

# The Penetanguishene Decision To Be a Naval Yard or Not to Be

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Résumé de l'article

*L'Établissement naval de sa Majesté sur le lac Huron a été décrit comme découlant d'une décision ferme et catégorique, à la suite de la guerre de 1812, ayant pour résultat la construction d'un chantier naval de grande importance sur les rives de la baie de Penetanguishene. Cette théorie ignore les plans antérieurs de son développement et la longue période d'indécision qui a marqué ses origines. Une fois construit, cet établissement de grand potentiel fut réduit à l'impuissance sous une politique de réductions, qui ont laissé une poignée d'hommes en charge de cinq vaisseaux en veilleuse dans un état de décomposition.*

# The Penetanguishene Decision

## To Be a Naval Yard or Not to Be

by Thomas Malcomson

The British Naval Establishment at Penetanguishene, created as a result of both British victories and defeats in the War of 1812, has largely failed to appear within that conflict's history.<sup>1</sup> For Barry Gough, Penetanguishene appears after the war, as a "sheet-anchor of empire," to defend the north-west reaches of Upper Canada, and to serve as a base from which to attack the Americans, if war was renewed. His story of the dock yard begins in 1815, and has Commissioner Sir Robert Hall, in charge of the British Navy on the Great Lakes between 1816 and 1818, as its main promoter. Kenneth Bourne also focused on Hall as the instigator of the

construction of His Majesty's Navy Yard at Penetanguishene.<sup>2</sup> Elsie Jury referred to the naval establishment as the bastion of the north.<sup>3</sup> All three leave the impression that the building of the naval yard was a singular activity, without disruption, producing an active, vibrant establishment until its closure in 1834.

But the dock yard's history predates 1815, being chosen as a potential site for a naval establishment in 1793. That idea lay dormant until events of the War of 1812 necessitated a new British dock yard on the upper lakes. The plan was accepted, rejected, and accepted again, changed by the war's end, the Rush-Bagot Agreement, and fiscal concerns. Hall was

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Gough, *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay: The War of 1812 and its Aftermath* (St Catharines, ON: Vanwell, 2002), x-xi, xiii, 145-50; An example of its mention in the broader history of the war is in Robert Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake; The Naval War on Lake Ontario 1812-1814* (Toronto, ON: Robin Bass Studio, 1998), 235, 241.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Bourne, *The Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 1967), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Elsie Jury, *The Establishments at Penetanguishene, Bastion of the North 1814-1856* (Bulletin No. 12 Museum of Indian Archaeology; London ON), 1959.

### *Abstract*

*His Majesty's Naval Establishment for Lake Huron has been portrayed as deriving from a decisive decision, in the wake of the War of 1812, that resulted in a significant, active naval yard being developed on the shores of Penetanguishene Bay. This picture ignores the earlier plans for its development, and the protracted period of indecision that marked its beginning. Once built, the potentially significant establishment was rendered impotent through a continuous series of reductions that left a handful of men in charge of five decaying vessels in ordinary.*

**Résumé:** *L'Établissement naval de sa Majesté sur le lac Huron a été décrit comme découlant d'une décision ferme et catégorique, à la suite de la guerre de 1812, ayant pour résultat la construction d'un chantier naval de grande importance sur les rives de la baie de Penetanguishene. Cette théorie ignore les plans antérieurs de son développement et la longue période d'indécision qui a marqué ses origines. Une fois construit, cet établissement de grand potentiel fut réduit à l'impuissance sous une politique de réductions, qui ont laissé une poignée d'hommes en charge de cinq vaisseaux en veilleuse dans un état de décomposition.*

only one of many whose opinions and actions shaped the plan. The present article will explore the twisting story of what took place between 1813 and 1834.

Penetanguishene lays in the tradition territory of the Huron.<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe visited Penetanguishene Bay in 1793, searching for a “naval station” on the upper Great Lakes.<sup>5</sup> Ideally located to secure a trade and military alliance with the aboriginal peoples of the northwest, Simcoe adjudged the bay as lending itself to a naval establishment. To that end he worked

diligently to gain control of a large section of the area.<sup>6</sup> He also ordered the trail from York to Lake Simcoe made into a usable road to truck materials and personnel north.

Captain Alexander Aitken surveyed the bay in 1794, describing it, “as a proper situation for a Town and Harbour.”<sup>7</sup> Simcoe suggested that the “sooner an Establishment takes place at *Penetanguishene*, the better, to precede all Establishments made by the United States on Lake Huron” [*italics in original*]. Simcoe suggested to the Duke of Portland that

<sup>4</sup> Arthur E. Jones, “Sendake chen” or Old Huronia. Fifth Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario (Toronto, ON: Province of Ontario, 1909). The word *penetanguishene* translates to “rolling white sands,” referring to the sand banks that were on the eastern edge of the bay’s mouth.

<sup>5</sup> Simcoe to Clarke, 3 May 1793. E.A. Cruikshank, *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents relating to his Administration of the Government of Upper Canada* [hereafter: *The Simcoe Papers*], Vol. 1. Toronto, ON: Ontario Historical Society, 1923-1931, 338-44; 5 October 1793, Diary of Lieut. Governor Simcoe’s Journey from Humber May to Matchedash Bay in 1793 by Alexander MacDonnell, Sheriff of the Home District. Cruikshank, *The Simcoe Papers*, Vol. 2, 70-9; & Simcoe to Dundas, 19 October 1793, *Ibid.*, 90-91.

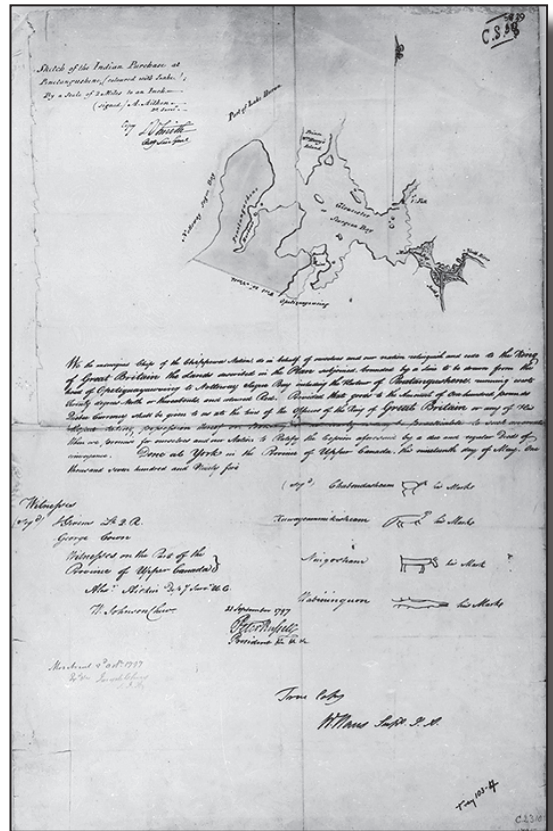
<sup>6</sup> Simcoe to Dorchester, 10 November 1794, *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 175-6; Simcoe to Dorchester, 18 December 1794, *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 224-5; Simcoe to McKee, 10 May 1795. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, 141-42.

<sup>7</sup> Simcoe to Portland, 10 November 1794. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 178-79.

Figure 1: Detail from the Treaty between the Chippewa and the King, 22 May 1798, that gave the British access to develop the area surrounding Penetanguishene Bay. See, *Sketch of the Indian Purchase at Penetanguishene, 21 September 1797*. LAC, microfiche H3/440 Penetanguishene 1797.

the British ships on Lake Erie and the garrison at Michilimackinac (scheduled to be returned the Americans according to Jay's Treaty) be relocated to Penetanguishene.<sup>8</sup> In 1796, Simcoe wrote that a road "from York to the Head Waters of Lake Huron has been opened by the Soldiers... a ready communication afforded to the post which Public Interest demands should be removed from Michilimackinac to Penetanguishene."<sup>9</sup> Simcoe predicted that Penetanguishene would become the "Maritime Arsenal" of Lake Huron.

Though the potential of Penetanguishene was lauded, Simcoe's ideas of building a fort and naval yard there were rejected on the grounds of cost.<sup>10</sup> Two years after Simcoe returned to England, the land along the southern shore of Gloucester Bay (currently Severn Sound), between Georgian Bay and Hog Bay, including Penetanguishene Bay, was ceded to the British in a treaty with the Chippewa, 22 May, 1798.<sup>11</sup> No military or naval establishment was created.



Fur traders had set two routes from York, on Lake Ontario, to Lake Huron. The one we will focus on went north from York along Young Street, to the Holland River. Travellers then sailed, rowed, or paddled into Lake Simcoe and over to Kempenfelt Bay. Passengers and supplies were landed and traversed

<sup>8</sup> Simcoe to Portland, 20 May 1795, *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 14-6. 15; Simcoe to Privy Council for Trade and Plantations, 20 December 1794. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 226-29.

<sup>9</sup> Simcoe to Portland, 27 February 1796, *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 201; Simcoe to the Executive Council, 5 April 1796. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 232-34.

<sup>10</sup> Portland to Simcoe, 9 May 1795. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 6-7. Simcoe to Dorchester, 20 May 1796. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, 271-72.

<sup>11</sup> Conveyance of the Harbour of Penetanguishene by the Chippewa to the King with Inventory, schedule and plan annexed, 22 May 1798. *Library and Archives of Canada* (hereafter LAC), Vol. 1840, mfr. T-9938, unpaginated.

a nine-mile portage to Willow Creek. Boarding bateau they paddled the eight miles of narrow, winding Willow Creek, which flowed into the Nottawasaga River, where they ran nine miles of rapids before the river calmed. The twisting Nottawasaga flowed into the shallow, sandy south end of Georgian Bay. There, all would be transferred to larger vessels for crossing the lake.<sup>12</sup> Depending on the season and how light one was travelling the route could be covered in a week. With heavy loads the trip would grind into a much longer period. Penetanguishene lay thirty-four miles diagonally north west from the head of Kempenfelt Bay.

Penetanguishene's qualities as a harbour did not resurface until the War of 1812, when events much further south had the British scouring the shores of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay for a suitable location for a dock yard. At the outset of the war Major General Isaac Brock had sent orders to the British garrison at St. Joseph's to seize the American fort on

Mackinac Island.<sup>13</sup> This expedition was successful and with it came the assured alliance of the northwest indigenous tribes to the British cause.

As long as the British kept control of Lake Erie, Mackinac was secure. That condition changed in September 1813 when the British squadron was beaten by the Americans at the Battle of Put-in-Bay.<sup>14</sup> With that singular victory the Americans had free rein over the waters of the upper lakes.

Historian George Stanley asserts that in response to this loss, Lieutenant-General Sir Gordon Drummond, commanding in Upper Canada, selected three possible supply depots for Mackinac, in late 1813.<sup>15</sup> One was Matchedash Bay, at the eastern end of Gloucester Bay, another was an unspecified point along Penetanguishene Bay, where four gunboats were to be built, and the third was the mouth of the Nottawasaga River, where a blockhouse was built in early 1814.

The only realistic spot for a depot to resupply the garrison at Mackinac, was

<sup>12</sup> Edwin Guillet, *Early Life in Upper Canada*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Publishing Co., 1933, 385-86, & 500-501.

<sup>13</sup> "Memoranda of General Brock on Plans for Defence of Canada." February 1812. William Wood, *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (vol.1), Toronto, ON: Champlain Society, 1920, 288-90. For correspondence on the capture see Brock to Prevost, 29 July 1812; Roberts to Baynes, 17 July 1812; Roberts to Brock, 17 July 1812; & Roberts to Glegg, 29 July 1812; *Ibid.*, 398-9, 432-3, 433-438-42, respectively.

<sup>14</sup> See, Thomas Malcomson and Robert Malcomson, *HMS Detroit: The Battle of Lake Erie*. (St Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing, 1990); David C Skaggs (ed.). *The Battle of Lake Erie and its Aftermath: A Reassessment* (Kent, OH: Kent State university Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> George F G Stanley, *The War of 1812: Land Operations* (Ottawa, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1983), 274-75, and 289; Drummond to Prevost, 19 January 1814. in E. Cruikshank, (ed.), *The Documentary History of the Campaigns upon the Niagara Frontier in 1812-4, Vol.* (Welland, ON: Tribune, 1908), 132.

<sup>16</sup> Drummond to Prevost, 28 January 1814. Wood, *Select British Documents, Vol. 3 pt. 1*, 266-67; Bullcock to Freer, 26 February 1814. *Ibid.*, 268-70; Cruikshank, *The Documentary History, Vol. 9*, 151-52.



the mouth of the Nottawasaga.<sup>16</sup> Drummond was informed that work to build a road from Kempenfelt Bay to Penetanguishene would take 200 men three or more weeks, whereas a dozen men could improve the nine-mile portage from Kempenfelt Bay to Willow Creek Landing, in ten days. Prevost approved the decision for the Nottawasaga River to serve as the place to resupply Mackinac.<sup>17</sup> Captain Richard O'Connor, dock yard commissioner at Kingston, sent thirty carpenters to build the boats needed to transship goods from Holland Landing across Lake Simcoe, to Kempenfelt Bay.

The first lot of men for the Holland Landing Lake Huron Establishment arrived at Gwillimbury in March 1814. Quarterman John Peterbridge brought two shipwrights, and a smith from Kingston.<sup>18</sup> He hired another smith and two more shipwrights at York. George Chiles was sent from Kingston, as the Clerk-in-Charge.<sup>19</sup> He was followed by William Wilson and Robert Tait, storehouse porters. Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McDouall and troops from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, headed to

Mackinac, helped to cut the nine-mile portage route from Nottawasaga Bay to Willow Creek, between February and April 1814.<sup>20</sup> This group included Lieutenant Newdigate Poyntz RN and twenty seamen. Along with some of the shipwrights that arrived in March, they constructed twenty-nine boats to carry them and their supplies along the Nottawasaga River. The practicality of building gunboats at Penetanguishene was called into question when Lt.-Colonel Ralph H. Bruyeres wrote Prevost, that the lack of local resources there made building any vessel, "extremely difficult and uncertain."<sup>21</sup>

In the summer of 1814, the Americans made an attempt to recapture Mackinac. Their visit to the mouth of the Nottawasaga forced the British to destroy their last vessel on Lake Huron, HM Schooner *Nancy*.<sup>22</sup> Gough states that this attack revealed the vulnerability of the mouth of the Nottawasaga as a naval depot.<sup>23</sup> Yet, throughout 1814 and into the 1820s the Nottawasaga continued to play an essential role in supplying the post-war British garrison on Drummond Island, and the naval depot at Penetanguishene.

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<sup>17</sup> Freer to Drummond, 4 February 1814. *Ibid.*, 165-66.

<sup>18</sup> Holland Landing Depot, 1 September to 31 October 1814. *LAC*, ADM 42/2172, mfr. b6007, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Naval Depot Holland Landing, 25 November 1815, Pay List. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b6007, 150.

<sup>20</sup> Drummond to Prevost, 5 February 1814. Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Vol. 9, 167. The force included two companies of the Newfoundland Regiment, an NCO, ten gunners of the Royal Artillery, about 200 men in total. Andrew Bulger, *An Autobiographical Sketch of the Services of the Late Captain Andrew Bulger of the Royal Newfoundland Fencible Regiment* (Bangalore, IN: Regimental Press, 1865), 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Bruyere to Prevost, 23 January 1814. Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Vol. 9, 140-41.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Cruikshank, "An Episode of the War of 1812: The Story of the Schooner *Nancy*," in Morris Zaslow (ed.), *The Defended Border: Upper Canada and the War of 1812* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan Company, 1964), 143-53; Barry Gough, *Through Water, Ice, & Fire: HMS Nancy and the War of 1812* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Gough, *Fight Sail*, 138.

The American attack on the British at Mackinac Island was a dismal failure. The Americans withdrew, leaving two schooners (*Scorpion* and *Trigress*) to watch the British and to interdict supplies to the garrison. Royal Navy Lieutenant Miller Worsley, conducted a convoy of bateau and canoes from Nottawasaga to Mackinac, and then captured the two American schooners.<sup>24</sup> This shifted the balance of power on Lake Huron, as the British gained two vessels. What was needed now was a place to shelter these ships, and build more.

Sir George Prevost travelled to Kingston, in October 1814, to discuss building ships at Turkey Point on Lake Erie, and at Matchedash Bay with Lieutenant General Drummond, and Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo.<sup>25</sup> His goal was to regain control of the upper lakes. Yeo urged the establishment of a naval post at Penetanguishene. Drummond favoured Turkey Point, with the rationale that dominion on Lake Erie assured dominance on Lake Huron, but the reverse was not guaranteed. Acknowledging Prevost's desire for a naval supply point on Lake Huron, Drummond ordered work to build a road between Kem-

penfelt Bay and Penetanguishene.

The three men decided the main effort would be focused at Turkey Point, where Drummond ordered Major Cockburn, and a company of sappers and miners to proceed. Yeo would send Captain Edward Collier RN and the crew of HMS *Niagara* to establish the base on Lake Erie, to house 1,000 men. In November 1814, American Brigadier General Duncan McArthur raided Port Dover, just east of Turkey Point.<sup>26</sup> Though, in part, facilitated by the congregating of British forces in the Niagara Peninsula to resist the American early summer invasion there, the American capacity for deep incursions into western Upper Canada, threatened any project at Turkey Point.

Writing to the Admiralty in October, Yeo expressed doubts that a Georgian Bay navy yard was possible, due to the wilderness between Lake Simcoe and Penetanguishene.<sup>27</sup> Sir James still requested an additional 310 seamen to man a twenty-six-gun frigate and two gun boats, he planned to build somewhere on Lake Huron, and the two schooners captured on the lake.<sup>28</sup> He held that a naval

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<sup>24</sup> McDouall to Prevost, 14 August 1814; McDouall to Drummond, 9 September 1814; Bulger to McDouall, 7 September 1814; Wood, *Select British Documents*, Vol. 3 part 1, 273-77, 277-79, 279-82, respectively; Worsley to Yeo, 15 September 1814. *LAC*, ADM 1/2738, 5-11.

<sup>25</sup> Prevost to Bathurst, 6 October 1814. Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Vol. 2, 239-40; Drummond's ideas on the Lake Erie and Lake Huron are outlined in three letters. Drummond to Prevost, 23 October, 1814, and Drummond to Prevost, 30 October 1814, in Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Vol. 2, 279-81 and 265-68 (respectively); and Drummond to Prevost, November 9, 1814. Wood, *Select British Documents* Vol. 3 pt. 1, 245-48.

<sup>26</sup> George Stanley. *The War of 1812: Land Operations*. (Ottawa ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1983), 276-86.

<sup>27</sup> Yeo to Croker, 24 October 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 2737, mfr. b292, 214-15.

<sup>28</sup> Yeo to Croker, 14 October 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 2737, mfr. b292, 221-25.

base on Lake Erie was impossible due to the nature of the warfare. Yeo also felt the Lake Huron establishment was more important for retaining the north western indigenous warriors as British allies.

In November 1814, Prevost received a letter promoting a naval yard at Penetanguishene.<sup>29</sup> The writer described access from York as straight forward and relatively easy. The spot allowed for bottling up the Americans in Lake Erie, by blockading the St Clair River, until such time as the British squadron, on Lake Huron, could defeat the Americans on the lower lake. Prevost passed this letter along to Commodore Yeo, adding pressure to build the naval establishment there.

Sir James Yeo sent Lieutenant Poyntz to Penetanguishene to survey the bay.<sup>30</sup> Poyntz thought it provided one of the finest harbours he had ever seen, "with plenty of water for the largest ship to go in, and good anchorage, both within and without, with a soft bottom." He found black oak, ash, elm, and cedar. He preferred the eastern shore, it being dryer and higher than the west, and therefore he felt healthier. He marked three spots where ships could be built and launched. Because of the slope of the shoreline they would be built parallel to the water and launched sideways. Defence would be

easy, given the shape of the harbour and the rise of land, allowing batteries to dominate the area. A shoal off the west tip of the harbour needed to be buoyed, otherwise entry to the bay was easy.

Besides the road to Penetanguishene, Drummond directed as many supplies be carried to Kempenfelt Bay as possible before winter came.<sup>31</sup> Repairs were also ordered for the thirty-five miles of road from York to Holland Landing. Yeo ordered the guns from HMS *Princess Charlotte* be off loaded, shipped to York and carried into Penetanguishene. By the end of December Captain William Payne, Royal Engineer, had arrived at Holland Landing, with a group of Canadian Fencibles to start cutting the road between Kempenfelt Bay and Penetanguishene.<sup>32</sup> Captain Collier joined him with part of the *Niagara's* crew, redirected from Lake Erie. The *Niagara* carried twenty-four cannons, the necessary shot, anchor cables, sails, and iron work for the proposed Lake Huron frigate. Yeo had ordered the two schooners on Lake Huron to head to Penetanguishene and begin cutting timber, and clear a site for construction.<sup>33</sup>

With an early winter freeze icing over the Nottawasaga River, Collier and his men were stranded at the Kempenfelt Bay portage by 18 December.<sup>34</sup> Collier left Poyntz with eighteen shipwrights to

<sup>29</sup> Prevost to Yeo, November 17, 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1225, mfr. c3527, 29-34.

<sup>30</sup> Poyntz to Yeo, 19 November 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 733, mfr. c3244, 129-34.

<sup>31</sup> Drummond to Prevost, 22 November 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 733, mfr. c3244, 123-28. Drummond to Prevost, 24 November 1814. Cruikshank, *The Documentary History*, Vol. 2, 315.

<sup>32</sup> Drummond to Prevost, 31 December 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, C Series, Vol. 686, mfr. c3231, 248-50.

<sup>33</sup> Yeo to Prevost, 26 November 1814. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 733, mfr. c3244, 131-33.

<sup>34</sup> Crookshanks to Foster, 16 December 1814, *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 733, mfr. c3244, 163-69.



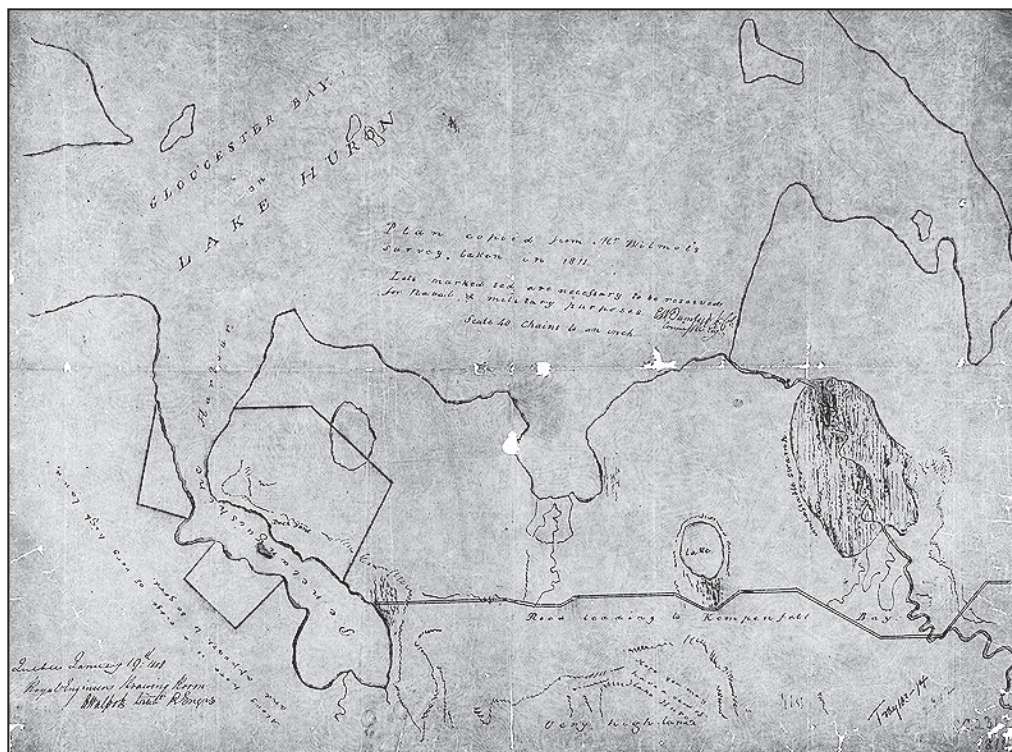


Figure 2: Map from 1818 showing proposed route of the road from Kempenfelt Bay to Penetanguishene. See, Lots marked red are necessary to be reserved for Naval & Military Purposes, 19 January 1818. LAC, microfiche H3/430/ Tay/1818.

construct bateau for the transport of material on the river and headed to Penetanguishene. Miller Worsley, commanding on Lake Huron was ordered to winter at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River, to facilitate forwarding the supplies to Mackinac in the spring. He did not complete building a store hut, and housing for the work crew at Penetanguishene. The work on the road had cleared a four-mile-long trail, twenty feet wide, with some of it “caused way’d.” It had reached the Cedar Swamp area, which needed to be cleared and built up to allow for wag-

on traffic. With a crew of thirty-five men working at the road it was anticipated that sleds would reach Penetanguishene by the end of January 1815, a hopeful, but hallow prediction.

Captain Collier informed Yeo of the positive progress on the road and the thickening of the ice on Lake Simcoe.<sup>35</sup> He anticipated that the ice would bear horse teams and sleds by the end of January. Collier did not tell Owen, that he and his men were living in lean-to structures, the fronts of which were open to the elements. Fires were lit across the opening

<sup>35</sup> Collier to Yeo, 7 January 1815. LAC, RG 8, Vol. 734, mfr. c3244, 17-18.

to provide heat during the night.<sup>36</sup>

Reporting on the progress, Yeo warned the Admiralty that this undertaking was far from easy due to the “many obstacles, and difficulties... to contend against... in such a desolate Country in the depth of winter.”<sup>37</sup> Sir James spoke of the frigate building at Penetanguishene in need of seamen, a somewhat premature description, as the place held no ship supplies, nor local wood cut for the project.<sup>38</sup>

Sir James attempted to reach Lake Erie and Penetanguishene in February 1815. Weather conditions limited his trek north to the shores of Lake Simcoe.<sup>39</sup> His visit to Turkey Point, on Lake Erie, eliminated any hope of building vessels at that water logged site. Yeo shifted all his energy to Penetanguishene, site unseen.

In mid-January 1815, Major Cockburn, overseeing the work on the road to Penetanguishene, predicted it would be open by 10 February, allowing the naval supplies at Holland’s Landing to reach Penetanguishene.<sup>40</sup> Touring the proposed route he reported that the road would be travelled in a day. It was generally composed of sandy soil, with only a few swamps, three small lakes, and several hills to deviate around, and two rivers to cross. He felt the area would provide good soil for farming, and the river closest to Penetanguishene, emptying

into Gloucester Bay, would power a mill. Along the route were bass, elm, beech, birch, iron wood and white pine, with Norway pine growing only a few miles from Penetanguishene. He lamented that lack of oak, for construction.

Cockburn mentioned that a hundred men, including Canadian Fencibles, Sappers and Miners, and private inhabitants, were employed on the road. Since they were building it for sleigh travel only, the path was a mere eight to ten feet wide. A summer road would have to be substantially widened, and that would require many more men. Cockburn asked for an additional 200 men to build the naval establishment and its defences at Penetanguishene.

With the Treaty of Ghent, the situation changed, as hostilities between America and Britain ended with the ratification of the treaty by the United States Government, on 17 February 1815. With that, Penetanguishene’s future took a turn.

In early March, Collier wrote Yeo that Drummond had ordered the army to stop work on the road and Penetanguishene.<sup>41</sup> The seamen had made great advances building a storehouse, temporary barracks and clearing a ship building site. Since the military took the only food supply, Collier decided to pull the

<sup>36</sup> Jury. *The Establishments at Penetanguishene*, 9-10. The author states that Captain Collier was a commodore, he was not.

<sup>37</sup> Yeo to Croker, 1 January 1815. *LAC*, ADM 1/2738, mfr. b292, 22-23a.

<sup>38</sup> Yeo to Admiralty, 20 January 1815. *LAC*, ADM 1/2738, mfr. b292, 46-47.

<sup>39</sup> Yeo to Croker, 25 February 1815. *LAC*, ADM1/2738, mfr. b292, 78-80.

<sup>40</sup> Cockburn to Myers, 16 January 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 621, mfr. c3158, 32-37.

<sup>41</sup> Collier to Yeo, March 11, 1815. *LAC*, ADM 1/2262, mfr. b2635, 112-13b.

men back to York. With no ice on Penetanguishene Bay sleds could not be used to remove things, everything had to be carried out on the backs of the seaman and artificers, over the “new road.” The snow was off the path in spots, leaving the ground swampy; making headway was arduous. Reaching Kempenfelt Bay they crossed the lake to Holland River, in bateau. Unfortunately, the river had iced over, forcing Collier and his men to walk the rough road that followed the river to the landing. From there it was a thirty-five-mile walk to York, along a quite boggy Young Street. The total distance between Penetanguishene and York was 101 miles.<sup>42</sup> The cannons and naval stores that were on their way to Penetanguishene would never make it, being spread out between York, Holland Landing and Kempenfelt Bay. Collier tried to put them in order, arranging room for them in storehouses, where available.

Commodore Sir Edward Owen relieved Yeo of his command on 21 March 1815. Sir Edward would now judge Penetanguishene’s suitability as an establishment. In April, Sir Edward received the report of two men sent there to assess the wood growing around the proposed dock yard site.<sup>43</sup> They found few trees suitable for building anything bigger than a small schooner. Only some white and yellow pine, and white elm trees were usable. The rest were red and black oak, maple, bass and white cedar, good

for houses, but not vessels. That meant all wood, for larger vessels, would have to be brought in from the more distant surrounding countryside, increasing cost and difficulty.

For now, Owen saw Penetanguishene as an unacceptable location.<sup>44</sup> It would take two winters and a summer to get heavy guns from York to the establishment, far too slow. With no suitable trees for ship building and an impassible road for most of the year, and no prospect of better roads soon, Owen suggested halting Penetanguishene’s development. Instead, he focused on the new post on Drummond Island, in northern Lake Huron, to which the British would shift after returning Mackinac to the Americans, as per the Treaty of Ghent.

On board HMS *Niagara*, at York, Collier wrote Owen that only one twenty-four pounder cannon, thirteen caronades, their carriages, and 150 shot for each gun had arrived, the rest were still at Holland Landing, along with cables, anchors, sails, etc. Owen read that the road to Penetanguishene from Kempenfelt Bay, was no longer open, needing eight miles of elevated boardwalk to make it passable.<sup>45</sup> With all this in mind, Sir Edward offered Sir Gordon Drummond the ordnance, and all its supplies, for the proposed frigate at Penetanguishene that was on board the *Niagara*, and all that remained at Holland Landing and Kempenfelt Bay, for use by the

<sup>42</sup> Collier, Route from York to Penetanguishene, March 1815. *LAC*, ADM 1/2262, mfr. b2635, 174.

<sup>43</sup> Hall to E. Owen, April 10, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 370, mfr. c2932, 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, April 14, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 370, mfr. c2932, 11-17.

<sup>45</sup> Collier to E. Owen, April 3, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 370, mfr. c2932, 4-10.

military at Amherstburg and the new post in Lake Huron. Drummond agreed to shelve plans for Penetanguishene, for the time being, instead using the Nottawasaga River as a communication line to Lake Huron.<sup>46</sup> He felt it was safer than a route past Amherstburg, which was always open to American interdiction. As for the ordnance, he was delighted with the offer.

The nine-mile portage was the focus of development for 1815. Six buildings and a surrounding palisade were erected at the Willow Creek end of the portage from Kempenfelt Bay.<sup>47</sup> George Chiles remained at Holland Landing amassing goods for shipment to Mackinac. In October, work began on the rebuilding of housing and defences at Nottawasaga that had been burned when the American's attacked the depot in 1814.

The naval establishment for Lake Huron had three midshipman, forty-seven seamen, two boys, twenty-three marines and eleven supernumeraries under the command of Lieutenant David Wingfield and Captain Hambly.<sup>48</sup> They were split between the *Confiance* and *Surprise* schooners, with some of the marines stationed at the Holland Landing, Willow Creek and Nottawasaga depots.

In July, Sir Gordon (now Governor-

in-Chief) complained to Sir Edward that only one vessel was transporting stores to the new post on Drummond Island.<sup>49</sup> Owen responded that the one available schooner would make more regular trips but that the other was involved in the critical task of surveying the upper lakes and could not be spared. To overcome this the military hired merchant vessels, often American, to ferry supplies and military goods from Amherstburg to Drummond Island.

Captain Hambly and a detachment of sailors were sent in the late fall to move the seventeen twenty-four pounders and three eighteen pounders during the winter from Holland Landing to Kempenfelt Bay. They received ten tents and twenty camp kettles from the Military commissariat for their winter stay in the wilderness.<sup>50</sup> The cannon (each twenty-four pounder, barrel alone, would be just over 2,400 kilos), plus their carriages, tackle and equipment, and the necessary shot, would be loaded in bateau to be carried down the Holland River into Lake Simcoe and over to Kempenfelt Bay. Once there they would be hauled in sleds over the nine mile portage to Willow Creek, placed in boats for the ride to the Nottawasaga and then down that river to Georgian Bay. In the following spring they

<sup>46</sup> Drummond to E. Owen, April 29, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1228, mfr. c3527, 37-38.

<sup>47</sup> Wilfred Jury and Elsie McLeod Jury, "The Nine Mile Portage From Kempenfelt Bay to the Nottawasaga River." *Museum Bulletin No. 11*, Museum of Indian Archaeology, University of Western Ontario, London: ON, 1956, 17. Pay List Naval Depot Holland Landing, 25 November 1815. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b6007, 180.

<sup>48</sup> Pay List for Naval Establishment on Lake Huron, 1 July to 31 December 1815. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b6007, 73-78.

<sup>49</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 10 July 1815. *LAC*, ADM 1/2738, mfr. b292, 55-57.

<sup>50</sup> de Watteville to Drummond, October 17, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 736, mfr. c3244, 32.



would be transported to Drummond Island.<sup>51</sup> The commissariat reviewed the rest of the naval stores taking what they needed. The remaining goods, including two cannonades and an anchor, were left at Holland Landing.

Sir Edward's half-brother, Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen, had been sent out by the Admiralty, in 1815, to survey the Great Lakes. William Owen had spent much of the spring and summer surveying the lower lakes. In the fall he turned to Lake Huron, eventually arriving at Penetanguishene Bay.<sup>52</sup> William's October report noted the steep bank on which the establishment would be situated and Dobson Island about a cable's length off shore. Ships would have to be launched below the island as it was too close and shallow between the mainland and the island. Captain Owen even suggested building on the island. William located a better spot further into the inner harbour, on the west side, with more level ground and a longer stretch of deeper water in which to launch.

The harbour mouth had two shoals, one on each side which reduced the mouth to 190 yards. Shoals ran along both sides from the Island to the head of the bay. Areas of rock bottom and a greater depth of water than Poyntz had noted, were discerned. William Owen concluded,

Possessing the advantages of Shelter and easy

navigation to its immediate neighbours, the Harbour of Penetanguishene appears to me decidedly the most appropriate place on the Lake for a Naval Arsenal and when (distance) is added its vicinity to our Establishment on Ontario whence its Supplies may always be certain, even if the Carriage be difficult, I don't imagine it possible to find a Spot better suited to such a purpose.

But he qualified his praise by noting it was too distant from Drummond Island. He suggested Christian Island, which lay on the edge of Georgian Bay. It was sheltered from various winds, providing a good anchorage, and departure independent of contrary winds and weather. William declared it easy to defend and would serve to secure the bays to the east, from which it would be supplied. Bringing supplies along the Nottawasaga and up the east side of Georgian Bay also made Christian Island the choice, as it was closer than Penetanguishene, saving time and cost. He believed the road from Kempenfelt Bay to Penetanguishene would not be open for transportation for some time and so the Nottawasaga was the only real route for supplying the establishment. If Penetanguishene was to be chosen, then fortifying Christian Island would be a must, in order to protect the last part of the Nottawasaga route.<sup>53</sup>

William also commented on the nature of the forest near Penetanguishene. No oak was on the bay but some was found around Gloucester Bay, but not

<sup>51</sup> Robinson to E. Owen, August 12, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1325, mfr. c3548, 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> W. Owen to E. Owen, 21 October 1815. *LAC*, CO 42/171, mfr. b137, 209b-25, quote is on 215b.

<sup>53</sup> This differs from Gough's assessment of William Owen's report. He suggests that Owen found the Penetanguishene location very good and only mentioned Christian Island as a commissariat depot. See Gough, *Fighting Sail...*, 142-43.



close to shore. East of Matchedash Bay there were reports of white oak and good pine, but again the difficulty of getting it out would significantly add to its cost.

Commodore Owen used his half-brother's remarks and those of the earlier review of the wood growing in the Penetanguishene vicinity, in his report to the Admiralty on the Upper Province's strengths and weaknesses in regards to defence, if there was war with America.<sup>54</sup> Sir Edward declared Penetanguishene as the best site for the navy depot on Lake Huron, not mentioning William's alternative of Christian Island. Although wood close to the site was not good for building ships he believed (contrary to William) that pine along the Nottawasaga River could be transported either by winter road from the river, or via Georgian Bay in the spring. He also held that pine and white oak were plentiful near Matchedash Bay and could be harvested and forwarded to Penetanguishene with little difficulty (again counter to William). The only major problem Sir Edward reported was that the road from Kempenfelt Bay to Penetanguishene was fit only for winter use. The Nottawasaga River would be the favoured route for moving heavy objects to the post in the summer. Sir Edward suggested altering the path to take the road over an area of higher land. This would add two miles and the road would end at the west side

of the Bay, near the spot William had suggested was better for ship launching than the original site.

Why had Sir Edward made this significant change from his April 1815 position? The two prospective spots on Lake Erie, Turkey Point and the Grand River had been seen as too difficult and costly to build. Turkey Point required a massive infill and the construction of a raised dockyard that was simply not financially viable. Grand River would serve as a depot, but the piers to cut through its sandbar would never be raised as they too were simply too expensive.<sup>55</sup> The failure to find a suitable, workable site on Lake Erie certainly contributed to the change of mind. Sir Edward Owen returned to England in November 1815. Dock Yard Commissioner Sir Robert Hall was given command, but Hall had ventured to England to consult with the Admiralty in June 1815, and was not yet back. Temporary command went to William Owen.

In May 1816 some of the naval ordnance and its stores reached Georgian Bay and were ordered to be shipped to Amherstburg, instead of Drummond Island.<sup>56</sup> But most of the ordnance had not moved into the river, it still lay at Holland Landing.<sup>57</sup> De Watterville, Assistant Commissary-General, blamed the lack of movement on the navy who claimed not to have the necessary support to get the guns to the Nottawasaga and on to

<sup>54</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 18 November 1815. *LAC*, CO 42/171, mfr. b137, 155-61.

<sup>55</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, August 15, 1815. *LAC*, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, pp. 59-60a; & Drummond to E. Owen, August 24, 1815, *LAC*, RG 8, v. 1228, mfr. C3527, pp. 305-307.

<sup>56</sup> de Watterville to Walker, 17 May 1816, *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1325, mfr. c3548, 286.

<sup>57</sup> de Watterville to Hall, 4 July 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1325, mfr. c3540, 313.

the lake.<sup>58</sup> In August, it became apparent that some of the gun carriages had been sent to Drummond Island. Captain Baumgardt, in temporary command on the lakes, requested that the carriages be returned to the Nottawasaga River.<sup>59</sup> The naval clerk, George Chiles was worried that he would be charged for the missing carriages. Getting the ordnance distributed to the military posts was anything but easy.<sup>60</sup>

In June 1816, William Owen reported his establishment on the Great Lakes.<sup>61</sup> On Lake Huron, Commander P.S. Hambly, with Lieutenant David Wingfield, commanded the *Surprise*, with a crew of thirteen seamen and four marines. Lieutenant John Kingcome, nine seamen, a boy, five marines were in the *Confiance*. The Lake Huron Establishment included thirty-one seamen and thirty marines serving ashore. It also had a storekeeper, clerk, quartermaster and shipwrights and artificers, totalling fourteen men.<sup>62</sup>

Based on Sir Edward Owen's recommendations the Admiralty designated Penetanguishene as the Naval Establishment on Lake Huron, on 6 July 1816.<sup>63</sup> Work had already begun again in early July.<sup>64</sup> The chosen site was along the east side of the bay, just south of the bay's mouth, behind a bend in the shoreline, sheltering the yard from the bay's entrance. George Chiles and his two storehouse porters moved to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River, where in December of 1816 Chiles was made a naval storekeeper.<sup>65</sup> Additional shipwrights and sawyers were hired to work on the various sites, from Holland Landing to Penetanguishene.<sup>66</sup>

In August, Captain William Owen wrote Baumgardt about supplying the garrison on Drummond Island.<sup>67</sup> Owen favoured the route via the Nottawasaga River over that which took material along the Niagara and Amherstburg frontiers with America. He felt the former was

<sup>58</sup> de Waterville to Hall, 17 July 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1325, mfr. c3548, 319.

<sup>59</sup> Baumgardt to Wilson, 3 September 1816; & Smith to Hambly, August 12, 1816. Both from *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1326, mfr. c3548, 30 and 30-31, respectively.

<sup>60</sup> Wilson to Baumgardt, 8 September 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1327, mfr. c3549, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Muster Table Lake Huron Establishment, April-June 1816. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b6007, pp. 158-68. The *Surprise* and *Confiance* were still on Lake Huron at the end of the year, see Baumgardt to Bagot, 5 September 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 738, mfr. c3245, 137-41; W. Owen, A List of all the Commission and Warrant Officers Serving in His Majesty's Vessels Under my Command. *LAC*, ADM 1/2265, mfr. b2786, 77b-9.

<sup>62</sup> The Grand River depot on Lake Erie held only eight men. Kingston had a commissioner, a storekeeper, a master shipwright, master artificer and shipwrights, and artificers, totally 220 people. There were fifteen in the Dock yard establishment at Lake Champlain. See W. Owen to Drummond, 15 May 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 737, mfr. c3245, 116.

<sup>63</sup> Gough, *Fighting Sail...*, 143.

<sup>64</sup> de Waterville to Green, 13 July 1816, *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1325, mfr. c2548, 317.

<sup>65</sup> Pay List Clerk from Kingston Yard to Holland Landing to the head of the Nottawasaga Creek, 1 October to 31 December 1816. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b6007, 176-77.

<sup>66</sup> Pay List Lake Huron Naval Depot, 1 October to 31 December 1816. *LAC*, ADM 42/2173, mfr. b26007, 183.

safer and ultimately cheaper. With reference to the Penetanguishene Establishment, William Owen revealed, there was “no such thing in existence, that excellent Harbour and Situation for our Arsenal having not a single inhabited dwelling.” For the time being the mouth of the Nottawasaga would provide the route for supporting any military or naval activity originating along the Lake Huron area.

Commissioner Sir Robert Hall returned and took command in September 1816.<sup>68</sup> With the Admiralty’s orders, he set about placing the Naval Establishment of the Great Lakes on a proper footing. Hall dismissed the entire northern coast of Lake Erie as unsuitable for any naval yard. Instead, he promoted the Admiralty’s choice of Penetanguishene, where the frames of two small frigates could be laid down. In the event of war, he proposed the frigates could be rapidly completed and used to capture the American Fort Gratiot, at the head of the St. Clair River, on Lake Huron. From there they could enter Lake Erie to attack the American naval yard at Erie, Pennsylvania. He also suggested attacking the isolated American settlements across Michigan, recruiting indigenous forces to undertake the task. Hall opined that this would keep the Americans focused on preserving their

western settlements and away from Niagara and Kingston. His grandiose plan seemed to ignore his spurning of Lake Erie, which left the invading ships without shelter on the lake. He did suggest that all supplies could be carried hence from York, and that ships would gather them up at the Grand River, which he had declared unusable. How they would attack Fort Gratiot and then sail past Fort Detroit without being severely damaged was also not addressed. Hall seems to have ignored the wood reports as well, assuming wood to build frigates would be found where none grew. The two frigates, (each of twenty-six guns) would need a shallow draft to get through the St Clair River, without unshipping guns and supplies, at several different points. Hall’s plan seemed to ignore many realities.

Hall travelled to Georgian Bay along the Nottawasaga route in October 1816.<sup>69</sup> He wrote Sherbrooke that he intended to begin building at Penetanguishene as soon as the lake opened the following spring. He urged that the road, started in late 1814, be completed. His trip along the Nottawasaga left him with a low opinion of the river, it being nearly impassable. He would write again in late 1817 encouraging the government to finish the road.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> W. Owen to Baumgardt, 4 August 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol 738, mfr. c3245, 71-81; Baumgardt to Sherbrooke, 4 August 1816. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 738, mfr. c3245, 87-9; & Sherbrooke to Hall, 28 September 1816. *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 94-95.

<sup>68</sup> Hall to Gore, 16 September. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 30, mfr. 4547, 1364-5; Sherbrooke to Hall, 23 September 1816. *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 89. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, 24-26. Gough, *Fighting Sail*, 145-46.

<sup>69</sup> Hall to Sherbrooke, 25 October 1816. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 30, mfr. c4547, 1377-80.

<sup>70</sup> Hall to Smith, 14 December 1817. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 34, mfr. c4600, 16461-3.

Construction at the Penetanguishine dock yard began in earnest in 1817. George Chiles, and Robert Adams, Quarterman, had twenty-six shipwrights, two smiths and eleven sawyers listed for the depot.<sup>71</sup> This group completed the work started in late 1815, and puttered at during 1816, especially the large storehouse, which rose three stories and was one hundred feet by fifty feet.<sup>72</sup> They built officer's houses, a seamen and marine barracks, a small hospital, several smaller storehouses, a saw pit and accommodations for dock yard officials and staff. In order to construct the seventy plus buildings they had to cut seven terraces into the side of the hill rising up from the water's edge.<sup>73</sup> Extra labourers from the area, and as far away as York, were hired for the various projects. Employment of locals would become a trend in the years to follow.<sup>74</sup> The navy established its powder magazine on the Dobson Island, renaming it Magazine Island. All the extra shipwrights and sawyers were sent to Kingston, in Octo-

ber, and would not return the following year.

The Rush-Bagot Agreement, in 1817, changed the overall situation once more.<sup>75</sup> America and Britain agreed to allow one armed ship, of 100 tons and one gun, on each of Lakes Ontario and Champlain, and two of the same quality on the upper lakes. The agreement reinforced the naval reductions to date, and continued cost saving decisions.

The agreement resulted in shifting the *Tecumseh* (Lieutenant commander Henry Kent) and *Newash* (Lieutenant Commander Thomas Bushby) to Lake Huron, from Lake Erie, in early June 1817.<sup>76</sup> Once there they were taken out of service and placed into ordinary, next to Magazine Island.<sup>77</sup> Kent stayed on at Penetanguishene as superintendent of the navy's ordinary establishment, on half pay. The majority of the crews from the two ships were sent to Kingston for return to England. In addition to Lieutenant Kent, Assistant Surgeon Thomas Tait, and four seamen were put on the

<sup>71</sup> These numbers are revealed in Muster Table for the Holland Landing Depot, 1 January to 31 May 1817. *LAC*, ADM 38/2296, mfr. b5991, unpaginated; and Penetanguishene List of Establishment Officers, Clerks and Artificers, 1 May to 30 June 1817. *LAC*, ADM 42/2174, mfr. b6007, 22-25.

<sup>72</sup> Jury, *The Establishments*, 13 & 18.

<sup>73</sup> Triggs, "Social Flux", 115

<sup>74</sup> Penetanguishene Depot list of Supernumeraries, 1 April to 30 June 1818, & 1 October to 31 December 1818. *LAC*, ADM 38/2296, mfr. b5991, unpaginated, lists seven contractors and hired men.

<sup>75</sup> J. M. Callahan, "Agreement of 1817- Reduction of Naval Forces upon the American Lakes." *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1895* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing), 1895, 369-392. A L Burt, *The United States Great Britain and British North America: From Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 388-94; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, 12-14, 17-19. Gore to MacGier, 19 May 1817. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 32, mfr. 4549, 15240-1.

<sup>76</sup> Gough, *Fighting Sail*, 143 and 147, sends the *Tecumseh* and *Newash* to Lake Huron a year early.

<sup>77</sup> Lecanne Elizabeth Gordon, "Newash and Tecumseh: Analysis of Two Post-War of 1812 Vessels on the Great Lakes" (MA Thesis, Texas A & M University, May 2009), 82-84.

ordinary service.<sup>78</sup> Twenty-five sailors were entered in the muster as belonging to the extra-ordinary. Of this group three ran in late 1817 and sixteen deserted in June 1818. One of the seamen listed in the ordinary ran. None of the departed extra-ordinary were replaced. Lieutenant Caldwell, Royal Marine, having served for two years at Penetanguishene, was ordered home.<sup>79</sup>

The British built three Durham Boats, rigged as schooners, at Penetanguishene, in 1817. They were the *Bee*, *Wasp*, and *Mosquito*, each being 36.5 feet long by 14.5 feet (a burthen of forty tons).<sup>80</sup> These vessels served for the next three years as supply ships for the naval establishment and Drummond Island. No keel and lower frames were ever erected for Hall's proposed two frigates. The expense, and lack of enough suitable wood made it a dead idea.

The navy partially reduced its medical establishment on the Great Lakes in June 1817.<sup>81</sup> Hall discharged most of the

physicians, surgeons, orderlies and nurses. He requested that the military assume tending to the navy's medical needs. This was not possible at Penetanguishene, so a naval assistant surgeon remained.

In November 1817, a small detachment of the 70th Regiment were sent to serve as military supplement to the handful of marines at Penetanguishene.<sup>82</sup> Sir Robert Hall was anxious to build a strong defence for the naval establishment. Concerned about his resources, Governor-in-Chief Sir John Sherbrooke told Hall the troops were only temporary.<sup>83</sup> Hall was advised to request more marines from the Admiralty.

When they arrived the 70th Regiment troops found no barracks existed for them, and that they would be in tents for the coming winter.<sup>84</sup> Less than pleased, their commanding officer fired off a letter to his superior Major General Widdrington. Widdrington responded that barracks could only be built with the Navy's approval, since it was a naval

<sup>78</sup> Pay List His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment on Lake Huron, 1 October to 31 December 1817. *LAC*, ADM 42/2174, mfr. b6007, 9-11.

<sup>79</sup> Hall to Gore, 22 May 1817. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 32, mfr. c4549, 15263-4.

<sup>80</sup> R. Malcomson, *Warships of the Rest Lakes 1754-1834* (London, UK: Chatham Publishing, 2001), 139.

<sup>81</sup> Addison to Robertson, 6 June 1817, *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 262; Sherbrooke to Hall, 6 June & 9 June 1817, *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 263-4 and 265, respectively; Addison to Hall, 25 June 1817. *LAC* Sherbrooke Letter-book, 272; Addison to Hall, 25 June 1817. *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 272.

<sup>82</sup> Addison to Widdrington, 4 November 1817. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 34, mfr. c4600, 16268-71. Widdrington to Addison, 23 November 1817. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1327, mfr. c3549, 200. Addison to Widdrington, 2 December 1817. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 34, mfr. c4600, 16401-4.

<sup>83</sup> Sherbrooke to Hall, 6 June 1817. *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 263-64; Addison to Hall, 16 June 1817. *LAC*, Sherbrooke Letter-book, 268-69; Widdrington to Hall, 16 December, 1817. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1327, mfr. c3549, 203-204; Addison to Durnford, 16 December 1817. *LAC*, Rg 8, Vol. 1245, mfr. c3530, 110.

<sup>84</sup> Widdrington to Addison, 23 October 1817. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 515, mfr. c3062, 193-96



establishment. The junior officer's letter also questioned the lack of food for the troops, remarking on the abundance of the naval rations.

In response, Sir Robert Hall stated that budget reductions by the Admiralty meant they could not build adequate barracks for the seamen at the post.<sup>85</sup> The seamen had built their own housing. He suggested that the military do the same. As for food, Hall ordered they receive the naval ration. Sir Robert Hall referred to the naval establishment at Penetanguishene as, "this interesting Naval Depot, which from the quantity of stores already there, and other considerations, is the most important Post in the Upper Lakes."

Sherbrooke wrote Hall at the end of 1817 that the Great Lakes Establishment would conform with the Rush-Bagot Agreement.<sup>86</sup> He told the commissioner that no fortification of Penetanguishene would take place, both as a result of the agreement and the direct order of the Government, "to desist from all Public Works of this nature, in order to avoid for the present as far as possible further expenditure." Hall agreed with the idea of economy, reducing active ships into ordinary, but he disagreed with not having ships on the stocks ready to launch

at outbreak of war. Hall held that if war came again, quick attacks on American bases on the lakes was the only way to assure time for reinforcements to arrive from the mother country.

A different message was sent in January 1818, when Major T.F. Addison, Military Secretary to Sherbrooke, sent a sketch of where the naval wharf and its defensive works were to be built.<sup>87</sup> The military would build a fort to guard the dock yard, and the navy would also construct their own battery and blockhouse. This commitment was repeated in February.<sup>88</sup>

The naval depot in 1818 included clerk George Chiles, and Robert Adams, who supervised seven shipwrights, two smiths and two sawyers.<sup>89</sup> As for the ordinary, 1818 saw a similar decreased number on the pay lists compared with 1817. Lieutenant Kent was listed as superintending the ordinary, Thomas Tait was still the assistant surgeon.<sup>90</sup> Eight seamen, seven listed as ship keepers, one as boat crew, and one second class boy were present to mind the two ships in ordinary. During the year, two sailors left as their term of service expired. The one seaman who deserted was replaced by a local man. In July, a further eight seamen joined the establishment. They would provide the nucleus of the crews for the three Dur-

<sup>85</sup> Hall to Widdrington, 20 November 1817. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 515, mfr. c3062, 197-99.

<sup>86</sup> Sherbrooke to Hall, 20 December 1817. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1245, mfr. c3530, 113-14

<sup>87</sup> Addison to Smith, 20 January 1818. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1245, mfr. c3530, 133.

<sup>88</sup> Smith to Sherbrooke, 2 February 1818. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 516, mfr. c3062, 1-2.

<sup>89</sup> Pay Lists Naval Depot Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 January to 31 March, & 1 October to 31 December 1818. *LAC*, ADM 42/2177, mfr. b6009, unpaginated.

<sup>90</sup> His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 July to 30 September, & 1 October to 31 December 1818. *LAC*, ADM 42 2177, mfr. b6012, 9-22.

ham Boats, built the previous year.

At the end of 1818, it was decided that the military presence at Penetanguishene was indispensable.<sup>91</sup> The Admiralty would not supply marines to garrison the post, and the supplies accumulated there were so great that a guard was mandatory. In January 1819, there was one subaltern, and sixteen troops of the 70th Regiment along with two women and three children.<sup>92</sup>

Commissioner Captain Sir Robert Barrie RN assumed command of the Great Lakes Establishment in November 1818, upon the sudden death of Sir Robert Hall.<sup>93</sup> Arriving in spring 1819 he toured the lakes, after which he made a number of recommendations to the Admiralty. In regards to Penetanguishene he suggested placing parties of men at Holland Landing and Kempenfelt Bay to facilitate the passage of the mail, and supplies to the establishment on Lake Huron.

Assistant Surgeon Thomas Tait died on 31 January 1819 and was replaced by

Gile Todd.<sup>94</sup> Lieutenant Kent left the station in June, being replaced by Lieutenants James Roberts, as superintendent, and James Jackson, as lieutenant of the ordinary.<sup>95</sup> There was one ship keeper for the *Tecumseh* and *Newash*, and another for the *Bee*, *Wasp* and *Mosquito*, now listed as gun boats, while the boat crew consisted of one man. The last two men were from Penetanguishene, further evidence of the navy's reliance on local men.

The construction of a new wharf was undertaken in April 1819. Contractor Cryus Smith hired fifteen local men and was finished the project in two months. The defensive works would not be forthcoming. The new wharf was the last major improvement to the facility.

In April the military requested the navy transport two hundred troops from Penetanguishene to Drummond Island, and return with the troops they replaced.<sup>96</sup> The only vessel available was the *Tecumseth*, in ordinary, which could carry one hundred people at a time. With just one sailor at Penetanguishene,

<sup>91</sup> Cockburn to Maitland, 17 November 1818; Montresor to Cockburn, 16 November 1818. Both in *LAC*, UCS, Vol 40, mfr. c4602, 19525-6 & 19528-9, respectively.

<sup>92</sup> General Distribution Return of the Troops under the Command of Major General Sir P Maitland, Upper Canada January 25, 1819. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 42, mfr. c4603, 20276-8. This number compares favourably with the Lake Erie depot where a subaltern, two sergeants and eighteen troops resided, versus at Kingston, the military headquarters in Upper Canada, where just over 800 officers and troops were stationed along with forty-nine women and seventy-eight children.

<sup>93</sup> Maitland to Barrie, 17 November 1818. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1255, mfr. c3530, 17-18. Sir Robert died 7 February 1818, see Laws to Sherbrooke, 8 February 1818, *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 738, mfr. c3245, 95-96. Laws informed the the navy immediately. The notification to Admiralty from the Station Commander was sent in April, see Milne to Croker, 21 April 1818. *LAC*, ADM 1/511, unpaginated.

<sup>94</sup> His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 October to 31 December 1818. *LAC*, ADM 42/2177, mfr. b6012, 19-22.

<sup>95</sup> His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 August 1821. *LAC*, Arm 42/2181, mfr. b613, 45-45b.

<sup>96</sup> Laws to Cockburn, 22 April 1819. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 42, mfr. c4603, 20911.

Edward Laws, serving as temporary commissioner prior to Barrie's arrival, hired seamen at York and sent them to Penetanguishene. After completing its mission, the *Tecumseth* returned to ordinary, to continue its decay.

In September, Sir Robert Barrie wrote his mother from Penetanguishene.<sup>97</sup> "Our Naval Establishment is in a sad state we have here two lieutenants half a dozen seamen and as many shipwrights to look after two rotten schooners and some boats--the expense of conveying Salt provisions and stores to this little out of the way place is nearly equal to a small dock yard." He told her of his trip up from York covering the first thirty-five miles on a corduroy road, the crossing of Lake Simcoe, the portage to Willow Creek and the Nottawasaga. Each leg took two days and left Barrie exhausted by the time he reached Penetanguishene.

By December 1819, a mere four years after construction, the *Tecumseh* and *Newash* were in desperate shape. The *Bee*, *Wasp* and *Mosquito* were not far behind entering into ordinary in 1820.<sup>98</sup> The

next time troops needed to be moved by ship, the American vessel *Michigan* was hired, though it ruffled feathers among senior officers at York and Quebec.<sup>99</sup> Within seven years, all five vessels were either sinking into the bay, or beached.

In 1820 and 1821 the establishment experienced a flurry of departures and replacements.<sup>100</sup> Lieutenant Jackson was replaced by Lieutenant Samuel Roberts.<sup>101</sup> Two sailors served as ship keepers for the decaying *Tecumseth* and *Newash*. Two others acted as ship keepers of the three gun boats. The boat crew shifted among four men during the two years, with one running and another discharged. The officers' servants also seemed to have had a problem staying, either deserting, being reassigned, or quickly discharged. At the end of 1821, there were twenty-three officers, seamen, and servants at Penetanguishene. The naval yard maintained its small crew, headed by George Chiles, two store porters, two shipwrights, a smith and a sawyer. Repairs were made to the hospital, officer's quarters, and the soldiers and seamen's barracks.<sup>102</sup>

Finances dominated decision mak-

<sup>97</sup> Barrie to Dolly Clayton, 14 September 1814. H. M. Dock Yard Kingston: under Commissioner Robert Barrie, 1819-1834. Royal Canadian Military College, Massey Library [hereafter, Massey Library], unpaginated.

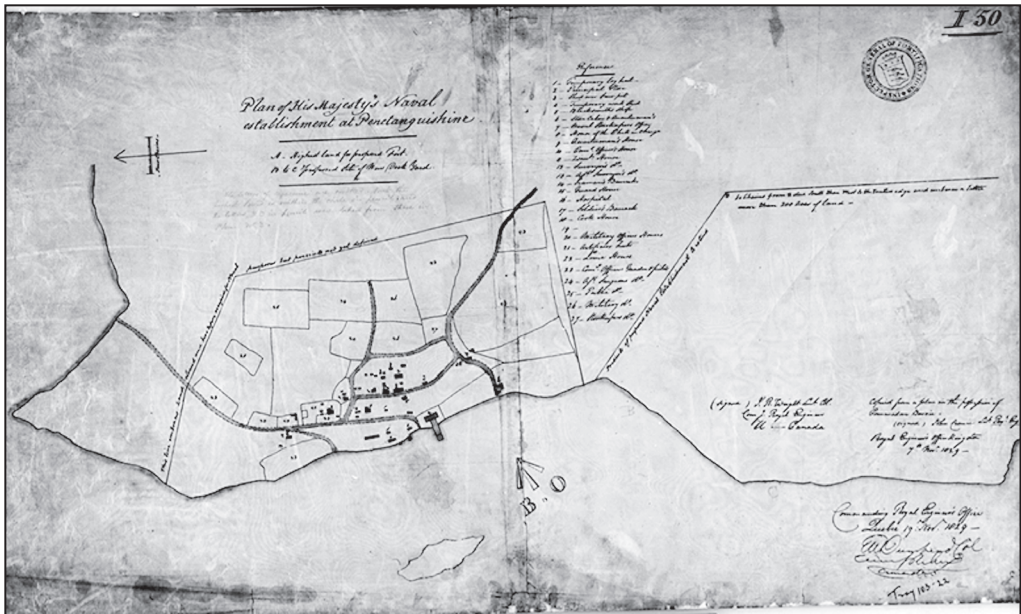
<sup>98</sup> Jury, *at Penetanguishene*, 17; Nadine Kopp, "The Influence of the War of 1812 on Great Lake Shipping." MA Thesis, Department of History, East Carolina University, 2012, 125.

<sup>99</sup> Lightfoot to Maitland, 17 May 1822; Lightfoot to Hillier, 7 June 1822; & Hillier to Lightfoot, 10 June 1822. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 56, mfr. c4608, 28859-4, 29026-30, & 29054-6, respectively.

<sup>100</sup> His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 August 1821. *LAC*, Arm 42/2181, mfr. b6013, 45-45b; & His Majesty's Ordinary Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 October to 31 December 1821. *LAC*, Arm 42/2181, mfr. b6013, 47-49b. Pay List Naval Establishment Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 12 November 1821. *LAC*, ADM 42/2181, mfr. b2013, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Barrie to Roberts, 16 July, 1820. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 48, mfr. c4605, 23693-4.

<sup>102</sup> Triggs, *Social Flux...*, 110.



*Establishment at Penetanguishene, 19 November 1829. LAC, microfiche, H2/440/Penetanguishene/1829.*

ing on the defence of the British colonies in North America, after the War of 1812. Even with the ongoing economies the cost of the Great Lakes Naval Establishment totalled £23,000, in 1818.<sup>103</sup> The Duke of Wellington's suggestions to put Canada into a state of readiness if war erupted only fueled the cry for economic restraint.<sup>104</sup> For Penetanguishene, he suggested a peacetime garrison of 500 troops. The garrison never rose beyond twenty-five soldiers between 1817 and 1829. In 1820, the cost for the naval establishment was slated to rise to £24,000,

even after major reductions.

The year 1822 saw George Chiles and the store porters discharged, sending Chiles back to Kingston and the porters to their homes in the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>105</sup> Only two shipwrights remained after 1822, William Willson (assigned in 1817) and Samuel Richardson, who arrived in 1821. Lieutenant Roberts departed 1 January 1822, replaced by Lieutenant Charles Jones, who stayed five months to be replaced by Lieutenant Henry A.C. Douglas in June.<sup>106</sup> The ship keepers for the *Tecumseh* and the

<sup>103</sup> Wood to Laws, 30 October 1819, *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 740, mfr. 3245, 41-43.

<sup>104</sup> Bourne, *The Balance of Power*, 35-6.

<sup>105</sup> Maitland to Barrie, 5 April 1822. Massey Library, unpaginated.

<sup>106</sup> Muster Book His Majesty's Establishment at Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 November to 31 December 1822. *LAC*, ADM 42/2182, mfr. b6013, 81-5. Jury and Jury, *The Establishment at Penetanguishene*, 15, suggest Chiles was replaced in 1817, but this was not the case, He remained in his position, adding the duties of naval store keeper, until the reduction in 1822.

gun boats were replaced, one lasting only a month, while another deserted. After December 1822, there was no longer a boat crew.

Over the next three years Lieutenant Douglas commanded an ordinary consisting of Assistant Surgeon Todd, James Hasset, a boy 2nd class and three able seamen.<sup>107</sup> Two of the three remaining seamen were discharged and two local men hired to replace them, on terms that no other British navy seamen were employed, that of a limited self-determined service period. In August 1825, the seamen on the survey of Lake Superior passed through Penetanguishene headed for Kingston. John Franklin and his expedition team visited Penetanguishene in 1825, on their way to the Northwest.<sup>108</sup>

Commodore Barrie (he was promoted in 1827) received a request, in January 1828, to repair the buildings in which the officers and troops at Penetanguishene were living.<sup>109</sup> They were unfit for habitation, the repair being a naval responsibility.

Lieutenant-Governor Maitland appealed to Barrie's "goodness" to have the problems fixed.<sup>110</sup> Barrie told the Maitland that "strictly speaking" the troops were carried on the naval muster tables and as such should have lived on the ships, in ordinary.<sup>111</sup> With no viable ship accommodations the troops were allowed to use any empty building in the naval establishment.<sup>112</sup> On a visit to Penetanguishene in June, Sir Robert had to admit that the situation was worse than he thought.<sup>113</sup> Substantial repairs were ordered to be undertaken, using the soldiers to make them.

Drummond Island had been awarded to the Americans by the Boundary Determination Committee in late 1822, and after six years, the troops were finally moved to Penetanguishene.<sup>114</sup> On 16 November 1828 the British garrison were carried by two merchant ships, the *Wellington* and *Alice Hackett*, to Penetanguishene.<sup>115</sup> Seven officers, forty soldiers, fifteen women, twenty-six children and three servants arrived, with a small

<sup>107</sup> Muster Book His Majesty's Establishment at Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 January to 28 February 1823, & 1 November to 31 December 1823. *LAC*, ADM 42/2182, mfr. b6013, 99-106, & 150-58, respectively; Muster Book His Majesty's Establishment at Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 January to 29 February 1824. *LAC*, ADM 42/2187, mfr. b6016, 3-9. Muster Book His Majesty's Establishment at Penetanguishene Lake Huron, July to 30 September 1824. *LAC*, ADM 42/21871, mfr. b6016, 189-95.

<sup>108</sup> Triggs, "Social Flux", 111.

<sup>109</sup> Maitland to Gore, 31 January 1828. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1328, mfr. c3549, 141.

<sup>110</sup> Maitland to Barrie, 15 March 1828. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1328, mfr. c3549, 141-42.

<sup>111</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 21 March 1828. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 68, mfr. c6865, 48440-1; Maitland to Gore, 14 April, 1828. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1328, mfr. c3549, 142-43.

<sup>112</sup> Triggs, "Social Flux", 131.

<sup>113</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 11 June 1828. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 89, mfr. c6865, 49214-6.

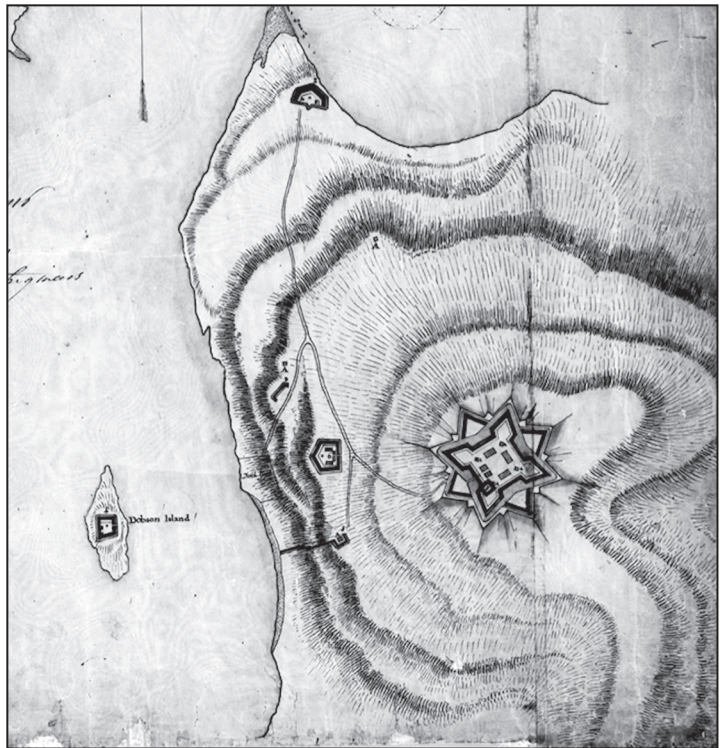
<sup>114</sup> Bathurst to Dalhousie, 19 March 1823. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 516, mfr. c3062, 173.

<sup>115</sup> Couper to Routh, 31 March, 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1269, mfr. 3533, 159. Samuel F. Cook.

*Drummond Island: The Story of British Occupation, 1815-1828*. Lansing, MI, 1896, states that an American schooner was used along with the *Wellington*, named *Cincinnati*, 81.



*Figure 4: Detail of the planned fortifications at Penetanguishene. A citadel fortress rises on the hill overlooking the dock yard, with its own fortified area, a fortified blockhouse is on Magazine Island and another small fort lays at the point on the east side of the bay's mouth. None of these fortifications were constructed. See, Plan of Penetanguishene Harbour and Works Projected for the Defence of the intended Dock Yard, 7 February 1815. LAC, microfiche.*



number of civilians.<sup>116</sup> The army officers were quartered in the better abandoned buildings of the Naval Establishment, while the soldiers occupied the more dilapidated buildings.<sup>117</sup> Winter at Penetanguishene would have been a cold and uncomfortable experience. As to the establishment itself, Sir Robert declared, "it is by no means created on an advantageous spot, as to [the] contrary - as a dock yard it could hardly have been more misplaced."<sup>118</sup>

Construction of the military's fortifications for the post were put on hold as Governor-in-Chief Sir James Kempt consulted with the new Upper Canada Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Colborne,

Barrie and the commissary, as to what was best.<sup>119</sup> Barrie was asked to mark on a sketch of Penetanguishene Bay the land needed by the naval establishment, so the army could choose its spot.<sup>120</sup> Commodore Barrie failed to mark the map before heading home to consult with the Admiralty.

Once again, the line of communica-

<sup>116</sup> A. C. Osborne, "The Migration of Voyageurs From Drummond Island to Penetanguishene," *Papers and Records of the Ontario Historical Society* 3 (1901), 123-48.

<sup>117</sup> Couper to Barrie, 1 October 1828. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1269, mfr. c3533, 18.

<sup>118</sup> Barrie to Kempt, 18 October 1828. Massey Library, unpaginated.

<sup>119</sup> Couper to Dunnford, 7 August 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 19. Couper to Colborne, 11 August 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 24-5. Couper to Routh, 13 August 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 28-29.

<sup>120</sup> Kempt to Barrie, 8 August 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 20-1; Colborne to Couper, 15 August 1829 and 5 September 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1328, mfr. c3549, 164, for both letters; Couper to Sherborne, 29 September 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 71-72.

tion between Lake Simcoe and the port raised its unresolvable self.<sup>121</sup> No suitable road had been established, though the need had long been present. Paying for the road bounced back and forth between Kempt and Colborne. Sir John assigned £1,400 to the venture, but Kempt made no contribution to this critical project.<sup>122</sup> The refusal came from the Secretary of State for War and Colonies, Sir George Murray, who had been Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, where he had assessed defences. The importance of an access route to Penetanguishene would have been well known to him.<sup>123</sup> The transportation of naval and military stores, provisions, and Indian presents would have been much easier, reducing the time currently taken. But for the moment, economics trumped military preparedness.

Continued delay pushed the building of the permanent military post at Penetanguishene into 1830. The navy suggested moving its naval yard to a new location within the bay.<sup>124</sup> Until Barrie's return from London no decision could be made.<sup>125</sup> With prompting from Governor-in-Chief Lord Aylmer, Colborne met with Barrie in October, and the two decided that the dock yard would not move.<sup>126</sup> Construction of the military post would begin in the coming spring, but would have its own twisted path to completion.<sup>127</sup>

Further reductions in 1830 and 1831 left Lieutenant W. Woodin, then in charge, with his servant boy, and the shipwrights Wilson and Richardson (who seemed to have survived all the cuts and discharges). The only addition was a soldier, his wife and four children.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Routh to Couper, 21 January 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 275, mfr. c2859, 168-69. The building of a permanent barracks suitable for housing troops and defensive works were requested in 1829, see Couper to Respective Officers, 11 April 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, vol. 1269, mfr. c3533, 174-5; Couper to Dunnford, 21 April 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, vol. 1269, mfr. c3533, 178; and Stewart to Routh, 7 May 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 580, mfr. c3148, 68-69; Kempt to Murray, 11 June 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1268, mfr. c3533, 89-90.

<sup>122</sup> Couper to Dunnford, 14 July 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1269, mfr. c3533, 242; and Couper to Colborne, 15 December 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 143-44.

<sup>123</sup> Couper to Commanding Royal Engineers, 16 December 1829. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 147. Couper informs his correspondent that Murray had vetoed the use of military chest funds for the Penetanguishene road construction.

<sup>124</sup> Couper to Dunnford, 25 May 1830; & Couper to Colborne, 25 May 1830. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 1270, mfr. c3533, 260 and 361, respectively; Couper to Colborne, 11 August 1829. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 95, mfr. c6868, 53212-5; and Byhaur to Marin, 11 January 1830. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 518, mfr. c3062, 30-35. This last two letters contain a general description of what was to be built. Byhaur to Marin, 27 January 1830; & Dunnford to Couper, 4 May 1830. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 518, mfr. c3062, 29 and 36-7, respectively.

<sup>125</sup> Barrie to Colborne, 20 December 1829. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 97, mfr. c6868, 54504-5; Wright to Dunnford, 14 May 1830. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 518, mfr. c3062, 42-44.

<sup>126</sup> Wright to Dunnford, 30 October 1830. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 582, mfr. c3148, 115-16.

<sup>127</sup> Routh to Glegg, 25 October 1831. *LAC*, Vol. 583, mfr. c3148, 240-41.

<sup>128</sup> Muster Book His Majesty's Establishment at Penetanguishene Lake Huron, 1 November to 31 December 1830. *LAC*, ADM 42/2195, mfr. b6021, 32-39. Barrie to Colborne, 31 May 1831. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 107, mfr. c6813, 61039.

A handful of soldiers received victuals from the navy depot as they performed guard duty, protecting the now basically abandoned establishment. Still the cost of the British Navy on the Great Lakes amounted to £18 to £20,000, with £180,000 worth of stores supporting the current establishment and laid away for war with America.<sup>129</sup> The expense was simply too much for a government bent on economy and an Admiralty without Lord Melville and Byam Martin, both of whom had defended the expense in the past. The remains of *Tecumseh*, *Newash*, *Bee*, *Wasp* and *Mosquito*, were offered for auction, but there were no takers as the vessels were not salvageable.<sup>130</sup>

Commodore Barrie received his recall notice 1 March 1834, ending the British Navy's tenure on the Great Lakes.<sup>131</sup> He was tasked with disposing of the naval material and vessels at the various depots around the lakes. At Penetanguishene he intended to keep the anchors and "such weighty stores as are not likely to deteriorate" in the storehouse. All perishables were to be sold off. The military was offered the storehouse facilities at Holland Landing and Nottawasaga River, and any supplies within. On 1 June,

Lieutenant Woodin left the Navy's Ordinary Establishment at Penetanguishene, turning what little remained over to the military.<sup>132</sup> The British Navy withdrew from Canada, leaving the military to defend the provinces in the unlikelihood of an American invasion.<sup>133</sup>

The route to Penetanguishene was still in a backward state in 1839. Frederick Dullas, of Orillia, who helped convey troops, and provisions between Toronto (formerly York) and Penetanguishene, told a tired tale of the troublesome trip into the post.<sup>134</sup> The portage between "the narrows and Coldwater" was "in a shocking state of disrepair" and nearly impassable. Wagons broke down and the animals used in hauling goods were injured. Without repairs the portage would be unusable in the coming year. The road remained in terrible condition until after 1847, when the stretch between Kempenfelt Bay and Penetanguishene was made reliably passible.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusions

The Naval Establishment at Penetanguishene was never tested as a base for aggressive action against the Americans, nor did it need to repel an enemy

<sup>129</sup> Bourne, *The Balance of Power*, 31.

<sup>130</sup> Kopp, "The Influence of", 125; and Jury, *The Establishments of Penetanguishene*, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Pechell & Bakeley to Barrie 11 January 1834. Massey Library, unpaginated; Pechell to Barrie, 9 January 1834. Massey Library, unpaginated; Barrie to Colborne, 12 March 1834; & Barrow to Barrie, 1 January 1834. *LAC*, UCS, vol 139, mfr. c6881, 75923-6 & 75927-30, respectively.

<sup>132</sup> Barrie to Colborne, 19 May 1834. *LAC*, UCS, Vol. 141, mfr. c6882, 77146-8.

<sup>133</sup> Bourne, *The Balance of Power*, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Memorial of Frederick Dullas, 23 May 1839. *LAC*, RG 8, Vol. 277, mfr. c2860, 102-3.

<sup>135</sup> Guillet, *Early Life...*, 516. The military post survived into 1856, with pensioners from England providing the garrison, Jury, *The Establishments at Penetanguishene*, 34.

invasion. After a hesitant start, between 1813 and 1816, its high point was in 1817 as the establishment was built along the hillside, rising up from the bay's edge. The Rush-Bagot Agreement was the first impediment to the depot. The Penetanguishene Ordinary Establishment kept two stripped schooners waiting, ready for use for three years. Beyond that they were in such poor condition they were little more than drift wood. Three gunboats built along the shore plied the lake for three years before they too entered ordinary. Their rapid decay reinforced the earlier, re-

peated finding that local wood good for ship building was in short supply. No frigate was ever laid down. Across the 1820s, the Penetanguishene establishment slowly withered under repeated reductions, in the name of financial restraint. The necessary road from Kempenfelt Bay was only finished after the establishments closure. Its final demise, in 1834, was overshadowed by the plans for the military post adjacent to its vacated spot. His Majesty's Naval Ordinary Establishment at Penetanguishene was never the sheet anchor, or a bastion, of empire it could have been.

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