set about organizing the available military force in Kingston.<sup>24</sup> By 8 December the volunteer cavalry was patrolling the roads around the town and arms and munitions were shipped off to Toronto on the steamer *Traveller*. Two hundred men

of the local 1st and 2nd Frontenac Regiments, under the command of Thomas Markland and Francis Raynes, were divided between Fort Henry and the Tete du Pont barracks.<sup>25</sup> The response of the militia of the surrounding areas was immediate and enthusiastic. Within a week a force of about 500 had been assembled from the Frontenac, Lennox and Addington militias, a troop of the Frontenac Light Dragoons and a force of “volunteer marines.”<sup>26</sup> Additional militia came from the Eastern, Midland and Prince Edward Districts.<sup>27</sup>

The reaction of the civil administration of Kingston was no less immediate or energetic. Led by the magistrates, including Dr. James Sampson (who would later become mayor), James Nickalls, Clerk of the Peace for Midland District and Mr. A. Pringle, Justice of the Peace, a meeting was held at the court house wherein the town was divided into sec-

<sup>22</sup> KCG, 2, col. 2, 9 December 1837.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. I, 281-82.

<sup>24</sup> For a thorough and detailed account of Bonnycastle and the Kingston militia during the rebellion see: John Grenville, “Kingston’s Reaction to the Rebellion of Upper Canada: Bonnycastle and the Role of the Militia,” *Historic Kingston*, 36 (1988), 66-88.

<sup>25</sup> LAC, Upper Canada Sundries, vol. 180, 99055-99059, Bonnycastle to John Joseph, 7-8 December 1838, quoted in Colin Read and Richard Stagg, *The Upper Canada Rebellion: A Collection of Documents*, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1985), 276-77; a United Empire Loyalist, Markland was a successful Kingston merchant and a long serving militia officer. See Jane Errington, “Thomas Markland,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), vol. VII, 583-85; Raynes was the Barrack Master at Kingston. LAC, MG13, WO17/1541, reel B-1577. War Office Returns 1837: Distribution of Troops in Canada.

<sup>26</sup> KCG, 13 December 1837, 2, col. 6.

<sup>27</sup> The Eastern District fronted on the St. Lawrence River from the Lower Canada border in the east to Cardinal in the west and included the counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. The Midland District extended from Lake Ontario in the south to the Ottawa River in the north and from Napanee in the west to Gananoque in the east. The district included Addington, Frontenac, Hastings and Lennox counties. The District of Prince Edward comprised only one county, that of Prince Edward. For the county and district structure of Upper Canada in 1837 see Frederick H. Armstrong, *Handbook of Upper Canadian Chronology*, rev. ed., (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1985), 137-52.

tions and neighbourhood patrols were instituted.<sup>28</sup>

The militia gathered at Kingston in December 1837 was numerous, but it was far from a professional force. Raised, trained and organized on a county basis, the proficiency of Upper Canada's part time military force had been allowed to degenerate after the War of 1812. While most adult males between the ages of 16 and 60 were liable for service very few did and the annual muster day on the king's birthday was more often a social occasion only slightly inconvenienced with actual military training.<sup>29</sup> There were exceptions such as the volunteer units that trained and equipped themselves at their own expense. Two such units in Kingston were the Frontenac Light Dragoons under Captain T. Wilson and the Queen's Marine Artillery composed of lake sailors under the command of Lieutenant James Harper of the Royal Navy. Overall though, Bonnycastle was acutely aware of the shortcomings of his throngs of eager citizen soldiers. In addition to arming, clothing and accommodating the troops he set out a rigorous training program to bring cohesion, discipline and a sense of *esprit de corps* to the officers and men. Over the course of the winter the Royal Engineer issued a continuous stream of orders detailing how to submit reports,

set up guards, muster in case of attack; regulate leave and numerous other fine points of military life that would have been foreign to the vast majority of the militiamen.<sup>30</sup>

Creating a viable military force out of the militia was an enormous task, but Bonnycastle was fortuitously positioned. Since Kingston was the major military and, until 1834, naval base in Upper Canada, it was the home of a fair number of veterans and retirees. Early in the crisis the Royal Engineer noted that there were perhaps fifty "old soldiers" who were eager to serve and lighten the load of the militia.<sup>31</sup> From this group the Royal Engineer was able to assemble a command staff to coordinate and train the raw militia regiments. For instance, both of Bonnycastle's adjutants, Captain Angus Cameron and Lieutenant Nathaniel Bate were former regular army non-commissioned officers as was the Quartermaster, Thomas Campbell.<sup>32</sup> These men, given militia commissions, were instrumental in developing the militia into proficient soldiers.

With the large influx of militia, accommodation became a challenge. The absence of regular troops helped to an extent and there were permanent facilities available. The main barracks in Kingston were at the Royal Artillery Yard off Bar-

<sup>28</sup> Grenville, 71 and Bonnycastle, vol. II, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. 1, 279.

<sup>30</sup> A tremendously detailed source on the organization and activities of the militia in Kingston in this period is the *Kingston Garrison Order Book, 1837-1838* (hereafter KGOB). Richard Henry Bonnycastle Family Fonds. Archives of Ontario.

<sup>31</sup> Read and Stagg, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. 1, 312.

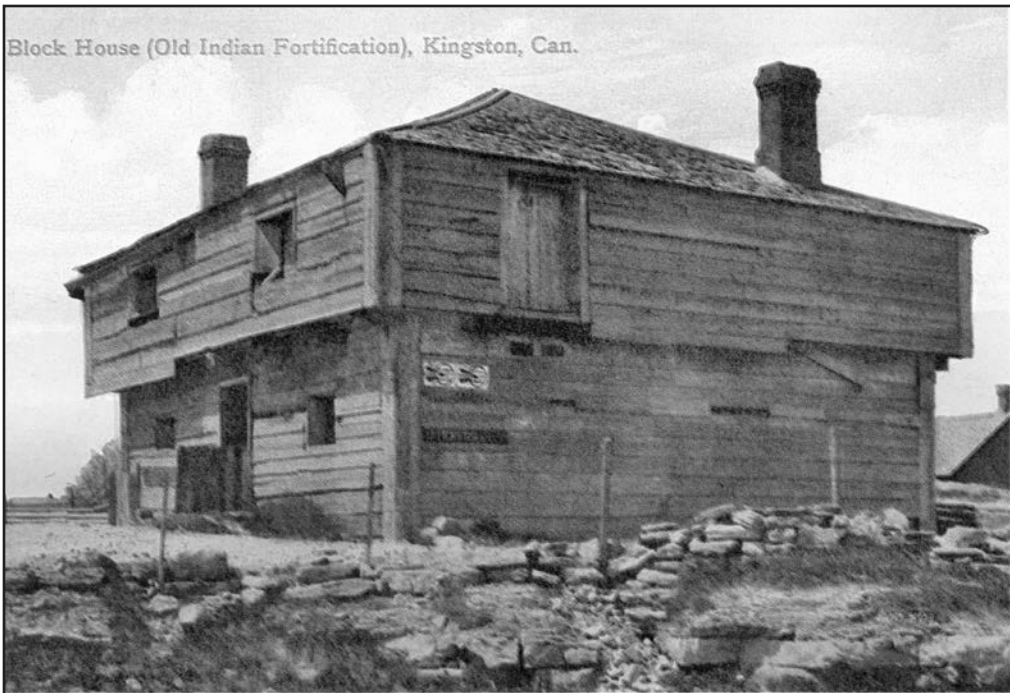


Figure 4. A postcard of one of the War of 1812 blockhouses. Parks Canada.

rack Street and at the Tete du Pont, where Bonnycastle established the militia headquarters. The latter had barracks for 200 soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Detachments of troops were housed in at least three (Nos. 2, 3 and 5) of the War of 1812 blockhouses that still girded the western side of the town (Figure 4).<sup>34</sup> The “old line barracks” from the war (near what are now Sydenham and William Streets) was also pressed into service, housing 220.<sup>35</sup> The old mili-

tary hospital in Kingston on Front Street (now Ontario Street) was converted into a barrack for 100 soldiers.<sup>36</sup>

On the eastern side of the Cataraqui River, Fort Henry had a rated capacity of 327 troops.<sup>37</sup> The old officers’ quarters located just outside the redoubt could accommodate thirty and several times that when pressed into service for soldiers’ barracks. Also near Fort Henry was the former Royal Sappers and Miners bar-

<sup>33</sup> LAC, National Map Collection 3908, Tete du Pont Capacity, 28 July 1830.

<sup>34</sup> There were at least ten blockhouses constructed in and around Kingston during the war. See Richard J. Young, “Blockhouses in Canada, 1749-1841: A Comparative Report and Catalogue,” *Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History*, No. 23 (1980), 78-79.

<sup>35</sup> *Old Sydenham Area Heritage Conservation District Study*, (Kingston(?): Bray Heritage and Associates, Draft Report, September 2008), 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 304, 31-33. Bonnycastle to Respective Officers, 13 April 1838.

<sup>37</sup> LAC, RG8 I vol. 1635. Inspection Reports on Fortifications in Canada.

racks in the Royal Engineer Yard on Point Henry. Constructed during the War of 1812 the two-storey wooden structure housed twenty Royal Artillerists as recently as 1835.<sup>38</sup> On the southern tip of the adjacent Point Frederick was Fort Frederick, which contained barracks and a blockhouse for fifty soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

Even with these buildings there was a shortage of barrack space in Kingston. The situation became more acute in 1838 with the return of large numbers of British regulars from Lower Canada or directly from England. Initially the soldiers were in transit to other posts in Upper Canada, but by mid-year a substantial force was permanently stationed in the town. In April the Ordnance officers received orders to hire what buildings were required and by July had leased at least ten private structures to accommodate 300 soldiers, stables for forty horses, storerooms, mess rooms and a temporary hospital.<sup>40</sup> Such was the demand for living space that the decision was made and tenders solicited by the Commissariat Department to construct a new 300-soldier barrack (later a second structure for 100 men was added) within the Tete du Pont and to reconstruct Blockhouse No. 2.<sup>41</sup>

The poor state of many of the barracks can be seen in the records of expenditures compiled by Bonnycastle. In the

period from December 1837 until the end of 1838, the imperial government spent over £5,813 sterling on barracks and other related buildings. The cost for “fitting up” Blockhouse No.3 was £215 including the renovation of the interior, the construction of gun platforms, the erection of a palisade, a new cookhouse, privy and the improvement of a nearby building as an officers’ quarters. The two new wooden barracks within the Tete du Pont, mentioned above, came to £3,630. This expense included a new Commissariat office and vault, a masonry cookhouse and a new privy. The old military hospital in Kingston became a barracks at a cost of £41. The Royal Engineers adapted the Tete du Pont barrack-bedding store into militia quarters for a nominal cost of £3. A new wooden barracks, guard house and privy was constructed for £400 at the new provincial penitentiary west of Kingston. Blockhouse No.2 required extensive repair. For a total of £693 the Royal Engineers enclosed the fortification in a stockade, built a cookhouse and privy and sunk a well.<sup>42</sup>

Several buildings were modified for the volunteer cavalry or the horses of the Royal Artillery. It cost £248 to convert two gunsheds in the Royal Artillery Yard to house fifty-three horses. The “old flour store” within the Tete du Pont became

<sup>38</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 586, 5, 121. 10 February and 30 November 1835.

<sup>39</sup> In December 1837, blockhouses Nos. 3-5 are noted. *KCG*, 9 December 1837, 2, col. 5; and *KGOB*, 15 December 1837 and 21 February 1838.

<sup>40</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 589, 29-31. “List of Private Buildings hired by Government for the accommodation of the troops at Kingston.” 27 September 1838.

<sup>41</sup> *KCG*, 9 June 1838, 3, col.1 and 27 June 1838, 3, col.1.

<sup>42</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 447, 247-272. Bonnycastle to Rowan, 17 March 1839.

a stable for thirty-seven cavalry mounts with a guardhouse adjoining for £57. One of the leased buildings, located at the top of Grave Street (Now Queen Street), was fitted up as a stable for six horses of the cavalry piquet.<sup>43</sup> Another structure, at the head of Store Street (Now Princess Street), became home for eight horses of the cavalry.

The Royal Engineers spent over £230 repairing and fitting up the various hired buildings. A house on Quarry Street leased from a Mr. Carroll was converted into a barracks for 100 soldiers and stables for forty horses. An adjoining structure was leased from a Mr. Askew as a barrack and storehouse. Located on Brewery Street (now Rideau Street), another barracks for 100 soldiers was leased from a Mr. Caffry. The "old line barracks" was leased as a living quarters and surgery for the militia. Repairs here were a modest £15.

In addition to the work completed on Blockhouses No. 2, 3 and 5 (expenditures for No.5 have yet to be located), the British carried out numerous repairs to the defences of Kingston costing a total of £2,003.9.1. Fort Frederick had its battery improved with the installation of new platforms for carronades and a 24-pounder long gun. Embrasures and shutters were installed in the blockhouse and a new stockade around it.

Fort Henry, while completed, was not in a state for defence. The Royal Engineers finished the magazine by lining it with boards and charcoal to reduce damp

that could damage gunpowder. They erected a stockade to join the southern side of the redoubt with the gorge (northern open ends) of the Advanced Battery. The stockade also enhanced security for the officers' quarters and magazine of the first Fort Henry that stood between the redoubt and the Advanced Battery. These structures were scheduled for demolition, but under the present circumstances their retention was essential. Lastly, and this item gives a sense of the state of unpreparedness of Fort Henry, a gun platform was constructed so that one cannon could be mounted at the tip of the Advanced Battery (the battery was designed for nine 32-pounder cannons).

The battery at Mississauga Point, another War of 1812 defence, was also re-occupied. The position commanded the western lake approaches to Kingston and could cooperate with the guns mounted at Fort Frederick to deny entrance to the harbour and the Cataraqui River (the southern entrance to the Rideau Canal). Earlier in the 1830s the point had been leased to the Kingston Maine Railway Company, which had built a slip, dry-dock and several buildings. Bonnycastle complained that the firm's ship repair facilities impaired the ability of the gun in the battery from firing over the full extent of its arc. Nevertheless, one 18-pounder was mounted, the company's buildings fitted up for barracks, guard house, magazine and kitchen and a garrison of militia artillerymen installed.<sup>44</sup>

Efforts were made to construct new

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> LAC, MG13, WO55/873, 443-48. Bonnycastle to Wright, 29 March 1838.



structures for the use of the militia and regular forces. The British put up three substantial wooden gunsheds in Kingston each measuring 100 x 30 feet (30.48 x 9.14 m) at a cost of just over £681.<sup>45</sup> One shed was located in the Royal Artillery Yard in Kingston and two at the Ordnance Yard on Point Henry. These sites were selected because they could be easily monitored for intrusion by Patriot sympathizers. While the British did not complete the buildings until after the initial crisis of the winter of 1837-1838 they show the commitment to provide proper storage for the garrison's artillery equipment.<sup>46</sup>

An area of utmost concern to the British was the military depot on Point Henry. Both Bonnycastle and Gurley were keenly aware of the exposure of the military supplies. Without adequate troops, at least initially, to protect the stores, Bonnycastle armed the civilian employees of the Royal Engineer and Ordnance Departments who mounted a nightly guard on Point Henry.<sup>47</sup>

In March 1838 Bonnycastle wrote to his superior, Lieutenant-Colonel Wright, now the Commanding Royal Engineer in Canada, concerning progress on Fort Henry. The Kingston engineer was certain that the Ordnance Yard would have to be relocated as soon as possible. Bonnycastle was motivated by the construc-

tion of the *glacis*—open ground with clear fields of fire—of the fort. It was stipulated in the 1829 fortification plan that there should be no buildings within 600 yards in front of the redoubt or for 300 yards behind. All of the Ordnance Establishment lay within these zones, impeding work on the *glacis*. It was feared that the buildings could also offer vantage points from which enemy riflemen could snipe at the gunners serving the artillery of the fort.<sup>48</sup>

Initially, Bonnycastle directed Gurley to move the Ordnance Department stores into the navy yard at the southern end of Point Frederick. Surrounded by a sturdy masonry wall, access to the yard could be easily monitored from the guardhouse at its main gate. But, when word came in March 1838 that a naval force would soon return to Kingston, the Royal Engineer turned his eyes to the upper portion of the point. He saw the flat and open land there as vastly superior to the steep slopes of Point Henry for the erection of storehouses or for the storage of ordnance and shot. In addition, Point Frederick's easy access to deep water, via the navy's piers would also ease the transfer of supplies to and from ships.<sup>49</sup>

It was Bonnycastle's hope that the navy would not need the entire peninsula. However, upon the reactivation

<sup>45</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 447, 253. Bonnycastle to Rowan, 17 March 1839.

<sup>46</sup> The two gunsheds constructed on Point Henry still exist. They were moved from their original locations in the mid-1840s and now reside within Fort Henry National Historic Site's stockade. One of the buildings has been rehabilitated into the historic site's administration offices and the other continues in its role as a gunshed.

<sup>47</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. II, 84.

<sup>48</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 448, 175-76. Bonnycastle to Wright, 30 March 1838.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

of the yard, Captain Williams Sandom, the new commander of the naval forces, decided that he required all of the structures and area on Point Frederick for his operations.<sup>50</sup> Sandom's decision scuppered the engineer's plans, forcing Gurley to move his stores to casemates within Fort Henry and into several new wooden sheds erected on Point Henry within the Royal Engineer Yard.<sup>51</sup>

With these dispositions and preparations, Bonnycastle hoped that Kingston would be safe from a *coupe de main* or a sudden attack by the Patriots. The garrisons in Blockhouses No.3 and No.5 (and later No. 2) protected the western approaches to the town. The batteries at Mississauga Point, Point Frederick and Fort Henry's Advanced Battery covered the harbour. Access to the town from the east was controlled by the checkpoint established at the tollgate on the eastern end of the Cataraqui Bridge and by Forts Frederick and Henry.

### “The Designs of the Disaffected and the Banditti” – Kingston and Hickory Island

After the initial excitement of December 1837 had abated Bonnycastle and the militia staff devoted themselves

to the regularization of the training of the militia and to the further strengthening of the defences of Kingston. There was a steady movement of militia units from surrounding districts, some of which were ordered on to other posts or returned home for lack of barrack accommodation.<sup>52</sup>

The real crisis came in late February 1838. After the dispersal of the rebels in December, a number of them, including William Lyon Mackenzie, fled to the United States. Here under the guise of the Hunters' Lodges they gathered support for their cause from American citizens. Mackenzie's message of a British tyranny akin to that of the time of the revolution in the thirteen colonies resonated with the populations of the border counties of Michigan, Ohio and New York State.<sup>53</sup> With promises of land for the liberators of the oppressed Canadians, funds and volunteers were raised with amazing rapidity. With these new forces Mackenzie launched his first raid declaring the Republic of Canada on Navy Island in the Niagara River on 14 December 1837. Loyalist forces soon displaced him. The Patriots and their American sympathizers planned and executed several more forays into Upper Canada during the winter of 1837-1838.<sup>54</sup> None of these attempts were successful but they did have

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 174. Bonnycastle to Respective Officers, Kingston, 10 June 1839. Bonnycastle reiterated the advantages of the upper portion of the peninsula a year later noting that the navy was using very little of that space.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 169-173. Windsor to Respective Officers, 2 May 1839.

<sup>52</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. 1, 313.

<sup>53</sup> George F.G. Stanley, *Conflicts and Social Notes: The War of 1812-1814, The Patriot War 1837-8*, (Np: Parks Canada, 1976), 51.

<sup>54</sup> Incursions were made along the Detroit River at Amherstburg (9 January 1838), Fighting Island

the effect of drawing British regular troop reinforcements away from Kingston and to the Detroit and Niagara frontiers.<sup>55</sup>

The capture of Kingston was a part of the overall Patriot strategy during this period. The leaders of this endeavour were Rensselaer Van Rensselaer, son of a War of 1812 officer of the New York State Militia, and William Johnston who would become known as the “Pirate of the St. Lawrence” in part for his taking and burning of the Upper Canadian steamer *Robert Peel* in May 1838. Recruiting in upstate New York for the effort to take Kingston was spurred in part by the very high levels of public outrage at the destruction of the American steamer *Caroline* and the killing of a crewmember in late December 1837.<sup>56</sup> The vessel, which had supplied Mackenzie’s forces on Navy Island, was boarded on the United States side of the Niagara River and burned by the Canadian militia commanded by Sir Alan McNabb and Captain Andrew Drew of the Royal Navy. This incident, a clear violation of American sovereignty, and the slowness or reluctance of local and state officials to curb the recruiting activities of the Hunters’ Lodges ensured an ample supply of volunteers for the Patriot ranks.

The rebel plan of attack comprised three elements. The main thrust would feint towards Gananoque (to draw loyalist troops away from Kingston) prior to attacking Kingston. A second force was to seize the provincial penitentiary to free the prisoners and a third group of sympathizers would rise within Kingston.<sup>57</sup> It has been estimated that between 1,500 and 2,500 Patriots assembled at Clayton, New York, on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River.<sup>58</sup> Equipped with weapons stolen from the United States arsenal at Watertown their initial objective was Hickory Island.<sup>59</sup> Located on the Canadian side of the international boundary between Wolfe and Grindstone Islands in the St. Lawrence, Hickory Island was located about twenty-five kilometres east of Kingston and eight kilometres southwest of Gananoque.

Traversing the now frozen St. Lawrence River, the Patriots occupied the island on 22 February 1838. News that Kingston had been alerted to their advance cooled the Patriot enthusiasm for an attack. While well armed with the stolen United States Army weapons, the vast majority had little if any military training. The severe cold of mid-winter, along

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(25 February 1838) and at Pelee Island on Lake Erie (3 March 1838). For more information about these incursions, see R. Alan Douglas, *Uppermost Canada* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), and John C. Carter, “Rebellious Acts in the Western District of Upper Canada: Precursor to Transportation to Van Diemen’s Land,” *Australasian Canadian Studies Journal* (2004 & 2005), vol. 22 & 23, 33-66.

<sup>55</sup> Through this period there were never more than a company of regular infantry (about 60 soldiers) or more than 30-50 gunners of the Royal Artillery in Kingston to bolster the militia forces LAC, MG13, WO17/1542-1542, reel B-1577. War Office Returns 1837-1838: Distribution of Troops in Canada.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, (Albany: Little and Co., 1853), 656-57.

<sup>57</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. II, 79-80.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley, 52.

<sup>59</sup> Bonnycastle estimated that 600-800 muskets were taken from the arsenal. Bonnycastle, vol. II, 95.

with knowledge that Kingston was alert to their advance caused many a second thought about the wisdom of liberating the Canadians from British rule. According to Bonnycastle, of the 500 or so who had marched to the island (the rest were held back on Grindstone Island or in New York) less than fifty were prepared to follow Johnston and Van Rensselaer on to Kingston.<sup>60</sup> With forces clearly inadequate to take the city, the Patriot leaders withdrew back into New York State.

This farcical show saw the end of the most serious Patriot attempt on Kingston in the winter of 1838. It was just as well, for extensive preparations were made when word reached the town of the Patriot movements. Bonnycastle notes that information regarding the intentions of Van Rensselaer and Johnston came in from various sources including American merchants and persons of prominence.<sup>61</sup> With accurate knowledge of the coming Patriot push, four companies of the Addington Militia and one of the Lennox Militia were called up arriving in Kingston by 19 February.<sup>62</sup> The troops were divided between Fort Henry and the steamers *Traveller* and *Coburg* civilian vessels hired as barracks for the occasion.

The next day Thomas Fitzgerald, the town major, issued orders informing militia officers to be in barracks with their

troops in readiness in case of attack. Officers in charge were directed to meet immediately with Bonnycastle for orders if an alarm was sounded.<sup>63</sup> The emergency signal consisted of the showing of blue lights and the firing of rockets from Fort Henry or Blockhouse No. 5. This signal meant that officers should return to their troops' barracks, the guards turned out at their posts and the troops readied for action. If a cannon was fired from the fort or blockhouse after the rockets and lights then the troops were to be issued ammunition and held in readiness for orders from the commandant.<sup>64</sup>

Over the following two days more orders were issued readying the town for the imminent attack. Five newly arrived companies of the Hastings and Lennox Militias were allocated to the "old line barracks" and immediately issued sixty rounds of ammunition per soldier. On 22 February, the day of the expected assault, Bonnycastle issued a flurry of orders in final preparation. He clarified chains of command and identified the Tete du Pont as a mustering point for the volunteers of the Kingston Rifle Corps.<sup>65</sup> Major Fitzgerald was dispatched to Gananoque with 160 soldiers and a 6-pounder cannon to augment that town's militia forces.<sup>66</sup> Bonnycastle wrote up orders specifically for that evening. He was

<sup>60</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. II, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Bonnycastle, vol. II, 79.

<sup>62</sup> KGOB, Militia Order, 19 February 1838.

<sup>63</sup> KGOB, Garrison Order, 20 February 1838.

<sup>64</sup> KGOB, Garrison Order, 11 January 1838.

<sup>65</sup> KGOB, Militia Orders, 22 February 1838.

<sup>66</sup> *KCG*, "Further particulars of the threatened attack upon Kingston," 24 February 1838, 2, col.4; KGOB, Militia Order, 22 February 1838.

Description of Force	Field Officers	Captns.	Subs.	Serjnts.	Rank & File	Horses	Remarks
<b>CAVALRY</b>							
Frontenac Light Dragoons		1	2	3	74	81	Capt. T. Wilson
1st and 2nd Addington Light Dragoons		2	4	9	92	107	Capt. Fralick, 1st Addington Capt. Clark, 2nd Ditto
1st Hastings Light Dragoons		1		1	10	12	Lieutenant Fralick
<b>ARTILLERY</b>							
Queen's Marine Artillery	1	4	9	4	174	1	Major Harper. Capt. Clark, RN, Capt. Taylor, RN, Capt. Bowen, Capt. Tildesley, RN
Perth Artillery		1	2	2	42	-	Capt. Graham
<b>INEANTRY</b>							
1st and 2nd Frontenac	1	6	12	25	302	5	1st Frontenac, Major D.J. Smith. Capt. Macfarlane, Capt. Meagher, Capt. Askew, 2nd Frontenac, Capt. Beach, Capt. M'Gregor.
2nd and 3rd Prince Edward		2	3	7	69	-	Capt. Young and Capt. Dougall.
1st and 2nd Addington		3	6	11	126	-	Capt. Lockwood, Clarke, and Wheeler
2nd Lennox		1	1	2	31	-	Capt. Frazer
Belleville Rifles		1	2	2	45	-	Capt. Murney, served at Gananoqui [sic]
Total	2	26	49	78	1154	206	
<b>WARRIORS</b>							
	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Chiefs</i>			<i>Warriors</i>		
Mohawks	1	3	-	-	70	-	Capt. Perth Leader. 11 more detached to Gananoqui
Militia and Indian Total	3	29	49	78	1224	206	
<b>MILITIA VOLUNTEERS &amp; INDEP. COMPANIES</b>							
Capt. Cameron's, Long Island		1	1	2	40	-	Long Island Militia
Capt. Saunder's, opposite Hickory Is.		1	1	2	45	-	3rd Frontenac
Capt. Matthewson's Kingston Mills and Locks of Rideau		1	1	1	30	-	3rd Frontenac
Capt. Spencer, Capt. Dorland's and Capt. M'Neil's		3	3	3	100	-	1st & 2nd Lenox [sic]
Capt. M'Annany, 2nd Hastings, on line of road to back townships		1	2	2	50	-	Prince Edward Militia
Capt. M'Kenzie, 2nd Hastings, ditto		1	2	2	45	-	Ditto Ditto
Town Guard Volunteers	1	3	3	-	100	-	Major Sampson
Detachment in Napanee		1		1	12	-	Napanee Militia, 2nd Lenox, Capt and Major M'Pherson
Ditto in Waterloo		6	1	-	12	-	1st Frontenac
Total under Arms for defence of Kingston	1	12	14	13	434	-	
Add regular Militia and Indians	3	29	49	78	1234	206	
	4	41	63	92	1668	206	

Table 1. Return of the Effective Militia and Volunteer Force at Kingston, Upper Canada, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bonnycastle, Royal Engineers, March 1<sup>st</sup> 1838. (Bonnycastle, vol. I, 314-315)



to remain at the headquarters at the Tete du Pont along with the 1st Regiment of Frontenac Militia until the intentions of the Patriots were known. Companies of the Addington and Prince Edward Militia were to guard the western barrier to the town on Church Street. Companies of the Addington Militia and the Queen's Volunteer Marine Artillery were given the responsibility of the town's waterfront.<sup>67</sup> The magistrates of Kingston were active in alerting the citizens, providing arms from military stores for the defence of the town and passing on intelligence of Patriot activities.<sup>68</sup> On the east side of the Catarauqui Colonel Cubitt took personal command at Fort Henry with militiamen and gunners of the Perth Artillery servicing the fortress's cannon.<sup>69</sup>

While the town readied itself troops were sent east into the country to act as a forward defence and to give warning of the approach of the Patriots. Two companies of the 3rd Regiment of Frontenac Militia took up positions on Wolfe Island and a third company was in Pittsburg Township on the alert for any signs of movement.<sup>70</sup> Bonycastle organized a contingent of Tyendinaga Mohawk warriors into patrols.<sup>71</sup> The local volunteer cavalry provided a similar service in and around Kingston.

Such was the level of preparation and

anticipation of the forces in Kingston for an encounter with the Patriots that their non-appearance was felt a tremendous anti-climax. The *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* reported, "our gallant militia were at their post, fully prepared to receive them, and a general feeling of disappointment was felt on the following morning that the banditti had not shown themselves in the night."<sup>72</sup>

It seems likely that if Van Rensselaer and Johnston had convinced an appreciable number of their troops to attack Kingston their chances of success would have been limited. The militia, well equipped and clothed from the military depot, had benefitted from over two months of training and acclimatization to military life under the capable hands of the British army veterans of Richard Bonycastle's staff. Early warning of the Hunter concentration at Clayton, New York, had given time to call in the militia from the surrounding districts. Bonycastle estimated that there were over 1,800 militia and Mohawk warriors in Kingston shortly after 22 February (Table 1). The town must have been very crowded considering the population at this time was about 3,800.<sup>73</sup> Their recent training and the fortifications gave advantages to the loyalist forces lacking to the raw volunteers of the Patriots.

<sup>67</sup> KGOB, 22 February 1838.

<sup>68</sup> KCG, 24 February 1838, 2, col.4; Bonycastle, vol. II, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Bonycastle, vol. II, 85, 92.

<sup>70</sup> KCG, 24 February 1838, 2, col. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Bonycastle, vol. II, p. 81-82.

<sup>72</sup> KCG, 24 February 1838, 2, col. 4.

<sup>73</sup> The population figure is for 1838-1839. See Armstrong, 272.

## “England need not fear for the safety of her Canadian possessions”

The Hickory Island affair signalled the end of Patriot plans to attack Kingston. While Bonnycastle retained a large militia contingent in the town until the spring, by late February the first of six companies of the 83rd Regiment had arrived. By mid-year the full regiment numbering almost 600 soldiers under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel The Honourable Henry Dundas, was stationed in Kingston.<sup>74</sup> The regiment, which had fought the Patriots along the Detroit River and at the Battle of Pelee Island in February and March, provided the backbone of the Kingston garrison through the remainder of the year. The 83rd also comprised the main element of the force of British regulars and Canadian militia dispatched to deal with the Hunter incursion near Prescott, known as the Battle of the Windmill, in November 1838.<sup>75</sup>

Even though the Battle of the Windmill showed that the Patriots still had the means to launch attacks, the federal government had taken steps to reduce the possibility of further incursions. In March 1838 President Martin Van Buren

facilitated the passage of legislation that gave authorities the power to confiscate weapons and to stop Patriot “filibustering” expeditions. The president ordered General Winfield Scott, a distinguished veteran of the War of 1812, to the frontier states. With the limited forces at his disposal he enforced the new law and worked diligently to ensure that local officials did likewise.<sup>76</sup> Support of the general public for the Patriot cause remained strong in 1838, but there was a gradual realization that perhaps the Canadians did not want to be liberated. By 1839 even Edward Theller, a former Patriot general, had to admit this was the case.<sup>77</sup>

The measures taken by the American federal government had a calming effect on the frontier in the long term, but this was not apparent to the defenders of Kingston early in 1838. Through the year the British devoted much effort and expense to improve the defences in the town, and in Upper Canada. In the thirteen months from December 1837 to December 1838 the Ordnance Department alone spent £7,894.7.6  $\frac{3}{4}$  (out of a total of £33,282.17.0  $\frac{1}{4}$  across the province) on fortifications, barracks and storehouses in Kingston, at Kingston Mills and on Wolfe Island.<sup>78</sup> An addi-

<sup>74</sup> LAC, MG13, WO17/1542, reel B-1577. War Office Returns 1838: Distribution of Troops in Canada.

<sup>75</sup> See Donald E. Graves, *Guns Across the River: the Battle of the Windmill, 1838* (Toronto: Robin Brass, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure: the search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 206-208.

<sup>77</sup> Roger Lynn Rosentretter, “To Free Upper Canada: Michigan and the Patriot War, 1837-1839” (Ph. D. diss., Michigan State University, 1983), 203-204.

<sup>78</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 447, 247-272. Bonnycastle to Rowan, 17 March 1839.

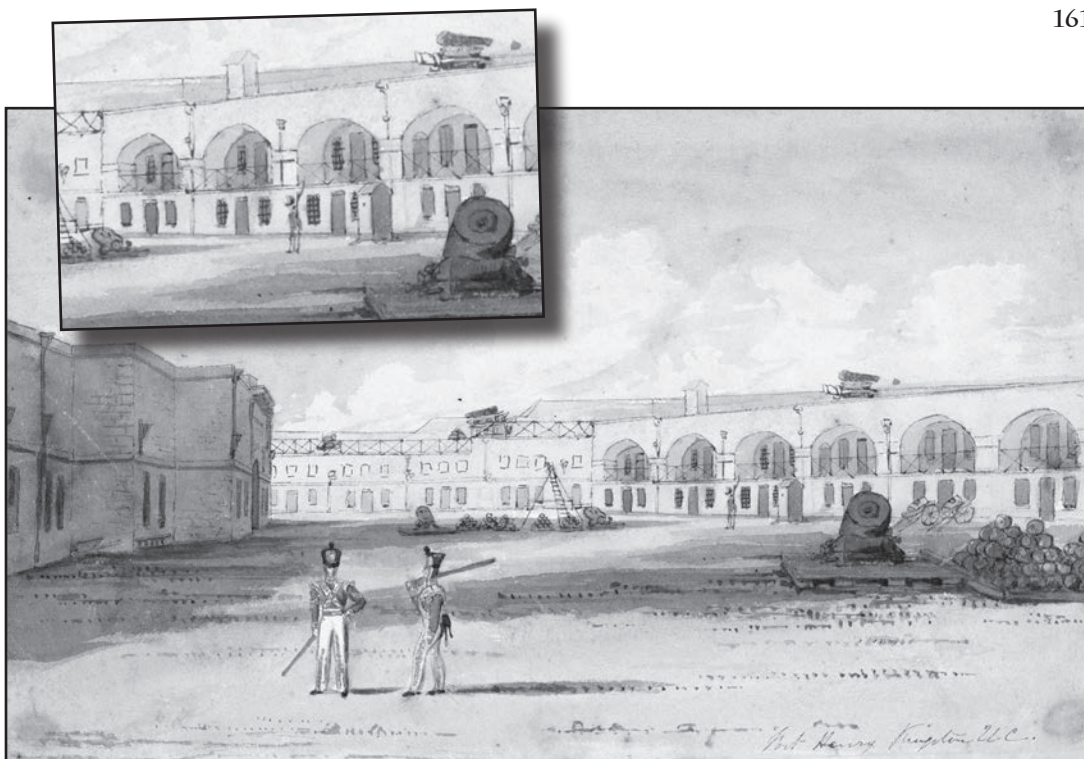


Figure 5. Fort Henry, circa 1840 by George St. Vincent Whitmore. This view of the interior of the redoubt gives a good impression of the appearance of the fort just after the rebellion. LAC C-150293. Inset: The casemates modified into prison cells (iron bars are visible on the windows) for the Patriots can be seen behind the red-coated sentry. LAC C-150293, detail. See also front cover.

tional £735 was spent on leasing privately owned buildings for use as barracks, storehouses and mess rooms.<sup>79</sup> Several of Fort Henry's casemates were modified into prison cells for rebellion prisoners (Figure 5). The fort became a centre for the receipt of prisoners, including those taken at Toronto, along the Detroit Frontier and at the Battle of the Windmill. It was also the location of the trials of several Patriots including Nils von Schoultz, the rebel leader at the windmill.

The spring of 1838 saw a further strengthening of the British presence in Kingston with the arrival of the naval forces under Captain Williams Sandom. Ordered to Kingston in February he arrived in April 1838 reactivating the naval yard on Point Frederick (and severely disrupting the plans of the Ordnance Storekeeper). Sandom proceeded with the hiring of vessels to patrol Lakes Ontario and Erie and the St. Lawrence River.<sup>80</sup> His ships were to play an instrumental role

<sup>79</sup> LAC, RG8 I, vol. 589, 31. List of Private Buildings hired for the accommodation of the troops at Kingston in Upper Canada. 27 September 1838.

<sup>80</sup> National Archives/Public Record Office 30/9/6/13. "On the naval defence of Canadian Frontier." Sandom to Colchester, 13 February 1846.

in transporting loyalist reinforcements from Kingston to Prescott for the Battle of the Windmill. Sandom's force bombarded the mill and prevented additional Patriots or supplies from reaching the Canadian shore.

Bonnycastle retained command of the militia in Kingston until June 1838 when he reverted to his role as the senior Royal Engineer in Upper Canada.<sup>81</sup> As the Patriot threat eased a large number of the militia units were sent home. Bonnycastle and his staff had made tremendous strides in turning the troops into an effective force for the defence of the town. They would not, however, be used on such a scale again. During the renewed period of rebel activity in the fall of 1838 the presence of the 83rd Regiment lessened the need for as many militia from the surrounding country to rally to Kingston's defence.

The non-stop exertions of the winter did take a toll on Bonnycastle's health. He describes a period of three months during the summer and fall of 1838 when he was confined to his bed unable to function from the "effects of anxiety of mind."<sup>82</sup> He had recovered sufficiently to resume his usual duties late in the year and was transferred to a new post in 1839. His efforts during the rebellion did not go unnoticed and upon his departure Dr. Sampson, now mayor of Kingston,

and the aldermen addressed the Royal Engineer:

...we feel it incumbent upon us in our corporate capacity to communicate to you our grateful sense of the essential benefit which you have rendered to this section of the province, and at the same time to express our humble hope that your valuable services may meet with that reward from our Most Gracious Sovereign, which to us they seem so justly to merit.<sup>83</sup>

Acknowledgement of Bonnycastle's work with the militia and in preparing the town's defences came in March 1840 when he received a knighthood from Queen Victoria.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Regardless of the actual threat of the Patriots, the British leadership in Kingston reacted with energy and imagination in winter of 1837-1838. Left without the usual garrison of regulars, a small group of British officers and veterans quickly organized the Canadian militia into a force capable of defending the town. Richard Bonnycastle in his dual role as commander of the militia and Commanding Royal Engineer was ideally placed to direct and coordinate the forces and to augment the defences. When the Patriots finally made an appearance in February 1838 they quickly realized that Kingston could not be easily taken.<sup>85</sup> The town with its large

<sup>81</sup> LAC, MG13, WO55/874, 263-264. Bonnycastle Memorial for Rebellion Services to Sir John Colborne, 20 May 1839.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid* and LAC, RG8 I, vol. 447, 24. Bonnycastle to Rowan, 7 January [1839].

<sup>83</sup> *KCG*, 2 October 1839, 3, col. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Raudzens.

<sup>85</sup> With all of the military activity in the region there were very few, if any, fatalities caused by contact

stores of military equipment was preserved for the government. The complete array of defences as proposed in 1829 was never realized. Yet continued tensions between Britain and the United States over Canadian boundary issues resulted in a

limited amount of fortification construction in the mid-1840s giving the town its distinctive harbour-front Martello towers. As well, Kingston retained its role as the military depot for Upper Canada until the withdrawal of imperial forces in 1870.

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with the Patriots. There is at least one documented case of an unfortunate casualty unrelated to enemy action. Joseph Nelson, a former soldier of the 11th Regiment had volunteered into a veterans' company that was serving at Fort Henry. While returning to the fort from home on the night of 17 January 1838 he died falling into the deep ditch surrounding the redoubt. His body was discovered the next morning. His widow, Ann, petitioned to retain her husband's pension. To bolster her case she claimed that his death was accidental (there being no fence around the ditch) and that her husband must have been perfectly sober as he was found with all of the money he had left home with that evening. LAC, RG9 1B4 vol. 6, 413-14. 28 February 1839.