

# The Re-Establishment of the British Navy on Lake Erie, 1814-1834

**Thomas Malcomson**

*At the conclusion of the War of 1812 the British navy needed to establish a new naval yard on the upper Great Lakes. Penetanguishene became the site for the main establishment, but its isolated location off of Georgian Bay necessitated a naval depot on Lake Erie where the British squadron was anticipated to spend much of its time. This paper examines the selection process resulting in choosing the mouth of the Grand River as the best location from among a less than optimum set of options for the naval dockyard. Elements such as depth of water, the ease of entering the space, what shelter from weather the land provided, the ease of fortifying the area, location of the navy yard along the shore and the site for ship building had to be considered. The convenience of the supporting supply line and its accessibility to enemy incursions were two further points in the decision-making exercise. The life of the naval establishment from conception through its closing in 1834 is described in light of British economic, military defence decisions, and British-American diplomatic agreements.*

*À la fin de la guerre de 1812, la marine britannique devait établir un nouveau chantier naval sur la partie supérieure des Grands Lacs. Penetanguishene est devenu le site du principal établissement, mais son emplacement isolé au large de la baie Georgienne a nécessité un dépôt naval sur le lac Érié où l'escadron britannique devait passer la majeure partie de son temps. Cet article examine le processus de sélection*

*qui a abouti au choix de l'embouchure de la rivière Grand comme meilleur emplacement parmi un ensemble d'options loin d'être optimales pour le chantier naval. Des éléments tels que la profondeur de l'eau, la facilité d'accès à l'espace, l'abri offert par le terrain contre les intempéries, la facilité de fortification de la zone, l'emplacement du chantier naval le long du rivage et le site de construction navale devaient être pris en compte. La commodité de la ligne de ravitaillement de soutien et son accessibilité aux incursions ennemies étaient deux autres points de l'exercice de prise de décision. La vie de l'établissement naval, depuis sa conception jusqu'à sa fermeture en 1834, est décrite à la lumière des décisions britanniques en matière de défense économique, militaire et des accords diplomatiques anglo-américains.*

The events of the War of 1812 around the Great Lakes Region were heavily influenced by whether the Americans or the British controlled the inland seas. After the defeat of the British squadron on Lake Erie on 10 September 1813, the Americans were able to land an unopposed army at Amherstburg, then chase and defeat the retreating British force at the Battle of the Thames on 5 October. This gave the Americans control over the south-west section of Upper Canada, potentially (though never really exploited) threatening the British positions on the Niagara Peninsula and the head of Lake Ontario. Free movement on Lake Erie and Lake Huron gave the Americans the opportunity to retake Fort Mackinac, at the juncture of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. The British had captured the fort on 17 July 1812, and with it the support of the First Nations of the surrounding northwest area.

With the former British navy yard at Amherstburg still under American control, the need to supply the British troops and Indigenous allies at Fort Mackinac was the primary driver to build a new navy yard on the upper lakes. A 110-mile route existed from York, north to Holland River, across Lake Simcoe, overland to Willow Creek, to the Nottawasaga River and on to Georgian Bay. The American effort to retake Mackinac failed and as 1814 closed out the British were beginning to undermine the American domination on the upper lakes.<sup>1</sup> On 12 August 1814, a force of sailors and marines under

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<sup>1</sup> See, R. Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1814* (Toronto, ON: Robin Brass Studio, 1998), 296-7; E. Cruikshank, "An Episode of the War of 1812: The Story of the Schooner Nancy," in *The Defended Border: Upper Canada and the War of 1812*, ed. M. Maslow (Toronto, ON: MacMillan Company, 1964), 143-153; and B. Gough, *Through Water, Ice Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812* (Toronto, ON: Dundurn Group,



Captain Alexander Dobbs' attack on the schooners USS *Ohio*, USS *Somers*, and USS *Porcupine* on 12 August 1814. Only *Porcupine* was able to escape. (Irwin J. Bevan, Mariners' Museum, Norfolk, VA)

Captain Alexander Dobbs, Royal Navy, took the armed schooners *Ohio* and *Somers* off Fort Erie, later sinking them in the Chippawa River, which empties into the Niagara River, as the British had no safe harbour on Lake Erie. A month later, a party of sailors and soldiers under Lieutenant Miller Worsley seized the American schooners *Scorpion* and *Tigress* on Lake Huron (3 and 6 September 1814) and kept them as transports between Georgian Bay and Mackinac. These schooners needed a more developed harbour for maintenance and wintering than what the mouth of the Nottawasaga River could ever provide. At the close of the war, the British constructed two more vessels for the upper lakes, *Tecumseth* and *Newash*. Raising the two captured American vessels from the Chippawa, the British had six vessels on the upper lakes in 1815, but no naval yard.

The major naval establishment on the upper lakes would eventually be located at Penetanguishene, in Gloucester Bay, on the east side of Georgian Bay.<sup>2</sup> The necessity of having a British squadron present on Lake Erie, far to the south, for extended periods required a local site to replenish, repair, and

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2006), 143-54.

<sup>2</sup> T. Malcomson, "The Penetanguishene Decision: To Be a Naval Yard or Not to Be," *Ontario History* 113, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 1-26; and B. Gough, *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay: The War of 1812 and its Aftermath* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell, 2002).

even build vessels.<sup>3</sup> Where *Huron*, *Sauk*, *Newash*, and *Tecumseth* would be tended to on Lake Erie remained a complicated choice throughout 1815 and 1816.

The process of selection and the life of the post-war Lake Erie naval yard is the subject of this paper. The navy yards in use during the War of 1812 have been described in relation to the events that occurred around them.<sup>4</sup> A detailed examination of the establishments and their choice, especially from among a set of options, is not typical of the historiography.<sup>5</sup> Situating a naval establishment in the early nineteenth century was a process with many moving parts. Elements such as depth of water, presence of sand bars or rock reefs, the ease of entering the space, what shelter the land offered from weather, and how it could be fortified to defend the area had to be explored. Where would the navy yard sit along the shore and where was the favoured site for ship building? The convenience of the supporting supply line and its accessibility to enemy incursions were two further points for consideration. These last matters were extremely important in Upper Canada as all the iron fittings and guns, and much of the rope and food supplies, would be transported to whichever location was selected through the main naval yard at Kingston, at the east end of Lake Ontario. Another matter was the local forests: did they provide the type of wood needed to build and repair ships? Not all trees were equally suitable for the task. The cost of building and maintaining the establishment was also a critical factor. These issues converged to influence the selection of the British navy's yard on Lake Erie after the War of 1812, its evolution, and demise.

### **The Context in 1815**

The Treaty of Ghent officially ended the War of 1812 after coming into effect on 17 February 1815. With this peace the British Government had two competing demands concerning its forces in Upper Canada. The first was economical, in that a quick reduction in forces, both army and naval, was required to stop the financial drain that the wars with France and the United States had placed on Great Britain.

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<sup>3</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 16 June 1815. British Military and Naval Records RG 8, C Series [hereafter RG 8], v. 389, mfr. C2936, 111-13, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

<sup>4</sup> For an example of the typical inclusion of the establishment in the narrative of the war, see Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake*; R. Malcomson and T. Malcomson, *HMS Detroit: The Battle for Lake Erie* (St Catharines, ON: Vanwell, 1990), 54-60; and R. Preston, "Broad Pennants at Point Frederick," *Ontario History* 50 (1958): 81-90.

<sup>5</sup> Penetanguishene has received the most analysis, see: Malcomson, "The Penetanguishene Decision"; and Gough, *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay*, chapter 8.

The immediate force reduction began with the withdrawal of seaman from the lakes and troops from Upper and Lower Canada. Twenty-eight thousand sailors and soldiers, including many just returned prisoners-of-war, were sent home from British North America by the fall of 1815.<sup>6</sup> In 1816, the British Government was forced to abolish the property tax as a means of pacifying a revolt by backbenchers over the estimated cost of the army, removing twenty percent of the government's revenue.<sup>7</sup> Nearly half the navy's sailors and officers had been discharged as 1816 began. From a total of 714 ships in 1814 the British navy was reduced to 121 by 1818.

The second demand was the possible renewal of war with the United States and a need to structure a defence force that could keep an invading army at bay until reinforcements arrived from Britain. Tensions persisted along the border between the United States and Upper Canada. The post war exchange of captured areas did not proceed quickly nor without enmity. The Americans hung on to Amherstburg and Fort Malden until the British finally left Fort Mackinac in July 1815.<sup>8</sup> This meant America controlled both sides of the Detroit River, holding the potential to cut off British travel into Lake Huron from Lake Erie. Marauding groups of American soldiers and civilians crossed the Detroit River and plundered British farms.<sup>9</sup> When British officers crossed the river on official duty they were regularly harassed and abused by the citizenry.

In the spring and summer of 1815, American soldiers enticed British troops

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<sup>6</sup> See T. Malcomson, "Commodore Sir Edward W.C.R. Owen: Shaping the British Naval Establishment on the Great Lakes in the Wake of the War of 1812," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2019):1-24 at 9-12. By the end of 1814, the British army had 30,728 troops in Upper and Lower Canada, and another 6,588 in the maritime provinces. See J. MacKay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto, ON: Robin Brass Studio, 1999), 295. The Royal Navy had over 2,155 officers and seamen serving on the Great Lakes at the end of 1814, not including Lake Champlain. See T. Malcomson, "Nationality and Race of the Crews in the Royal Navy on the North American and West Indies Station during the War of 1812 and the Relation to Creating 'Disorder' Aboard Ship" (paper presented at From Enemies to Allies: An International Conference on the War of 1812 and its Aftermath, Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission and the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, USA, 12-16 June 2013).

<sup>7</sup> R. Knight, *Britain Against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory 1793-1815* (London, UK: Alan Lane, 2013), 467-8.

<sup>8</sup> Brock to Murray, 10 April 1815, RG 8, v. 687, mfr. C3231, 211-12, LAC; E. Collier to E. Owen, 5 May 1815; James to McDouall, 25 June 1815, RG 8, v. 688, mfr. C3231, 94-6 and 158-61, respectively, LAC; Drummond to Baker, 30 May 1815, Military Secretary's Letter Book Foster RG 8 [hereafter MSLB-F], v. 1236, mfr. C3524, 7-11, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> James to Cass, 3 September 1815; James to Cass, 5 September 1815; Cass to James, 6 September 1815; and James to Robinson, 11 September 1815, RG 8, v. 167, mfr. C2774, 198-9, 200, 201-2, and 203, respectively, LAC.

and sailors to desert.<sup>10</sup> Nearly one hundred sailors deserted at Kingston in May 1815, many heading to New York State.<sup>11</sup> In early September, Lieutenant Alexander Vidal, while surveying the Detroit River, had four men desert from HMS *Confiance*.<sup>12</sup> Vidal sought them on the American side of the river. He sent one of the men, found drunk in the boat they stole, back to *Confiance*. The Americans, seeing this as pressing a sailor into British service against his will, seized and prosecuted Vidal. He was found guilty and fined.

In October, just before Vidal's release, the Americans at Sackets Harbor impounded the British dock yard schooner *Julia*, sent to purchase hay for the livestock at Point Frederick.<sup>13</sup> Accused of illegal entry, the schooner was stripped down and the matter sent to court. The trial was scheduled to take place at the end of 1816, but the results are unknown. The British merchant vessel *Maria* was also fired upon by the American schooner *Lady of the Lake*, as *Maria* left Niagara for Kingston. *Maria*'s master crowded on as much sail as he could and outran the American in a race the length of Lake Ontario.<sup>14</sup>

On Lake Erie, in November, while searching for information about a British ship-of-war at Amherstburg, the British schooner *Newash* fired a musket to stop the American merchant schooner *Mink*.<sup>15</sup> Even more antagonistic than the official US protests were the American newspapers' perspectives on this and the previous events. They wrote of the barbaric and piratical nature of the British and the need to defend against them. These papers had an enthusiastic audience along the southern shores of the lakes.<sup>16</sup>

To thwart an American attack, in 1815 the British planned to have a limited

<sup>10</sup> Drummond to Baker, 17 June 1815; and Drummond to Baker, 10 August 1815, MSLB-F v. 1236, mfr. C3529, 13-14, and 23-24, respectively, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> E. Owen to Croker, 26 May 1815, Admiralty Captain In-Letters, ADM 1/2263, unpaginated, LAC.

<sup>12</sup> This story is told in the following letters: E. Owen to Commanding Officer of the Troops of the US at Detroit, 5 September 1815, ADM 1/2263, mfr. B2635; Cass to E. Owen, 5 September 1815; E. Owen to Cass, 6 September 1816; E. Owen to Baker, 10 September 1815; E. Owen to Robinson, 10 September, RG 8, v. 167, mfr. C2774, 157-9, 160-3, 173-4, 175, respectively, LAC; Vidal to E. Owen, 6 and 16 October 1815, Colonial Office [hereafter CO] 42/171, unpaginated, 673, mfr. C3171, 215-17, respectively, LAC.

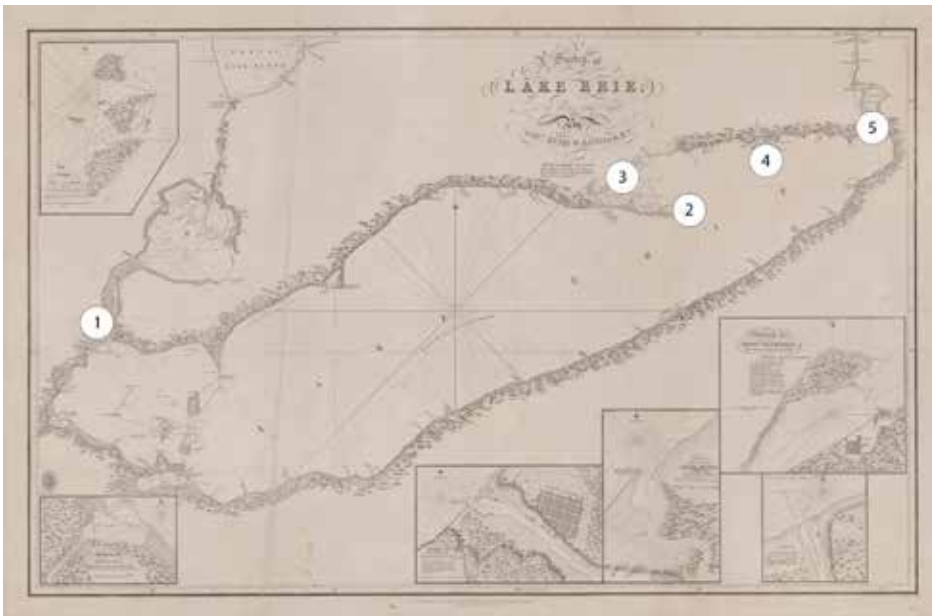
<sup>13</sup> Laws to E. Owen, 21 October 1815 and E. Owen to Baker, 31 October 1815, RG 8, v. 736, mfr. C3244, 35-7, and 33-4, respectively, LAC; E. Owen to Baker, 6 November 1815, CO 42/171, unpaginated, LAC; and Baumgardt to Bagot, 5 September 1816, RG 8, v. 738, mfr. C3245, 141-8, LAC.

<sup>14</sup> Smith to E. Owen, 24 October 1815, RG 8, v. 736, mfr. C3244, 43-4, LAC.

<sup>15</sup> Bushby to Bouchier, 9 November 1815, RG 8, v. 736, mfr. C3245, 114-15, LAC.

<sup>16</sup> E. Owen to Baker, 6 November 1815, RG 8, v. 673, mfr. C3171, 218-26, LAC; W. Owen to Drummond, 10 December 1815, RG 8, v. 736, mfr. C3245, 128-31, LAC; Baumgardt to Bagot, 5 September 1816, RG 8, v. 738, mfr. C3245, LAC.

(but undecided) number of vessels active on the lakes, requiring a sufficient supply of sailors and officers to crew them. Most of the squadron at Kingston would be held in ordinary – the ships stripped down to lower masts, with much of the interior furniture and guns removed and placed in storage. The control of lakes still played a major role in the upper province's defence. Even the Duke of Wellington had supported a dominant naval force on the lakes.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, President James Monroe recognized that the British had gained the support of the First Nations by being the strongest on the lakes at the war's outbreak.<sup>18</sup>



**Key:** 1) Amherstburgh, 2) Long Point, 3) Turkey Point, 4) Mouth of the Grand River, 5) Fort Erie. **Base Map:** Lt. Henry W. Bayfield, *A survey of Lake Erie in the years 1817 & 1818* (London: Hydrographical Office of the Admiralty, 1828)

### The Alternatives for Lake Erie

There were four alternative sites for a new naval yard on Lake Erie. First, was repairing the dockyard and rope walks at Amherstburg, destroyed as the British retreated from that place in September 1813. It provided a good place to build and launch ships into the Detroit River on which the yard was located.

<sup>17</sup> K. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America 1815-1908* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 33.

<sup>18</sup> G. Stanley, *The War of 1812: Land Operations* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan of Canada, 1983), 383.

Fort Malden protected the naval yard, controlling that area of the river. Two central drawbacks for Amherstburg existed. It was at the farthest end of the supply line. Iron elements, and rope came from England, in through the St Lawrence, across Lake Ontario, overland to the east end of Lake Erie and then west, the full length of the lake, a long precarious route. The more concerning problem was if control of the lake was lost Amherstburg became untenable, as had happened during the war.

The second alternative was Fort Erie at the confluence of Lake Erie and the Niagara River, at the eastern end of Lake Erie. It was closer in terms of the supply line, and it too had a fortification to protect shipping and a naval yard. Across the Niagara River was the United States and the town of Buffalo. Fort Erie had been captured twice during the late war and was vulnerable to a repeat of that event. Further, the current flowing into the river from Lake Erie was so strong that a fair wind was necessary for ships to enter into the lake. Some vessels were stranded there for up to forty days. Thus Fort Erie, like Amherstburg, was unsuitable as a naval establishment.

The location for a new naval yard on Lake Erie troubled every British naval commander between 1813 and 1819. Commodore Sir James Yeo, who had arrived in the spring of 1813 to lead the Royal Navy on the Great Lakes, had seen the impact of the loss of naval dominance on Lake Erie, leaving nowhere to build or maintain British vessels. Sir Edward Owen, who replaced Yeo in early 1815, his successor, Sir Robert Hall, and the Admiralty, wrestled with the limited and imperfect alternative choices for a naval establishment on the upper lakes.<sup>19</sup>

Sir James provided Sir Edward with three options: Penetanguishene (off of Georgian Bay), the mouth of the Grand River, and the area between Turkey Point and Long Point, the last two options being on Lake Erie.<sup>20</sup> The Grand River flows into Lake Erie about thirty-three miles west of Fort Erie. Another forty miles further west lay Turkey Point, and the more prominent Long Point, jutting out into the lake just a bit more west, creating a natural anchorage between them. In 1814, General Gordon Drummond, the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, had recommended Turkey Point as the best spot. Sir James Yeo visited both Lake Erie locations after the war, and he too favoured Turkey Point, whereas the commander-in-chief, Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost, wanted to see a full plan of the proposed dockyard before he committed to any site.<sup>21</sup>

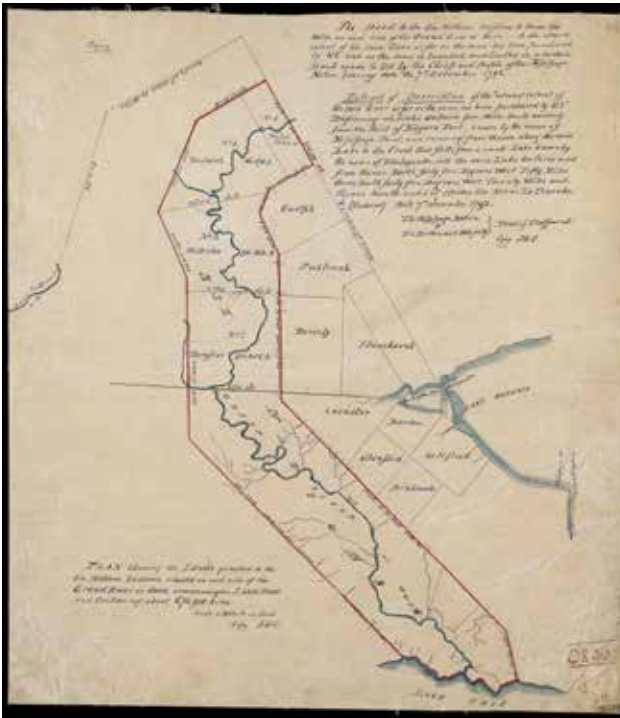
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<sup>19</sup> Malcomson, "Commodore Sir Edward W. C. R. Owen."

<sup>20</sup> Owen to Croker, 4 March 1815, In-Letters, ADM 1/2262, 67-8, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> Drummond to Prevost, 14 February 1815, RG 8, v. 687, mfr. C3231, 108-13, LAC; Prevost to Drummond, 11 June 1814, RG 8, v. 1222, mfr. C3527, 134a, LAC. Sir George Prevost was





Map of the Grand River showing the Haldimand Grant or Haldimand Tract. On 25 October 1784, Sir Frederick Haldimand signed a decree that granted a tract of land – ten kilometres on both sides of the Grand River, from its source to Lake Erie – to the Haudenosaunee/Six Nations as compensation for their alliance with Britain during the American Revolution.

Taking command of the lakes in March 1815, Sir Edward Owen viewed the absence of any government shipping on Lake Erie with which to transport government stores as seriously problematic. Contracting merchant ships on the lake meant using American vessels, as no private British hull sailed on the upper lakes at that time. The two American vessels captured by Commander Alexander Dobbs in August 1814 were re-floated in April 1815, and renamed *Huron* and *Sauk*, but were too small to be effective transports. It was at this point that Owen had *Newash* and *Tecumseth* (both 110-ton transports) constructed for service on Lake Erie.<sup>22</sup> Each would be fitted for two long guns and two carronades, but would not carry them in peacetime to free deck space for cargo and potentially to prevent an incident with American ships. With Drummond's agreement, Owen sent Kingston dockyard commissioner, Sir Robert Hall, and a party of shipwrights to Street's Farm, a mile up the Chippawa River, to

commander-in-chief of British North America from 1811 to 1815.

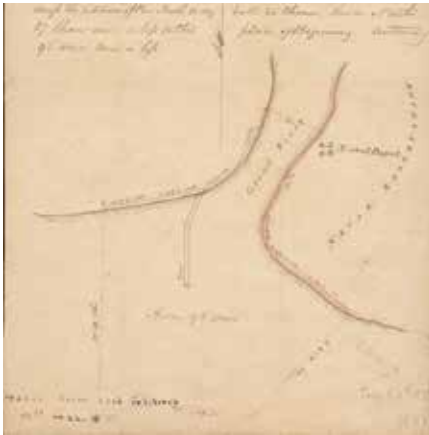
<sup>22</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 4 April 1815, RG 8, v. 734, mfr. C3244, 66-8, LAC; Foster to Murray, 8 April 1815, RG 8, v. 1235, mfr. C3528, 5-6. E, LAC. Owen to Drummond, 14 April 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 11-17, LAC. See Leeanne E. Gordon, "Newash and Tecumseth: Analysis of Two Post-War of 1812 Vessels on the Great Lakes" (MA thesis, Texas AM University, 2009). *Tecumseth* and *Newash* were Indigenous Chiefs who fought with the British during the War of 1812. Tecumseth (also spelt Tecumseh) was killed at the Battle of the Thames in October 1813.

build the ships.<sup>23</sup> Trees along the Chippawa and Niagara Rivers provided the wood, while all iron elements, rigging, and sails came from Kingston's naval supplies.

### **The Surveys of Grand River and Turkey Point/Long Point**

In mid-April 1815, Master John Harris and Quarter-Master John Aldersley were sent to determine which of the two Lake Erie alternatives would serve the navy's needs.<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant-General George Murray sent Lieutenant E. Portlock of the Royal Engineers along to assist in the project.<sup>25</sup> Harris, Aldersley, and Portlock canoed twenty-four miles up the Chippawa River on 22 April, reaching Oswego Creek.<sup>26</sup> They followed the log clogged creek seven miles to Canby Town Mills. They portaged six and half miles, arriving at Mark Thomas' farm on the Grand River on 26 April. If Oswego Creek was cleared of logs and the road improved, the route up the Chippawa was a good way to reach the Grand River.

After a day's rest, the three men began the survey of the Grand River. At their starting spot, the river measured 278 yards across, fourteen feet deep with seven-foot banks. Nearer the river's mouth, three miles below, there were extensive flat banks. The soil was good for growing hemp and the timber of the



The 1815 Chart of the Grand River entrance produced by Master John Harris, Quarter-Master John Aldersley, and the Vidal Marine Survey Department under Captain William Owen, Royal Navy. (Library and Archives Canada)

<sup>23</sup> Note that the Chippawa River is now commonly known as Chippawa Creek.

<sup>24</sup> J. Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot* (Dunnville, ON; Dunnville Historical Society, 2000), 2. Docker names Harris as the captain of HMS *Prince Regent* on Lake Ontario. Actually, he was a ship's master who came out with Sir James Yeo, in the spring of 1813. Henry Davies was the captain of *Prince Regent* and returned to England in 1815. See R. Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake*, 303; and R. Harris and T. Harris (eds.), *The Eldon House Diaries: Five Women's Views of the 19th Century* (Toronto, ON: The Champlain Society, 1994), xxxi-xxxiii.

<sup>25</sup> Foster to Murray, 18 April 1815, RG 8, v. 1234, mfr. C3528, 10, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Harris and Aldersley to E. Owen, 10 June 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 214-6, LAC.

best quality for ship building. The Blue Swamp Oak would be very durable, the Pines were large and thick, good for masts. At the river's mouth, the depth of water close to the bank facilitated ship launching and could be easily defended. This perfect picture was spoiled, however, by the sandbar 480 yards off the river, which allowed only shallow draft vessels to enter. The depth of water at the bar depended on the wind, with the channel over the bar shifting. Though thirty feet of water lay inside the river's mouth, the surveyors noted that the water level was four feet higher than usual.

Harris and Aldersley left the Grand River on 9 May and reached Fort Norfolk, just east of Turkey Point, a day later. On their arrival, eleven soldiers of the 37th Regiment took their canoe and deserted to America. Harris and Aldersley built a new boat to continue their work. This delay and bad weather prevented them from making a thorough examination of the area. They found a deep hole in the bay created by Turkey Point and Long Point, an excellent, easily defended anchorage. As of early June, Long Point had not yet been surveyed, so Harris promised Sir Edward Owen a further account of the area, when that work was finished.

Receiving this first report, Sir Edward wrote Sir Gordon Drummond, indicating that he could not decide on where to place the establishment on Lake Erie.<sup>27</sup> Owen stated the Grand River was an essential transportation route into the lake and would need to be developed and fortified. He suggested building a road from Burlington to the Grand River. Sir Gordon, now Governor-in-Chief, responded to Sir Edward, asking for a copy of the final report and any maps.<sup>28</sup> He was encouraging, offering whatever help might be needed to push forward the establishment's development. Sir Gordon did indicate a hesitancy to secure the land that would be needed for building a naval yard on the Grand River, since he understood it belonged to the Six Nations of the Grand. Drummond posited, "These Tribes are much more cautious and cunning than their more Savage Brethren, from their more frequent intercourse with Europeans, and are perfectly well aware of the very great value of that extensive track of fine Country which they possess." He suggested less area around the road to Burlington might make it easier for the Haudenosaunee to part with a portion of their land. Drummond referred the question of dealing with the Six Nations to Commissary-General Sir William Robinson. The question of cost was given to Colonel William Claus, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at York, to

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<sup>27</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 16 June 1815, RG 8, v. 389, mfr. C2936, 111-3, LAC.

<sup>28</sup> Drummond to E. Owen, 24 June 1815, RG 8, v. 1228, mfr. C3527, 151-2, LAC; and Gibson to Foster, 19 July 1815, RG 8, v. 232, mfr. C2845, 145-8, LAC. Sir Gordon Drummond became acting governor-in-chief from 1815 to 1816.

ascertain the answer.<sup>29</sup>

John Aldersley wrote a full report on the two potential navy yard sites on 20 July.<sup>30</sup> He referred to the road between Canby Town and the Grand River as little more than a path used by the Haudenosaunee. Their canoe was so battered during the portage that the day of rest at Thomas's farm was really a day to repair the canoe. Aldersley largely repeated Harris' report about the Grand River area. He conjectured that a thirty-gun ship could be taken over the sand bar, if emptied. He suggested the construction of two wharfs, or piers, through the sand bar, restricting the channel of water flowing from the river and washing out the sand bar between the piers. There was an abundance of Blue Swamp Oak, Beech, Ash, Hickory, and Butternut, all good for ship building. Aldersley recorded the presence of gypsum that yielded a plaster of Paris as good as that found in England.

Aldersley went up every creek west of the Grand River to Nanticoke Creek. The timber was inferior compared to the Grand River area. But the pines found around Dover, Patterson's, and Black Creeks were of "immense sizes Sufficiently large to make masts for ships of the largest class." Some pines up Black Creek measured fifteen feet in circumference, six feet off the ground, and were 130 feet tall. They stood close to the very broad creek and would have been easy to fell and float out to the lake. Aldersley was vexed over two "evil practices" carried on in the forests of Upper Canada. The first, was the hewing of large cuts in the trunks of the pines to allow for the extraction of resin. When the resin stopped at one cut another would be made to continue the flow, ultimately killing the trees. The second, was the harvesting of the

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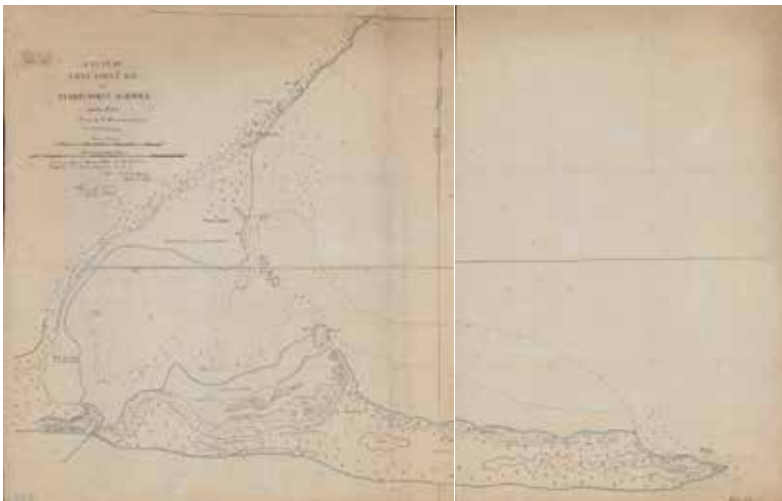
<sup>29</sup> Gibson to Foster, 19 July 1815, RG 8, v. 232, mfr. C2845, 145-8, LAC. In 1784, as a reward for their service to the crown against the rebellious colonies that formed the United States, the Six Nations, the Haudenosaunee, living in central New York State were given two tracts of land in Upper Canada. One area was along the Bay of Quinte, close to Kingston, the other was the land six miles either side of the Grand River from Lake Erie to its headwaters. The offer would remove the Haudenosaunee, who chose to leave, from American retribution and would bring a strong British ally within the British border, allowing the opportunity to call on their assistance in future conflicts. The members of the Six Nations who crossed over from the United States into Upper Canada consisted of Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Seneca tribes. During the War of 1812 the Six Nations of the Grand River fought with the British to repel American incursions into the province. See, for instance, Haldimand to Johnson, 23 March 1784, RG 1-1, Correspondence and Memoranda received by the Survey General's Office [hereafter RG 1-1], Reel MS7422, 106, Archives of Ontario (AO); Williams, 4 January 1791, RG 1-1, Reel MS7422, 141-2, AO; C. Klinck and J. Talman (eds.), *Journal of Major Norton 1809-16* (Toronto, ON: The Champlain Society, 1970), xcix- ciii; and C. Benn (ed.), *A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812: John Norton – Teyoninhokarawen* (Toronto, ON: University of the Toronto, 2019), 39-42.

<sup>30</sup> Adlersley to W. Owen, 20 July 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 30-7, LAC.

largest trees (the ones best for masts), and using them for simple construction purposes, when smaller trees would suffice. He urged the prevention of both practices.

Long Point also had good timber, including White and Red Oak, Blue Swamp Oak (the best to date), Hickory, Black Oak, Beech and Butternut. With the lake levels being four feet higher than normal much of the low-lying shoreline around Turkey Point and Long Point was flooded. The areas where marshes usually thrived were under water. Stands of tall Red and White Cedar, and Black Walnut were seen from a distance, but the high water prevented close examination. Along the beach, on the west shore of Long Point, Aldersley found turtles and their eggs, in large numbers. Dark grey slate, like he had seen around Yorkshire coal mines, and coal that burnt with a strong sulphur odour were also present.

As for a naval establishment, Aldersley assessed the only viable site to be Turkey Point, near the deep hole in the bay. The bar at the mouth of the bay had three to sixteen feet of water over it and could be reduced more by creating a narrow channel through it, easily admitting the largest ships on the lakes to the anchorage. The bay provided an excellent harbour and the surrounding country had all the resources needed to build ships. The only problem was the area for the dockyard was currently under two feet of water.<sup>31</sup>



A Plan of Long Point and Turkey Point Harbour, Lake Erie, 1815. (Library and Archives Canada)

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<sup>31</sup> Aldersley to W. Owen, 20 July 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 30-7, LAC.

Captain William Owen read Aldersley's report and wrote his brother, Sir Edward, about the choice.<sup>32</sup> He added the idea of building a canal from Canby Mills to the Grand River. He agreed the sand bar at Grand River was a major obstacle and that piers running out some 600 yards from the shore, through the bar and into the lake, would facilitate its erosion. He noted that "immense Cranberries swamps" just east of the Grand River's mouth offered protection from a flanking attack. But he saw the absence of a settler population as a problem.

William preferred the Turkey Point/Long Point area for the naval establishment. He claimed the harbour to be "one of the finest in the World for its dimensions, and it offers situations for works to any extent as an Arsenal." Establishing the yard there would require building a wharf and "land piers" as a foundation for a dockyard.

Captain Owen reminded Sir Edward that the Grand River area had been given to the Six Nations and would have to be purchased from them. The Long Point/Turkey Point area was available, except for an island granted to Colonel Ryerson. Rushby Island and several spots around Turkey Bay could be easily fortified to defend the harbour. William Owen suggested filling in the space between Long Point and Ryerson's and Rushby Islands, creating more protection from both wind and enemy incursions. The marshes throughout the area posed a health concern, but he thought the south-westerly wind, blowing over the isthmus of Long Point, removed "all exhalations so soon as formed," making it a very healthy place.

Captain Owen proposed extending the road that ran from Fort Norfolk to form a bank along Long Point. Where the lake had eroded a cut through the point, a bridge could be formed and piers set out into the lake allowing vessels to enter the bay from the west. He too remarked on the presence of coal along Long Point and iron ore around Charlotteville, just north of Fort Norfolk, as well as salt and sulphur springs.<sup>33</sup>

Fort Norfolk sat on the bluff overlooking the east end of Turkey Point, an earthen work with buildings within. The garrison included the First Royal Scots, with a captain, three lieutenants, five sergeants, two drummers, and 106 rank and file, and the Canadian Dragoons, with a captain, an ensign, two sergeants, two drummers, and twenty-seven rank and file. Sixty militia volunteers filled out the fort's force.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, the Grand River location

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<sup>32</sup> W. Owen to E. Owen, 20 July 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 38-48, LAC. William Owen was Sir Edward's brother who had been sent to British North America in 1815 to survey the Great Lakes.

<sup>33</sup> W. Owen to E. Owen, 20 July 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 38-48, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> General Weekly Distribution Return of troops forming the Right Division of the Army under

would require the construction and manning of a suitable fortification.

Two days later, John Aldersley sent William Owen an estimate of the wood and fill required to build a raised dockyard at Turkey Point.<sup>35</sup> It included building a site to construct four ships at a time, piling around eight acres of land, building up the area within, on which the dockyard would be built. Two acres would be a raised wooden platform and six acres would be filled with earth and stone, all to the height of six feet above the current water level. This would require 13,260 piles (265,360 cubic feet of wood), 261,360 cubic feet to terrace the two acres with oak and beech, and 116,160 yards of earth and stone for the six acres. No price for this massive project was given. Aldersley sent Commodore Owen samples of the Bog Ore, noting it produced, “iron of the very best quality,” along with local wood.

### **The Decision for the Grand River Site**

These remarks initiated an exchange between Sir Edward Owen and Governor-in-Chief Drummond about where to establish the dockyard.<sup>36</sup> Both agreed that while the Turkey Point/Long Point area seemed best, the idea of constructing the raised building site first, followed by the dockyard, was simply too costly, given the “infant state of the Upper Province.” At the time of this exchange, Sir Edward was on Lake Erie and had examined both locations. By the end of his trip, he favoured the Grand River. Both sites had strengths and weaknesses, but the financial considerations made the Grand River location the only plausible option. Owen’s recommendation and the reports were sent to the Admiralty for the final decision.

In the meantime, Commodore Owen ordered Captain William Bouchier, commanding on Lake Erie, to examine the Grand River for wintering the squadron.<sup>37</sup> Sir Edward instructed him to build five log huts for the officers, seamen, soldiers, and artificers that would be sent there. Until a final decision was taken, the buildings were to be made as inexpensively as possible. The commodore named the bay east of the river, Mohawk Bay, and requested Bouchier find within it a suitable anchorage. Sir Edward specifically noted an

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General Riall, 8 February 1814, RG 8, v. 1709, mfr. C3840, 43, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Aldersley to W. Owen, 22 July 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 49-51, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> E. Owen to Drummond, 15 August 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 59-60a, LAC; and Drummond to E. Owen, 24 August 1815, RG 8, v. 1228, mfr. C3527, 305-7, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> E. Owen to Bouchier, 15 August 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 52-8, LAC. Docker states that Bouchier was commanding the naval establishment at Turkey Point, but at the time there was no naval establishment there, Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 8. The Royal Navy on Lake Erie, in 1813, did collect fifty seamen sent by Sir James Yeo at Long Point, but there was not a naval depot at that spot.

unnamed island offshore that protected ships from most directions. Bouchier was required to report his observations under different weather conditions. He was to examine the bar across the river mouth to determine the best way over it and mark that entrance with buoys. To go over the bar the vessels would have to be lightened.

Owen directed Bouchier and Mr. Moore, the Deputy Ship Builder, to examine a spot near Rocky Point, at the west end of Mohawk Bay, for ship building. They were to determine the size of ship possible to build there, if launched stern first (as was usual), and bow foremost (offering the more buoyant end into the water first). Bouchier explored the creeks leading into the Grand River to find the reported gypsum and a rumoured vein of pigment, usable as chalk, or paint base.<sup>38</sup>

If the Grand River was not suitable for wintering the squadron, Bouchier was to leave the *Sauk* there and winter the rest of the squadron at Turkey Point. Officers and the crews would inhabit the Fort Norfolk barracks. Wherever they wintered, enough stores were to be carried there and accommodations arranged. As August was drawing to an end, Bouchier decided to winter the squadron at Turkey Point.

In October 1815, Sir Edward ordered Bouchier to build a storehouse at Grand River, when time permitted, but to keep costs down. Guards were to be placed to protect the stores from theft. The *Newash* and *Tecumseth* were to be altered, the former to a Brigantine rig, the latter to have the fore topsail yard lowered and receive *Newash's* schooner sails. Owen allowed Bouchier to build boats and bateaux as required. Commissariat stores were to be drawn from Fort Erie, Canby Town, or Burlington depending on the weather and ease of transporting the goods. When navigation opened in the spring of 1816 the ships would carry supplies, as needed, to the various British naval and military posts in the upper lakes. Officers were to keep a log of navigation with soundings, observations, and surveys, copies of which were to be sent to Kingston. Bouchier himself was to visit all parts of Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair River to make notes on navigation. The squadron was to work with the Collector of Customs to prevent smuggling.<sup>39</sup>

William Robinson wrote Claus that Sir Edward wanted to establish the navy at the mouth of the Grand River, assumed to be held by the Six Nations.<sup>40</sup> Before Claus could look into the matter, it came to light that William Dickson, a lawyer and member of the provincial legislature from Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake), had received the land from the Six Nations, negating the need

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<sup>38</sup> E. Owen to Bouchier, 15 August 1815, RG 8, v. 370, mfr. C2932, 52-8, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> E. Owen to Bouchier, 12 October 1815, RG 8, v. 736, mfr. C3244, 23-9, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson to Claus, 15 July 1815, RG 8, v. 1325, mfr. C3548, 5, LAC.



to treat with them for its purchase.<sup>41</sup> The Naval Establishment was placed on Dickson's land. John Docker describes the three parcels of land as consisting of thirty acres on Mohawk Bay, thirty-three acres at Barbet Point, at the west end of Mohawk Bay, and 232 acres mainly on the east side of the Grand River's mouth.<sup>42</sup> In early October, Bouchier wrote Sir Edward that five huts were being built at the Grand River.<sup>43</sup> He requested assistance in paying for the workers and the oxen used in hauling materials.

### **Potential Plans, A Road to Burlington, and the First Signs of Restraint**

Sir Edward Owen returned to England in November 1815. Tapped to replace him was Kingston Naval Yard Commissioner Sir Robert Hall. Hall had travelled to London, England in the summer of 1815 to consult with the Admiralty on the redevelopment of the British navy on the lakes. After Sir Edward left and in Hall's absence, Captain William Owen and then Commander William Baumgardt held temporary command over the naval forces in Upper Canada. During their tenures, progress on construction slowed awaiting Hall's return with the Admiralty's instructions. Not everyone supported pouring money into the defence of Canada. Rear Admiral Sir David Milne, appointed as commander-in-chief of the North American Station, thought the expense to be more than the worth of the colony.<sup>44</sup>

As of 1 May 1816, the British Naval Forces and Civil Establishments on the Great Lakes included Captain William Bouchier commanding the Lake Erie portion, with Lieutenant Thomas Bushby in *Newash*, Lieutenant Henry Kent in *Tecumseth*, both rated for four guns, Lieutenant James Jackson in *Huron*, and Lieutenant George Sarratt in *Sauk*, each rated for one gun.<sup>45</sup> The Lake Erie Naval Establishment listed 137 men in total, with 108 victualled in the books of

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<sup>41</sup> Addison to Laws, 3 March 1818, Sherbrooke Letter Book, R2513-7-8-9-E 174-5, LAC; and Indenture between George IV of the United Kingdom and William Dickson of Niagara for 4000 acres of land on the Grand River with exceptions for Naval purposes, 9 October 1820, Sub-Series B. Land Documents 1798-1857, box 4\_11.pdf, Retrieved on 12 July 2022 from <http://hdl.handle.net/10464/9000>, Archives and Special Collections, Brock University.

<sup>42</sup> Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> E. Owen to Laws, 22 October 1815; and Bouchier to E. Owen, 12 October 1815, extra, 2160.2, box 1 file 2, unpaginated, Queen's University Archive (QUA).

<sup>44</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 16.

<sup>45</sup> W. Owen, 1 May 1816, Statement of HMS Naval Forces and Civil Establishments on the Lakes of Canada, RG 8, v. 737, mfr. C3245, 115-6, LAC. Docker gives the number of people on the establishment as 187, but this does not correspond to this document, which is the one he cited in Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 13: A Statement of His Majesty's naval Force and Civil Establishment on the Great Lakes of Canada, 1 May 1816, RG 8, v. 737, mfr. C3245 115-6, LAC.

the four vessels. The yard employed eight men: two naval storekeeper clerks, a quarter-man of the shipwrights, and some artificers. None of the vessels had their armament aboard, the guns sat ashore at the mouth of the Grand River. Just as well, as the carronade slides were in need of replacement, first noted by Sir Edward when he visited Lake Erie.<sup>46</sup> Four gunboats were constructed in 1816 and kept by the yard's wharf.

Transportation on the upper lakes was becoming a problem for the military as the naval vessels were often unavailable when the army required them. The quarter-master general of the commissariat asked Captain Bouchier about purchasing a vessel for military use at Amherstburg.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, should one be built by the British or purchased from the Americans? Three schooners were under construction at Presque Isle, Pennsylvania. The need for constant movement of supplies to Colonel Robert McDouall in the British post at Drummond Island, at the head of Lake Huron, necessitated that something be done. As Bouchier was about to visit the American ship building yard, William Owen told him and now General Drummond, the acting commander-in-chief, that enough vessels existed on Lake Erie and Lake Huron, between the British navy and American merchant vessels, that no new vessel was required.<sup>48</sup> He protested that the navy was available to carry military goods and reinforcements. Owen informed Drummond that the master of the ship was the one to sign off on cargo coming aboard and not the commanding officer. Perhaps, he offered, this was the root of the military's sense of being rebuffed by the navy – they were not asking the right people.

At the same time, questions were raised again about transportation from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie.<sup>49</sup> Bouchier held that a road from Burlington to Warner Nellis' Settlement on the Grand River was the best option. One already existed, and only needed repair and widening to make it good. A road would be built along the bank of the river thirteen miles south until it reached the foot of the rapids, eighteen miles from the mouth of the river. At this point, items or men could be put in boats and easily carried downstream. The route would shave off some thirteen miles from the current route via the Niagara River to Queenston, portaging to Chippawa River, up to Oswego Creek, and then overland to the Grand River. Major Montgomery, who raised the question of a new route, thought that as the Americans occupied the mouth of

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<sup>46</sup> De Waterville to Dixon, 13 July 1816, RG 8, v. 1325, mfr. C3548, 318, LAC; and Gibson to Dixon, 6 October 1815, 8, v. 1325, mfr. C3548, 105, LAC.

<sup>47</sup> Bouchier to Dover, 2 March 1816, RG 8, v. 737, mfr. C3245, 88-91, LAC.

<sup>48</sup> W. Owen to Drummond, 21 April 1816, RG 8, v. 737, mfr. C3245, 190-2, LAC.

<sup>49</sup> Bouchier to Dover, 2 March 1816, RG 8, v. 737, mfr. C3245, 88-91, LAC; and Bouchier to W. Owen, 2 March 1816, RG 8, v. 738, mfr. C3245, 69-70, LAC.

the Chippawa in the late war, certainly the Burlington road would be just as easily taken. Bouchier responded that the Americans failed to venture very far into the peninsula and that the road would be safe. Bouchier failed to recall the 1813 Battle of Stoney Creek, a short distance from the Burlington road, and the American mill burning raids close to the Grand River in 1814.<sup>50</sup> The Grand River and the proposed road to Burlington were not as removed from the American reach as the naval officer reckoned.

Bouchier travelled to Burlington in May 1816 and returned via Forty Mile Creek.<sup>51</sup> He preferred Burlington as the military had store houses on the south side of the Little Lake (now Burlington Bay), which was separated from Lake Ontario by a sand bar. From the south, running towards the north this sand bar was well above the water and wide, but at the north end it dropped and the water ran over the bar to almost three feet. Bouchier believed bateaux could enter over the bar at this point and carry goods from ships in Lake Ontario to the store houses on the south shore of the Little Lake, next to the road to the Grand River. The whole was judged to be easily defended. The Forty Mile Creek was closed off in the summer by a sandbar and a road would have to be constructed through a large area of swamp. Sir Edward Owen had suggested building a pier at the Forty Mile Creek's mouth to alleviate the sand bar.<sup>52</sup> Both Bouchier and Hall dismissed this notion, choosing Burlington.

In July 1816, the Admiralty told Hall that it wanted to set up the frames of four frigates, rated forty guns each, at the Lake Erie Naval Establishment.<sup>53</sup> They would be built as flush single deck brigs and left on the stocks. This would allow an additional deck to be built over the original one, transforming them into two deck frigates. Such a venture would require a significant increase in shipwrights and carpenters at the establishment. All items, except lumber, would come from England and be sent up from Kingston, necessitating a decision on the route from Lake Ontario to the Grand River. Unbeknownst to the Admiralty, British counsellor to the United States, Sir Charles Bagot, and American Secretary of State James Monroe, who were negotiating a limitation on armed ships on the Great Lakes, had agreed to no warship construction.<sup>54</sup> This would ultimately scuttle the Admiralty's secret plan.

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<sup>50</sup> William Wood, *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812, Volume 3, Part 1* (Toronto: Toronto Champlain Society, 1926), 287-288. See also Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 149-51, and 219.

<sup>51</sup> Bouchier to W. Owen, 14 May 1816, RG 8, v. 738, mfr. C3245, 83-6, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Hall to Sherbrooke, 8 January 1817, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 1-3, LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Peake, Legge Middleton to Hall, 11 July 1816, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 90-1, LAC; and Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 17-18.

Throughout 1815 and into early 1816, the Lake Erie Naval Establishment used a storehouse at the mouth of the Chippawa River from which the men working at the Grand River drew supplies. By May the Grand River storehouse was complete and all supplies were forwarded there for storage and use for the ships and men.<sup>55</sup> The *Newash* took on victuals for twenty-eight days for forty men, and its commander, Lieutenant Thomas Bushby, was given the “necessary money” to procure food as the vessel cruised around the lake beyond the time frame for which it was victualed.<sup>56</sup> The establishment also purchased food from local farmers, butter and cheese from Warner Nelles, and beef from John Sharpe.<sup>57</sup>

In June 1816, Major-General Louis Charles de Watteville, commander-in-chief in Upper Canada, informed military secretary Lieutenant Hall that the Six Nations, consisting of 1,428 people, were short of food and had requested the government feed them for a month. De Watteville asked if the Grand River Establishment could send some food to them. If they did and what they sent is unknown. A month later he wrote again to Lieutenant Hall noting a complaint from the military stationed at Grand River over the poor quality of provisions at the establishment. Provisions would become an ongoing problem in the years ahead.<sup>58</sup>

Sir Robert Hall returned to Canada in September 1816 to assume command as commissioner of the Naval Establishment on the Great Lakes. The Admiralty confirmed Grand River as the site for the Lake Erie Naval Establishment.<sup>59</sup> Cutting through the sand bar was left to the military’s chief engineer to carry out. With the navy’s decision, the military recommended that a strong fortification be erected for the facility’s defence.<sup>60</sup> The focus on a Grand River-Burlington road was cemented by Sir Robert’s request that the army relinquish to the navy the abandoned military storehouse at Burlington so that naval supplies could

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<sup>55</sup> Irwin to Burton, 24 May 1816, RG 8, v1847, mfr. C3873, 322-3, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Bushby and Hipinley, approved by Bouchier, 1 May 1816, RG 8, v. 1847, mfr. C3873, 456, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> Irwin to Naval Agent Victualling Kingston, 6 August 1816; and Irwin to Grifford, 1 October 1816, RG 8, v. 1847, mfr. C3873, 536, and 593, respectively, LAC.

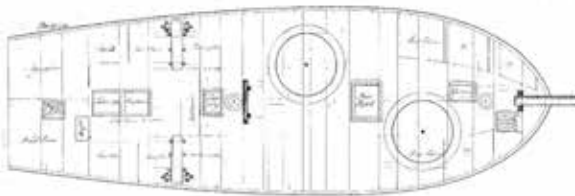
<sup>58</sup> De Watteville to Hall, 25 June 1816 and 11 July 1816, RG 8, v. 1325, mfr. C3548, 311 and 315, respectively, LAC. This population number is much lower than that of 1814, when there were 1,702 of the Six Nations and thirty-two other Mississaugas, reflecting losses in combat during the war, and death from disease and starvation. See Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812*, 300.

<sup>59</sup> Croker to Goulburn, 6 September 1816, Q 138, State Papers Lower Canada, Governor Sir G. Drummond, mfr. C11922, 99, LAC.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson to Drummond, 16 September 1815, RG 8, v. 1325, mfr. C3548, 79, LAC.

go through there to the Grand River Establishment.<sup>61</sup> A minute on the back of Hall's letter released them to the navy. Robert Hall proposed settling seamen seeking land grants for their service in Canada along the upgraded Burlington road and the new shoreline road, down the Grand River.<sup>62</sup> He offered twenty-one names of men wanting such grants. Lieutenant-Governor Francis Gore liked the idea and agreed to settling the men as suggested. But no one could settle along the river without the land being bought from the Six Nations and that could only happen with His Majesty's Government's approval.<sup>63</sup> This was not forthcoming.

By the fall of 1816, the Lake Erie naval element dropped to sixty-nine officers, seamen, and marines. Lieutenant Bushby, commanding *Newash*, had an assistant surgeon, a midshipman, a quarter-master, two quarter-master mates, one able seamen, five ordinary seamen, and one landsman, with one marine sergeant and two privates.<sup>64</sup> The *Tecumseth* was commanded by Lieutenant Henry Kent with a crew consisting of a quarter-master, a surgeon, a gunner's mate, a quarter-master's mate, one able seaman, three ordinary seamen, and one landsman, along with a marine sergeant and five privates.<sup>65</sup> As of 16 September 1816, Lieutenant William Whitehead temporarily replaced Bouchier as commander on the Lake Erie Establishment sailing on the *Tecumseth*. In October 1816, Bushby was moved to the *Sauk*, whose crew consisted of a quarter-master, master's mate, an assistant surgeon, a boatswain's mate, three able seamen, two ordinary seaman, a landsman, a marine sergeant, a corporal,



Construction draft for *Newash* and *Tecumseth*, prepared by Shipwright Robert Moore. (The National Archives)

<sup>61</sup> Hall to Sherbrooke, 20 November 1816, RG 8, v. 738, mfr. C3245, 173-4, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Hall to Smith, 18 June 1817, Civil Secretary's Correspondence, Upper Canada, RG 5 A 1, [hereafter: RG 5], v. 32, 15518-26, LAC; and Smith to Hall, 30 June 1817, RG 8, v. 623, mfr. C3158, 90-1, LAC. Sir Francis Gore served as lieutenant governor of Upper Canada from 1815 to 1817.

<sup>63</sup> Tensions between the Six Nations of the Grand River and Upper Canada's colonial government existed from the initial grant by Haldimand and persisted beyond 1840 when the civil authorities forced a reduction of the tract. Both the Crown and Government in London wished to honour the original deal but the colonial government and particular people within Upper Canada worked to undermine the arrangement. See Klinck and Talman, *Journal of John Norton*, c-cxi; and Benn, *A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812*, 64-70, 277-80, and 287-92.

<sup>64</sup> Pay List HM Brigantine *Newash*, 30 September 1816, ADM 42/2173, 114, The National Archives (TNA), Kew

<sup>65</sup> Pay List of HMS *Tecumseth*, 30 September 1816, ADM 42/2173, 116, TNA.



Illustration of the Grand River Ordinary in 1817. (Courtesy of Peter Rindlisbacher)

and six privates.<sup>66</sup> The crew of the schooner *Huron* included Lieutenant James Jackson, a quarter-master, an assistant surgeon, an able seaman, one ordinary seaman, three landmen, a sergeant of marines, a corporal, and seven privates.<sup>67</sup> These vessels were “used principally to carry HM’s Servants and stores from Post to Post.”<sup>68</sup> The naval yard added more buildings, including barracks for seamen and soldiers, housing for officers, clerks, two more storehouses, a cook house, and a saw pit.

At the outset of 1817, the Royal Navy’s Captain Daniel Pring commanded at Grand River. He and his wife organized a Fête that drew guests from as far away as York. The revellers were treated to a lengthy dinner, a play, and dancing through to the morning. The affair received coverage in the *Kingston Gazette* and the *Quebec Mercury*. For a moment, the isolated rough frontier depot took on the trappings of a fine country home, with decorations, including cut trees, creating a laneway to bring diners to the theatre, the women being conveyed there in sleds, drawn by the seamen. Bonfires, musicians, and plenty of wine and liquor helped all stay warm and enjoy the night.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Pay List for HMS *Sauk*, 31 December 1816, ADM 42/2173, 90-2, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> Pay List for HMS *Huron*, 32 December 1816, ADM 42/2173, 87-8, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> Baumgardt to Bagot, 5 September 1816, RG 8, v.738, mfr. C3245, 137-40, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> “Naval Fete at the Grand River,” *Kingston Gazette*, 15 March 1817, 2; and Docker, *Grand*

Earlier in 1817, the Admiralty sanctioned the request by Henry Goulburn, under secretary of state for war and colonies, that ordnance and ordnance supplies ordered for the Great Lakes Establishment be left at Quebec.<sup>70</sup> This immediately reduced the transportation costs in the colony and kept the items ready for return to Britain. In May, the Admiralty took another significant shift, ordering Commissioner Hall to pay off all the Great Lake vessels, send the seamen and marines to England, and leave the stores behind, unguarded.<sup>71</sup> Hall anticipated that the stores would disappear in short order as locals helped themselves to the navy's wood, cordage, iron fittings and other items of use along the frontier. He wrote to John Croker, first secretary to the admiralty, suggesting retaining some vessels and assigning a permanent marine guard to the storehouses. In the meantime, Hall wrote Governor-in-Chief Sir John Sherbrooke asking for a company of soldiers for the depot at Grand River, whom he would victual as the commissariat-general ordered. Hall sent a subaltern and twenty men. The Admiralty decided to keep one vessel ready to carry troops across Lake Ontario, not to man it, but hire a crew when used. Hall suggested to Sherbrooke that the governor hire a crew for the vessel. Sir Robert noted the possibility of contracting the steamboat *Frontenac*.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Grand River Establishment Becomes an Ordinary, 1817**

The effort to negotiate a limit of warships on the Great Lakes ended in the Rush-Bagot Agreement.<sup>73</sup> Each country could have four armed 100 ton vessels, with one 18 pounder cannon, one each on Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario and two on the upper lakes, dismantling all others. This caused the Admiralty to change its mind and keep the allowed vessels on the Great Lakes. The terms of the Rush-Bagot agreement were forwarded to Hall on 20 December 1817.<sup>74</sup>

But reductions had already started on the upper lakes. *Tecumseth* and

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*River Naval Depot*, 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> Barrow to Goulburn, 15 February 1817, RG 8, v739, mfr. C3245, 9-10, LAC.

<sup>71</sup> Barrow to Hall, 10 March 1817; Hall to Sherbrooke, 30 May 1817; 31 May 1817; and 12 June 1817, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 59, 52-4, 55-8, and 64-6, respectively, LAC; and Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 20-1.

<sup>72</sup> Barrow to Hall, 10 March 1817; Hall to Sherbrooke, 30 May 1817; 31 May 1817; and 12 June 1817, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 59, 52-4, 55-8, and 64-6, respectively, LAC; and Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 20-1.

<sup>73</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 17-18.

<sup>74</sup> Sherbrooke to Hall, 20 December 1817, Sherbrooke Letter Book v.1 misc. correspondence 1815-1818, R2513-7-9-E, [hereafter: SLB], 370, LAC. Sir John Sherbrooke served as governor-in-chief from 1816 to 1818. See also A. Burt, *The United States Great Britain and British North America; From the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace After the War of 1812* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 388-95.

*Newash* were sent north to Penetanguishene in June 1817, stripped of their sails, rigging, supplies, and internal furnishings, and housed over.<sup>75</sup> The smaller schooners *Surprise* and *Confiance* were sent from Penetanguishene to join *Sauk* and *Huron* on Lake Erie, where all four schooners were similarly placed into ordinary. With the *Tecumseh* and *Newash* sent north, Pring and his wife returned to England.

This change reduced the number of seamen at Grand River to fourteen. Bushby was now the lieutenant superintending what was renamed the Grand River Ordinary.<sup>76</sup> He had an assistant surgeon, an assistant gunner, a boatswain, a boatswain's mate, a quarter-master, four able seamen, one ordinary seaman, and three landsmen. The yard employed twelve people in 1817, Edmund Burton the clerk, a quarter-man of the shipwrights, six shipwrights, two blacksmiths, and two sawyers. On 1 August 1817, two able seamen and the ordinary seaman deserted. From the supernumerary list for victuals and wages, consisting of ten able seamen, one died in September, and four ran on 10 August 1817. The marines were replaced by an ensign, a sergeant, one corporal, and eleven privates of the 7th Regiment, one of which, Private Robinson, had his wife Ann with him in the soldiers' barracks. By year's end, two more able seamen were discharged, and two landsmen arrived from Kingston.<sup>77</sup> Three recruits from Lower Canada ran on 18 October 1817. From the supernumeraries list, two others were discharged, leaving only three men. The soldiers were replaced in December by a sergeant, a corporal, and eight privates of the 7th Regiment, from Fort George. These numbers remained constant through the next few years.

Even with this downsizing on the upper lakes and greater reductions at Kingston, the financial costs were of a continuing concern in Britain.<sup>78</sup> Hall began to view the naval establishment as far too expensive. As a result of the Rush-Bagot Agreement, domination of the Great Lakes at the outbreak of war would fall into the American hands simply because of the close proximity of the materials needed to build and outfit ships of war. For Hall, the Great Lakes had morphed into a "millstone round our necks."<sup>79</sup>

Hall accused Yeo and Sir Edward Owen of spending too much of the Crown's purse. Strict limitations were now required.<sup>80</sup> To this end, a number of measures were adopted, including not allowing any depot commander to

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<sup>75</sup> Gordon, "Newash and Tecumseth," 81.

<sup>76</sup> Muster Table for the Lake Erie Ordinary, 30 September 1817, ADM 38/2297, 1-5, TNA.

<sup>77</sup> Muster Table for the Lake Erie Ordinary, 31 December 1817, ADM 38/2297, 7-15, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 21-2.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 23.



hire replacements if men quit, died, or deserted.<sup>81</sup> Only Hall could sanction the expense of replacements. He cautioned that government stores were to be properly cared for, specifically calling out the clerk at Grand River for “shamefully” neglecting the storehouse.<sup>82</sup> Edward Laws, assisting Hall, reported to the Navy Board that the Lake Erie accounts failed to appear in time to be sent home in October 1817.<sup>83</sup>

The Admiralty withdrew the navy’s medical personnel from the Great Lakes, instructing Hall that the army would care for the navy’s sick and injured.<sup>84</sup> This arrangement worked well on Lake Ontario, where sick seamen could be sent ashore at Kingston, York, or Fort George to receive medical care, or a physician could come out to the ship. With no physician at Fort Erie, the seventy-six miles separating Grand River and Fort George ruled out the army caring for the seamen, so a naval assistant-surgeon was kept at Grand River.<sup>85</sup> As to the troops temporarily guarding the post, Governor-in-Chief Sherbrooke hoped that the navy would either send marines or close the depots. He reminded Hall of the need for cost reduction. The fact that the gun carriages of the British vessels on the Great Lakes continued to decay was ignored in the face of fiscal restraint.<sup>86</sup>

Sherbrooke wrote Sir Robert Hall informing him that the superintendent-general of Indian Affairs was going to allow the navy at the Grand River to distribute the annual gifts to the local Indigenous Peoples. He suggested that more gifts be given to those who aided the establishment in some manner. For this, the navy would have its own discretionary stock of items to dispense. The expense of storage and the work to hand out the gifts would fall on the navy.<sup>87</sup>

The Admiralty told Hall, in 1817, to prepare enough wood to build ships quickly if war broke out.<sup>88</sup> Other material for such future ships would be kept in a storehouse at each naval establishment. This plan sparked the construction of the road from Burlington to the Grand River.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hall to Bushby, 10 July 1817, Letter Book of His Majesty’s Naval Yard at Kingston, U.C. 1817, F 905 - Mu 1721 (B272830), [hereafter: LBNYK], 1-2, AO.

<sup>82</sup> By Commissioner Sir Robert Hall, 10 November 1817, LBNYK, 3, AO.

<sup>83</sup> Laws to Navy Board, 15 October 1817, ADM 42/2174, 87-8, TNA.

<sup>84</sup> Hall to Sherbrooke, 1 June 1817; 12 June 1817; and 15 June 1817, RG 8, C series v. 739, mfr. C3245,60-2, 64-6, and 67-8, respectively, LAC. Hall also retained a physician at the Nottawasaga River depot. Addison to Robertson, 6 June 1817, SLB, 262, LAC. The army was to receive all medicines aboard the paid off vessels.

<sup>85</sup> Addison to Hall, 6 June 1817; 16 June 1817; 25 June 1817, SLB, 174-5, 268-9, and 272, respectively, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Hall to Sherbrooke, 1 May 1817, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 44-5, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Sherbrooke to Hall, 11 March 1817, SLB, 206-7, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Hall to Smith, 14 December 1817, RG 5, v. 34, mfr. C4600, 16461-3, LAC.

## Financial Concerns Worsen

Financial restraint continued as the lord commissioners of the Treasury ordered the commissary-general at Quebec to tighten the purse strings on defence expenditures. This included seeking a naval officer's approval that any repair to a naval vessel was absolutely necessary.<sup>90</sup> Ordering naval stores was restricted to what was unreservedly required. Naval officers were told to submit regular, accurate accounts of all expenses.

In February 1818, Sir Robert Hall died at Kingston after a brief illness.<sup>91</sup> Edward Laws assumed control until Hall's replacement could arrive. That replacement was Captain Sir Robert Barrie, a seasoned naval officer who had served most recently on the east coast of the United States during the War of 1812, conducting raids around Chesapeake Bay and on Cumberland Island, off the southern coast of Georgia. Barrie arrived with his family in July 1819. He immediately enlarged the commodore's house in the Kingston Naval Establishment to accommodate his family, a decision the Admiralty censured for its expense.<sup>92</sup>

Edmund Burton, the Grand River Ordinary clerk whom Hall and Laws had found wanting, continued to fall short in his position. Barrie suspected Burton of keeping inaccurate records and having an inordinate amount of cash on hand.<sup>93</sup> Burton filed "a wrong statement" concerning the public funds in his keeping. Barrie ordered Burton's commanding officer, Captain H. Montresor, to periodically check the accounts, but the problem only grew worse. Burton's failure to send his reports and accounts in, as ordered, and the surveys of slops and food at the Ordinary caused Barrie great concern.<sup>94</sup> Montresor wrote in August 1820 that Burton had a contingency fund of £600, a sum that shocked the Commissioner who questioned what type of contingency Burton might be expecting.<sup>95</sup> Besides this sum, Burton had £590.12.6 cash on hand, another outrageous amount. By October, Barrie had had enough and Burton was discharged, but ordered to stay at Grand River until his accounts were

<sup>90</sup> Harrison to Commissary General Quebec, 11 July 1818, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 119-20, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Laws to Sherbrooke, 8 January 1818, RG 8, v. 739, mfr. C3245, 95-6, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> T. Malcomson, "Rear Admiral Sir Robert Barrie, KCB KCH (1774-1841) - St Augustine, Florida," in *From Across the Sea North America's in Nelson's Navy*, eds. S. Heuvel and J. Roodbaard (Warwick, UK: Helion Company Limited, 2020), 117-32; and T. Brock, "Commodore Robert Barrie and his Family in Kingston, 1819-1834," *Historic Kingston* 23 (March 1975): 1-18.

<sup>93</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 21 October 1819, LBNYK, 6, AO. See also Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 15 June 1820, AO, LBNYK, 12, AO.

<sup>95</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 23 August 1820, LBNYK, 15, AO.

approved, when he would receive his last quarter's pay.<sup>96</sup> John Benny took on the clerk's post and reviewed Burton's accounts. Sir Robert expressed his dismay that Burton allowed food to remain in the storehouse for upwards of three years without issuing it, in favour of other victuals. In the wake of the former clerk's departure, surveys were ordered on tobacco, flour, and other food thought to have gone bad.<sup>97</sup> But the problems continued, with accounts and reports not being complete or filed promptly. Barrie threatened Benny that if he did not conform, he too would be replaced.<sup>98</sup>

Austerity concerns continued to rise in London as the expense of the military and naval establishments in Canada drew much attention. Commissary-General S. Wood wrote to the governor-in-chief that the previous year's navy estimate for the lakes was £6,000, but they submitted £20,000 in expenses at year's end.<sup>99</sup> He would pay the £6,000 and carry the balance over to the 1820 estimates. The papers attached to the letter included an expense account by Laws for £24,000, covering the period between 25 December 1818 and 24 December 1819. Salaries for the Grand River Ordinary cost £1,337.14. This paid for the clerk of the naval storekeeper, a quarter-man, six shipwrights, two sawyers, and two smiths. The one lieutenant on half pay, a second master, an assistant surgeon, a boatswain, a gunner, a carpenter, a boatswain's mate, and five seamen, added £791.12.9.

Sir Robert Barrie had informed the Admiralty that the ships in ordinary at Kingston, and elsewhere, were in an advanced state of decay.<sup>100</sup> The cutbacks made it impossible to maintain them in a condition where they could be quickly readied for war. This latter possibility was not remote as Britain and the United States jostled diplomatically over America's desire to enter the former's mercantile system.<sup>101</sup> This tension would slowly build from 1817 through 1828, at which time the political elements in each country promoting the struggle were out of government.

Part of the continued fiscal restraint was to roll back the extra pay given to British naval officers serving on the Great Lakes.<sup>102</sup> Sir Robert appealed the

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<sup>96</sup> Barrie to Burton, 1 October 1820; Barrie to Montresor, 6 November 1820; 25 January 1821; and Rodger to Barrie, 22 March 1821, LBNYK, 20-21, 26, 33, and 34, respectively, AO.

<sup>97</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 20 October 1820; and Barrie to Montresor, 24 November 1820, LBNYK, 22-3, and 28, AO.

<sup>98</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 23 March 1821, LBNYK, 40, AO.

<sup>99</sup> Wood to Bowls, 11 November 1819, RG 8, v. 740, mfr. C3245, 59-70, AO.

<sup>100</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 27-8, and 29.

<sup>101</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 28. The last two country leaders grappling with the issue were British Prime Minister Canning, who died in 1827, and American President Adams, who was not re-elected in 1828.

<sup>102</sup> Barrow to Barrie, 15 January 1820; and Barrie to Montresor, 14 May 1820, LBNYK, 6, and 11, respectively, AO.

decision. The Admiralty responded that the pay had to stop immediately, and the officers pay back the amount they received since 1817. This did not go over well among the officers who found the prices in the upper province to be exorbitant.

Barrie monitored the expenses at each naval establishment. He ordered the commanding officer at Grand River to request supplies by late fall, so such material could be requested from England before winter, to appear in the spring. Locally obtainable supplies would be amassed at Kingston during the winter, ready for shipment when Lake Ontario thawed.<sup>103</sup> Given the potential of food shortage, Montresor received authorization to keep gardens.<sup>104</sup> The captain was also permitted to repair one of the cabins for an office. Barrie warned Montresor to keep expenses in check and limit travel to what was absolutely necessary, while public stores were to be used efficiently.<sup>105</sup>

A malady spread across the Grand River Ordinary in late summer of 1820, leaving many of the men on the sick list. Medicines were sent from Kingston for those affected. Barrie was shocked to learn that the establishment drew its water from the river next to the ordinary, which was inundated with human and animal effluence, explaining the sickness. Sir Robert reminded Montesor that the lake was filled with safe fresh water.<sup>106</sup>

As the collection of wood for ship repair and building continued, the Grand River Ordinary was told not to cut white pine, as that was unsuitable for ship building. Instead, they were to use red cedar, white oak, or red pine.<sup>107</sup> In 1820 alone, the station cut and squared six thousand feet of wood. In September, Sir Robert ordered Montresor to send the Grand River shipwrights to Kingston to conduct repair and construction work in that naval yard.<sup>108</sup> They would not return. One shipwright, two sawyers, and two smiths would stay at Grand River, the shipwright as acting supervisor. The ordinary's carpenter was to help the shipwright when necessary. While Barrie was taking men away, the Admiralty sent out Lieutenant John Templman for employment at the Grand River Ordinary.<sup>109</sup> He would be another officer to pay, cloth, and feed at an establishment that was shrinking.

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<sup>103</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 13 August 1820, LBNYK, 6, AO.

<sup>104</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 30 April 1820, LBNYK, 10, AO.

<sup>105</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 26 January 1820; and 1 February 1820, LBNYK, 7, and 8, respectively, AO.

<sup>106</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 13 August 1820; and 29 September 1820, LBNYK, 14, and 18, respectively, AO.

<sup>107</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 3 November 1820; and 21 December 1820, LBNYK, 31, and 32, respectively, AO.

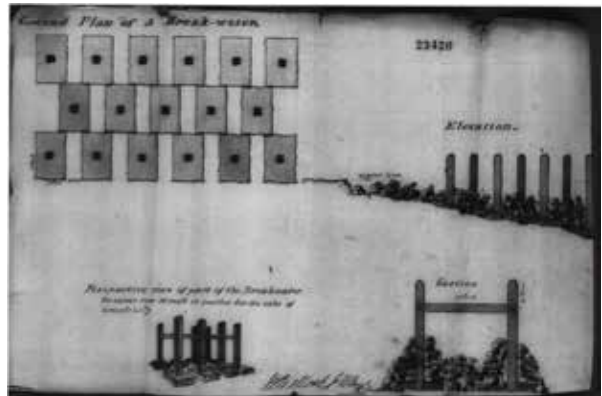
<sup>108</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 24 September 1820; and 27 February 1821, LBNYK, 17, and 38, respectively, AO.

<sup>109</sup> Barrie to Montresor, 24 November 1820, LBNYK, 27, AO.

### The Plan to Erect Piers at the Mouth of the Grand River

Even with the financial situation and the fact that no naval ships were going in and out of the Grand River Ordinary, a discussion began to address the sand bar that limited access to the river. To make the Grand River a meaningful and useful dockyard the bar had to be conquered. To that end, Sir Robert Barrie began to consider alternatives. Lieutenant J. Portlock, Royal Engineer, offered three variations. The first was to build a canal from the river to the lake bypassing the river's mouth. Portlock remarked that a sand bar would build up at the entrance of the canal, necessitating a pier to block the accumulation of sand. A second option was to build a canal from the Grand River to Mohawk Bay where the bottom was stone and not sandy. Large vessels could anchor near Gull Island, in Mohawk Bay, and unload into boats to enter the river through the canal. If cut straight the canal would be two miles long, twenty feet wide at the bottom, and hold four feet of water. Portlock estimated the cost to be £20,000, including guard locks at each end. An offer to just dig the canal for £10,000 was considered too costly and rejected. The high bank on Mohawk Bay offered a good location for either a naval yard or a fort.<sup>110</sup>

The plan for a break-water at the mouth of the Grand River as proposed in 1820. (Library and Archives Canada)



Barrie's preference to admit ships directly into the river, allowing them to travel the eighteen miles upriver to the rapids for guaranteed protection from the enemy, made the third solution the ultimate choice. It called for piers through the sand bar opening a channel for ships to enter the river. Since the deep water was within fifty yards on either side of the bar, piers extending 150 yards, spanning the sandbar, would suffice, and be half the cost of the canal. Ships with an eight-to-nine-foot draft could then enter the river with ease.

<sup>110</sup> Portlock to Barrie, December 1819, RG 8, v. 39, mfr. C2617, 81-105, LAC.

Portlock suggested a series of five locks be constructed to allow vessels of six-foot draft to navigate past the first rapids, just below the Mohawk Village. Such a project he stated would be about £45,000, and result in spring flooding and ice damage to the locks, both ongoing expenses. Portlock, in describing the local agricultural activity and forests, “lamented” the area was held by the Six Nations. He proposed a road from Warner Nellis’ settlement to the mouth of the Grand River, with another road between the Grand River, at Lynburner’s farm, and the Chippawa River, and from there to Forty Mile Creek. The latter road would be forty feet wide and have ditches on both sides, costing about £18,000. Barrie passed the report on to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland, declaring Burlington as the better option on Lake Ontario.<sup>111</sup> He requested Maitland reserve the necessary land along the Grand River.

Two months later, Lieutenant Portlock sent a description and drawing of the piers to be used. As the bottom was sandy, a solid pier would not work, as it would be undercut by the sand being washed out from under it. He proposed three rows of posts, the tops of which would rise above the water by four feet. The three rows of posts would be set up as to have the centre row offset to the other two. Each post would be a foot in diameter and driven into holes drilled into rocks measuring six feet long, by four feet wide, by one foot thick. Timbers would connect the posts in the three rows to reinforce them. A set of boards would be attached along the outer rows, on the inside of the posts, to retain rocks and large lumber placed inside the post structure, as an anchor and reinforcement. The piers would be put together in sections, carried out to their designated spot between two bateaux and then lowered into place. The piers would be 200 yards long and cost £4,200. It would not be until 1837 that a single pier would appear on charts of the mouth of the Grand River.<sup>112</sup>

Portlock recommended maintaining a squadron of smaller vessels in the river’s mouth to repulse any enemy attack. The Admiralty’s idea of building frigates was impossible, as the entrance would never accommodate a frigate’s draft. He encouraged establishing a military road between York and the Grand River, with settlers along it to assist in moving supplies during time of war.

The number of seamen and the civil establishment declined in 1819 to eighteen and twelve, respectively.<sup>113</sup> In the spring of 1820, Barrie temporarily returned *Confiance* to service, to assist in determining the border between the United States and Upper Canada.<sup>114</sup> Lieutenant John Grant commanded and

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<sup>111</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 2 April 1820, RG 8, v. 740, mfr. C3245, 79-80, LAC. Sir Peregrine Maitland served as lieutenant governor of Upper Canada from 1818 to 1828.

<sup>112</sup> Portlock to Maitland, 19 June 1820, RG 5, v. 47, mfr. C4605, 23416-20, AO.

<sup>113</sup> Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 22.

<sup>114</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 4 February 1820, RG 5, v. 46, mfr. C4604, 22741-2, LAC.

would only have the armament needed to “secure the respect of the Indians.” What that armament was, Barrie did not state. Twenty-three sailors and one officer were present in 1820, of whom sixteen seamen, led by Grant, manned the *Confiance*, for its cruise in the upper lakes. The rest were assigned to the other three schooners in ordinary and the two remaining gunboats (the other two had already sunk by the wharf). With the schooners and gunboats in ordinary, the seamen were housed ashore. One of the seamen drowned in 1820. During 1821 and 1822, the ordinary housed a subaltern, a sergeant, and seventeen rank and file of the 68th Regiment.<sup>115</sup> In July 1821, Barrie requested a physician be sent to the Grand River Ordinary to see to the numerous men who were sick.<sup>116</sup> Dysentery was a major problem as the men still drank river water.

*Confiance* returned to the Grand River in early 1821 and went back into ordinary, with most of the crew released. None of the naval vessels at Grand River were available to serve as transports. In May 1822, the concern of having no ships to carry British troops and supplies to the garrison on Drummond Island arose again amongst military officials.<sup>117</sup> Merchant ships were hired as needed, often American owned. Maitland wrote Lord Bathurst, secretary of war and colonies, that eighty merchant ships plied the waters of Lake Erie, with less than ten owned by British citizens.<sup>118</sup> The Americans also brought new technology to the upper lakes. In 1819, a steamboat was in operation from Black Rock to Detroit, with the occasional trip north to Mackinac Island.<sup>119</sup> Though civilian, the dominance of American merchant men on Lake Erie and Lake Huron underlined that the Americans would hold the naval advantage at the outbreak of war, without having to build ships-of-war first.

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<sup>115</sup> General Distribution of the Troops under Major General Sir Peregrine Maitland Upper Canada July 12, 1821, RG 5, v. 53, mfr. C4067, 26378; The General Distribution Return of the Regiments in UC, 24 December 1821, RG 5, v. 54, mfr. C4608, 27639, LAC. The rank and file increased to eighteen in December, see The General Distribution Return of the Regiments in UC, 1 March 1822, RG 5, v. 55, mfr. C4608, 28113, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 12 July 1821, Civil Secretary's Correspondence UC Sundries, RG 5, v. 53, mfr. C4067, 26373-4, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Lightfoot to Maitland, 17 May 1822, RG 5, v. 56, mfr. C4608, 28859-60, LAC.

<sup>118</sup> D. Moore, “Canada and the United States, 1815-1830” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1910), 69.

<sup>119</sup> The steamer was named *Walk-on-the-Water* and was built at Buffalo by Noah Brown, who built ships for the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario squadrons during the war. See J. Goldie, “The Tramp of a Botanist Through Upper Canada in 1819,” *Women's Canadian Historical Society*, Transaction No. 12 (1913): 29-40, 39; and R. Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada: Compiled with a View to a Grand System of Emigration, Vol. 2* (London, UK: Simpkin and Marshall, 1822), cxxvi.

**Steady Decline and More Restraint**

A survey of the buildings of the Grand River Ordinary in 1820 revealed that the store houses, mess-hall, surgeon's quarters, and bake-house were still in good shape, but the junior officers' quarters needed a new chimney and some repair.<sup>120</sup> The barracks for the shipwrights and the soldiers needed rebuilding, and Captain Montresor's cabin needed major work to make it livable. As the establishment fell into a degraded state, financial concern rose.

In mid-1821, Barrie ordered the establishments under his command to reduce spending.<sup>121</sup> No new building was allowed and a further reduction in personnel would occur. The cost of the establishment on the Great Lakes was becoming a bit of a shock at the Admiralty, as it peaked in 1822 at £42,000.<sup>122</sup> That year the Admiralty ordered the Grand River Ordinary closed, the buildings pulled down or sold off, including the supplies and the remains of the ships.<sup>123</sup> Barrie wrote that little would be gained in closing the ordinary, as the four schooners and four submerged gunboats would provide the seed of a squadron for the upper lakes if conflict erupted. The Admiralty reconsidered, leaving the Grand River Ordinary as it was. In 1823, the estimate for the year dropped to £40,000.<sup>124</sup> By 1827, that fell to £16,000, as the navy withdrew more men and spent less on maintenance and repairs.<sup>125</sup>

Barrie and his family returned to England for two years, in 1825, as he sought to first clarify and then surrender his role as commissioner. While the 1824 typhus epidemic in the province may have added some pressure to the decision, it was the absence of a clear direction on which to set the naval defence in Upper Canada that inspired the trip. The Americans had just finished the Erie Canal, increasing their ability to send naval supplies to Lake Erie. Barrie had a plan to have frames of frigates set up at Quebec, with the ships in ordinary at Kingston maintained to be readied for action quickly.<sup>126</sup> He suggested bringing

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<sup>120</sup> Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 26 and 28.

<sup>121</sup> Barrie to Captains, Senior Officers of Naval Establishments, 14 May 1821, MG 24, F 66, v. 3, pt. 1, 25, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Barrie, Estimate of the probable Sums of Money which may be Required by the Commissariat for the Naval Establishment in the Canadas between 25 December 1821 and 25 December 1822, 5 December 1821, RG 8, v. 741, mfr. C3245, 28, LAC.

<sup>123</sup> Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 29-30.

<sup>124</sup> Barrie, Estimate of the probable Sums of Money which may be Required by the Commissariat for the Naval Establishment in the Canadas between 25 December 1823 and 25 December 1824, 10 March 1823, RG 8, v. 741, mfr. C3245, 1-3, 39, and 165, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> Barrie, Estimate of the probable Sums of Money which may be Required by the Commissariat for the Naval Establishment in the Canadas between 25 December 1827 and 24 December 1828, 10 November 1827, RG 8, v. 741, mfr. C3245, 121, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 30.



steam technology to the upper lakes to counter the American steam vessels. Keeping the Kingston vessels close to ready would cost £25,000 more a year, raising Kingston's yearly expense to £40,000. The frigates in frame at Quebec were estimated to cost £60,000 a year. Even with Comptroller of the Navy Byam Martin in support of the idea, the financial reality was that Barrie's plan was a nonstarter. Barrie eventually returned to Upper Canada in 1827, with the rank of commodore, and permission to commission a schooner, HMS *Cockburn*, for his use on Lake Ontario.<sup>127</sup>

The British government reviewed the defences of Upper and Lower Canada in 1825. Major-General Sir James Carmichael-Smyth toured the provinces and wrote a precise of the wars in Canada, noting the importance of defensive locations.<sup>128</sup> Sir James' report resulted in the closing of the military posts at Drummondville and Le Cole, in Lower Canada, and River Raisin, Gananoque, Cornwall, Burlington Heights, Queenston, Chippawa, Fort Erie, and Turkey Point, in Upper Canada. He highlighted the importance of Lake Ontario but dismissed Lake Erie in two passages. First, he noted that "the British flag is not much seen on Lake Erie" and, second, that a strong fort on the Thames River would control the southwest section of the province, no matter who controlled the lake.<sup>129</sup> Still, Royal Engineers were sent to survey the spot on the Grand River for a fortification at the rapids, eighteen miles from the river's mouth. The idea of moving the naval establishment to this point, with guaranteed security for ships, was seriously considered, as work on forts at Penetanguishene and York was suspended for a year.<sup>130</sup>

Smyth's report fit well into previous military planning for Upper and Lower Canada. While the squadrons in ordinary on the lakes were deteriorating, the citadel at Quebec was in a similar state of decline.<sup>131</sup> Rebuilding this primary fortress had assumed a priority status. Establishing strong defences at Halifax, Montreal, Isle aux Noix, Kingston, and in the Niagara peninsula, with completion of the Rideau canal linking Montreal and Kingston (by-passing the St Lawrence River) were also proposed. As the naval budget for the lakes

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<sup>127</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 30. During a typhus outbreak in the province, William Mellanby, a shipwright at the Grand River Establishment, died. See Mellanby, William; Shipwright, 1824, Probate Estate Files, RG 22-155, unpaginated, AO.

<sup>128</sup> C. Robinson, *Canada and Canadian Defence: The Defensive Policy of the Dominion in Relation to the Character of Her Frontier, the Events of the War of 1812, and Her Position To-Day* (Toronto, ON: Musson Book Company, 1910), 95; and J. Carmichael-Smyth, *Precis of the Wars in Canada: From 1755 to the Treaty of Ghent in 1814* (London, UK: Tinsley Brothers, 1862).

<sup>129</sup> Carmichael-Smyth, *Precis of the Wars in Canada*, 201-2 and 206.

<sup>130</sup> General Order 31 October 1826; and Davenport to Wright, 14 October 1826, RG 8, C series, v 43, mfr C2618, 123-4 and 92-7, respectively, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 33-9.

dwindled, the military expenditures were estimated at over £1.6 million to accomplish all that was proposed (less than what was eventually spent). The army would protect the areas in Upper and Lower Canada that were seen as the most likely targets of an American invasion, just as they had been during the War of 1812. The idea of holding supremacy on the lakes was discarded, only gunboats would be kept on each lake for use if hostilities arose. As Smyth's report prompted debate in London during 1826, Lieutenant John Powell Tweed took command of the Grand River Ordinary, overseeing eight dockyard workers and six sailors.<sup>132</sup>

### **The Welland Canal and Final Demise of the Grand River Ordinary**

The year 1827 held two major blows to the Grand River Ordinary. A storm that year knocked down four of the buildings in the yard and took out the wharf, to which the gunboats had been secured.<sup>133</sup> The submerged gunboats stayed put as the wharf was washed away. The potential relocation of the naval yard was scuttled by the Welland Canal Company building a canal from Port Dalhousie, on Lake Ontario, to the Welland River (formerly the Chippawa River) which flowed into the Niagara River, allowing shipping to move between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.<sup>134</sup> Using Twelve Mile Creek to get close to the Niagara Escarpment, a canal would be dug, employing a series of locks to lift ships up and down the Niagara Escarpment.<sup>135</sup> At the top of the escarpment, the canal would be excavated south to the Welland River. At first, this section of the canal was to be cut deep enough to enter the low lying Welland River, with the river filling up the new canal. Unfortunately, the soil, in what was called the deep cut, proved unstable. After several collapses the decision was taken to not dig this section as deeply as intended. The river could no longer fill the canal and so water would have to come from elsewhere. To that end, a feeder canal

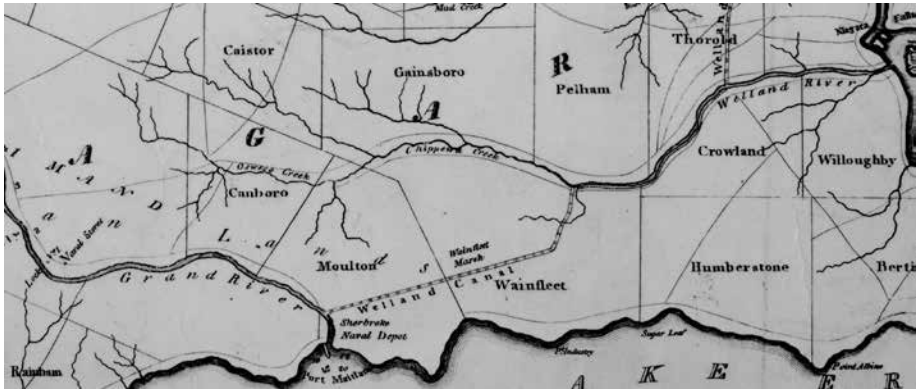
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<sup>132</sup> By 1840, only the citadel at Quebec, major fortifications at Isle aux Noix, Kingston, and the finishing of the Rideau Canal had been accomplished. The 13,500 troops Wellington had suggested were needed in the Upper and Lower provinces were reduced to 5000 in all of British North America by 1838. See Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 40-45.

<sup>133</sup> Ontario Heritage Trust, "Grand River Naval Depot 1815," Ontario Heritage Trust, n.d., <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/plaques/grand-river-naval-depot-1815>.

<sup>134</sup> The idea of a canal between Lakes Erie and Ontario had been considered since 1817. See Gourlay, Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada, Volume I*, 446-51. The Erie Canal certainly motivated the eventual building of the Welland Canal.

<sup>135</sup> Phillpotts to Mudge, 27 March 1827, RG 8, v. 48, mfr. C2619, 64-7, LAC; J. Larkin, "'Mr. Merritt's Hobby': New York State Influence in the Building of Canada's First Welland Canal," *New York History* 86, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 169-93; and W. Merritt, "Account of the Welland Canal, Upper Canada," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 24 (July 1828): 159-68; and Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 37-8.



Detail showing the naval depot, the naval stores, the proposed Lock 1 at the rapids, and the feeder canal from “Map of the Niagara Peninsula Shewing the Course and a Profile of the Welland Canal Connecting Lakes Erie and Ontario by Ship Navigation.”

was proposed drawing water from the Grand River, crossing the Welland River via a wooden aqueduct, and meeting the new canal not far from the locks that would move vessels between the Welland River and the canal. To create the twenty-eight-mile-long feeder canal, the Welland Canal Company proposed to build a dam across the Grand River, to create a reservoir for the feeder. Shipping would be restricted to below the dam, which would be positioned just 594 feet inside the river’s mouth. This would threaten the viability of the current naval establishment.

Captain George Phillpotts, Royal Engineers, and Commodore Barrie went to the Grand River to talk with William Merritt, who was supervising the work on the canal. Merritt promised Phillpotts and Barrie that he would build a lock into the dam, of whatever size they wanted. He suggested that the company would take the dam down once the canal was fully flooded and the connection with Lake Erie was completed. Neither option appealed to the two officers. Locks would never let a squadron of naval vessels above the dam reach the lake quickly enough to repel an attack. It would be inconvenient even at the best of times. As to tearing it down, or just ripping out a section of the dam after it was no longer needed, this could not be guaranteed, and the cost could prove prohibitive. Merritt suggested that the dam be five miles upriver, so as not to interfere with the current ordinary, but this still thwarted a naval depot at the rapids. Phillpotts warned the lieutenant-governor that flooding above the dam would destroy farmland, yielding more costs as landowners looked to the government for compensation.

Digging of the feeder canal continued as the debate over the dam stretched into two years. In 1829, the urgency to build a dam increased as the feeder neared completion. Commodore Barrie expressed his concern to Lieutenant-Governor

Sir John Colborne.<sup>136</sup> Barrie rejected a dam being thrown across the river because it would hamper shipping up to the rapids. Sir Robert acknowledged the importance of the canal to the province, both economically and militarily, but an open Grand River was more important. Phillipotts reiterated the flooding a dam would cause and the loss to the Indigenous farmers and the settlers along the river.<sup>137</sup> The Indigenous Peoples would also lose the fishery that was a main source of food and income if the river was dammed. He suggested cutting a feeder above the rapids in the Grand River, which might allow boat travel on the upper reaches of the river. If that was not feasible, a feeder from Lake Erie could be considered.

The decision did not go in favour of the navy, as commerce won out and the Welland Canal Company built their dam five miles above the river's mouth.<sup>138</sup> Phillipotts and Barrie protested again, but to no avail.<sup>139</sup> Merritt promised to remove the obstruction at the government's request.<sup>140</sup> Construction on the dam began in June 1829.<sup>141</sup> Any thought of moving the naval establishment upriver disappeared.

With the four schooners (*Saulk*, *Huron*, *Confiance*, and *Surprise*) rotting at their moorings, there was little for the personnel at the naval establishment to do, beyond repairs to the storehouses and accommodations.<sup>142</sup> Trouble with the civilian yard workers and the local settlers necessitated Lieutenant Tweed be made a commissioner of the peace.<sup>143</sup> This civil role allowed him to deal out justice to the drunk and unruly. Sir Robert informed Colborne of the civil disorder at the navy depot.

In 1828, the officer and troops of the garrison stationed at the Grand

<sup>136</sup> Barrie to Colborne, 18 March 1829, RG 5, v. 93, mfr. C6867, 51526-7, LAC. Sir John Colborne was lieutenant governor of Upper Canada from 1828 to 1836.

<sup>137</sup> Phillipotts to Mudge, 30 March 1829, RG 8, v. 48, mfr. C2619, 67-71, LAC.

<sup>138</sup> Mudge to Phillipotts 8 April 1829; and Mudge to Phillipotts, 15 April 1829, RG 8, v. 48, mfr. C2619, 288, and 237, respectively, LAC.

<sup>139</sup> Dunfield to Couper, 21 April 1829; and Dunford to Wright, 24 April 1829, RG 8, v. 48, mfr. C2619, 72-3, and 9-10, respectively, LAC.

<sup>140</sup> Merritt to Couper, 9 May 1829, RG 8, v. 48, mfr. C2619, 235-6, LAC.

<sup>141</sup> Purdy to Mudge, 4 June 1829, RG 5, v. 93, mfr. C6867, 51530, LAC. The dam stretched 600 feet across the river, raising it some five feet, flooding 2000 acres of land for ten miles above the dam. Nearly 100 people made claims for compensation. The Welland Canal Company was held responsible. See A. Hughes, "The Feeder Canal and its Communities," *Newsletter of the Historical Society of St Catharines*, September 2007, 6-9. This new route, which made use of a section of the feeder canal, was finished in 1834, with the first trip passing through the now slightly shorter canal. Within two years the dam powered a grist mill, carding machine, and three sawmills. See, "The Landed Property Consists," *Upper Canada Herald*, 22 December 1830, 3.

<sup>142</sup> Gough, *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay*, 163.

<sup>143</sup> Barrie to Colborne, 23 February 1829, RG 5, v. 92, mfr. C6867, 51253-55, LAC.

River Ordinary grumbled about the poor condition of their barracks.<sup>144</sup> Barrie responded to the criticism noting that both the seamen and soldiers had been ordered ashore into any unoccupied building in the depot they chose. Barrie ordered the depot carpenter to make the buildings suitable for accommodating the men.

Visitors remarked on the run-down state of the establishment, the difficulty getting there, and its isolation.<sup>145</sup> Naval Captain Basil Hall, on a tour of Upper Canada, described the scene in 1827: “The flag-staff was struck, the works gone to decay, the store-houses nearly empty. Every thing we saw, in short, bespoke the stillness and neglect of peace. . . .”<sup>146</sup> The men stationed there appeared in good spirits, welcomed the passers-by, and offered what hospitality they could.

During the following year, the question of feeding the troops at the ordinary reappeared. As the commissariat post at the Grand River had closed in 1817, the navy became responsible for feeding the soldiers.<sup>147</sup> Governor-in-Chief Sir James Kempt wanted the naval rations of sugar, tea, coco, oatmeal, peas, and lime juice, replaced with military rations. Since enough naval food had been delivered to the establishment to feed all concerned for several months, Sir Robert Barrie refused Kempt’s request to avoid wasting the victuals. If the navy did not supply the food, he wondered, who would, since the nearest military commissariat was Fort George. A minute, on the reverse of Barrie’s letter to Kempt, suggested that the issue had been sent up the chain of command and that Barrie had been notified to continue using the naval rations to feed the soldiers.

In 1830, the ranks of the already small contingent of troops at Grand River were thinned by fever. Sir John Colborne suggested removing the rest for their own good.<sup>148</sup> He inquired if the naval stores could be put elsewhere, and the depot simply closed. This did not occur – the depot remained in place and the troops stayed. Another issue concerned the provision of the troops with wood for fires.<sup>149</sup> Due to the cost of purchasing it elsewhere and transporting it to the depot the navy took this on after 1830.

The Welland Canal had one more part to play in the life of the Grand River Ordinary. In 1831, an extension was begun where the canal bent from

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<sup>144</sup> Barrie to Maitland, 21 March 1828, RG 5, v. 68, mfr. C6867, 48440, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 32-33.

<sup>146</sup> B. Hall, *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828* (Edinburgh, UK: Cadell and Co., 1830), 241; quoted in Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 32.

<sup>147</sup> Barrie to Kempt, 29 January 1829, RG 8, v 741, mfr C3245, 133-7, LAC. Sir James Kempt was governor in chief of British North America from 1828-1830.

<sup>148</sup> Colborne, 27 April 1830, RG 8, v 1328, mfr C3549, 179, LAC.

<sup>149</sup> Stewart to Alymer, 14 April 1831; and Barrie to Aylmer, 27 July 1831, RG 8, v. 742, mfr. C3245, 33-4, and 46-7, respectively, LAC.

its southerly path across the Niagara Peninsula, to head east via the Welland River, to the Niagara River. A more direct path south would bring the canal directly into Lake Erie, at Gravelly Bay.<sup>150</sup> The bay provided a good anchorage for ships, as they entered or left the canal. This made Gravelly Bay, and the new village of Port Colborne, of greater military importance than the Grand River. Sir Robert ordered the dockyard workers discharged, leaving a handful of seamen with Lieutenant Jones to watch over the rotting, semi-submerged schooners, and sunken gunboats, with the buildings of the ordinary decaying around them.

In 1831, the navy estimated there was £180,000 worth of supplies in warehouses and laying out in the open in Upper Canada.<sup>151</sup> That year the funding of repairs to the ships in ordinary was stopped. The annual budget for the ordinary establishment in Upper Canada steadily decreased to an estimated £8,000 in 1834.<sup>152</sup> At the start of that year, the Admiralty ordered Sir Robert to close the Naval Establishment on the Great Lakes, pay off HMS *Cockburn*, select a warrant officer to mind any vessels in ordinary, and send everyone else back to England.<sup>153</sup> With a military centred approach to the defence of Canada, the navy was no longer needed. Barrie was permitted to sell stores, or forward them to Halifax and England, leaving only the bare minimum to outfit the gunboats in an emergency. A clerk at Montreal and Kingston would ensure the naval storehouses were kept in good order. Barrie wrote Sir John Colborne to inform him that all naval stores at the Grand River Ordinary would be sold or removed when the navigation opened in the spring.<sup>154</sup>

On 19 May 1834, Sir Robert Barrie told Lieutenant-Governor Colborne that on 1 June, Lieutenant Jones, commanding at Grand River, would close out his accounts and break up his Establishment.<sup>155</sup> Barrie wrote that going forward there would be no need for a military garrison at Grand River, for there was nothing left to guard. If soldiers remained, the navy would be unable to victual them after that date. With Robert Barrie's departure from Kingston on 12 July 1834, the longest presence of the British Navy on the Great Lakes

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<sup>150</sup> The Welland Canal Field Guide, "A History of the Old Welland Canals," *The Welland Canal Field Guide*, n.d., <http://oldwellandcanals.wikidot.com/>; Docker, *Grand River Naval Depot*, 42; and Hughes, "The Feeder Canal and its Communities." This new route, which made use of a section of the feeder canal, was finished in 1834, with the first trip passing through the now slightly shorter canal.

<sup>151</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 31.

<sup>152</sup> Pickett to Barrie, 9 January 1834, Barrie Letters, [ BL ] unpaginated, Massey Library Archive, Royal Military College, Kingston.

<sup>153</sup> Barrow to Barrie, 18 January 1834, RG 5, v. 139, mfr. C6881, 75927-30, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> Barrow to Barrie, 10 January 1824; and 11 January 1834; BL, unpaginated, Massey Library Archive; Barrie to Colborne, 12 March 1834, RG 45A 1 v 139 mfr. C6882, 75923-4, LAC.

<sup>155</sup> Barrie to Colborne, 19 May 1834, RG 5 A 1 v141, mfr C6882, 77146-8, LAC.

came to an end. The clerks minding the storehouses were withdrawn in 1837 and 1838.<sup>156</sup> Only for two short periods, during the 1837 Rebellion and again in response to the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1867, did the British navy send officers and men to the lakes to man the armed boats to defend the colony.<sup>157</sup> While the Grand River did offer a harbour for the armed vessel on Lake Erie during the Rebellion, Port Colborne, Port Stanley, and Windsor served as bases from which to patrol Lake Erie's waters against the Fenians. No naval yard, nor fort, was established at either end of the Welland Canal.

## Conclusions

At the end of the War of 1812, preserving naval control over the Great Lakes when at war with America seemed a clearly demonstrated necessity. For Lake Ontario, that meant keeping the navy dock yard at Kingston functioning. The upper lakes offered a range of choices as to where to concentrate naval forces, but building some form of naval depot on Lake Erie was necessary as the squadron would spend a significant amount of time on that lake. Grand River and Turkey Point/Long Point both offered deep hole anchorage, good wood for construction, and other raw resources at hand. Both appeared to be easily defended, with Turkey Point and Long Point already having a garrisoned fort, while the Grand River did not. Both had a sand bar, with the one off the Grand River impairing ship movement in and out, while at Turkey Point and Long Point the bar did not.

But there were three aspects that favoured Grand River, making it the logical choice. First, the Grand River was more easily linked to a supply line from Burlington overland to the river and down to the navy establishment. Second, the Grand River figured into any post on the lake as it was a central artery in the supply line for Lake Erie. As a result, it was logical to build the naval yard at the river's outlet. Third, even though it was favoured, the cost of building up an eight-acre area on which to place the dock yard and ship construction facility knocked Turkey Point and Long Point out of contention. This monstrous financial expenditure was beyond what provincial government coffers could bear. So too was the cost of the piers to overcome the sand bar at Grand River, but that site did provide a dry area for a dock yard, a construction site, and the navy's small schooners could, with reduced weight, pass over the bar.

The Grand River Establishment did not survive long, being downgraded

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<sup>156</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 32.

<sup>157</sup> G. Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History, Vol. 1* (Ottawa, ON: Minister of National Defence, 1952), 36-40; and Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America*, 290-6.

to an ordinary, accompanied by a reduction of yard workers and sailors. With continued financial restraint on the part of the British government, the yard shrank in importance, providing no naval vessels on the lakes from summer 1821 until it was closed in 1834. While the issues of logistics and defence had selected the spot and forecast a brilliant future, it was the budgetary restraint that led to its slow but steady demise.

The story of the Grand River Naval Establishment and later Ordinary also reflects the changing directions taken by the British government and Admiralty towards the defence of the Great Lakes after the War of 1812. The Grand River site went from being the critical naval supply point on Lake Erie, with four frigates in frame waiting for a rekindling of hostilities, to the resting place of four war relics. The Rush-Bagot Agreement, reducing the size and number of armed vessels allowed on the lakes, removed the pressure to maintain full squadrons on each lake. The strategic shift in the late 1820s to the British military, with the aid of local militias, defending against a hostile United States eliminated the need for the navy to keep a presence on the Great Lakes. The Welland Canal traversing the Niagara Peninsula from Port Dalhousie to Port Colborne ultimately shifted the focus from the Grand River supply line to the canal as the critical, more efficient link with the upper lakes.

Over the course of the life of the Grand River Establishment and Ordinary nearly two hundred officers and seamen, two dozen yard workers, and dozens of soldiers, some with their wives, lived and worked at this isolated frontier post. Cycles of hard work and intense boredom, extreme cold and hot weather, mosquitoes and black flies, tainted water, sickness, and death constituted a major part of their experience. They built a navy yard where none had existed, sailed consistently for the first two years, entertained the occasional visitor, and watched over their ships in ordinary and the buildings of the yard with a shrinking budget and diminishing manpower. After they left, the place was inhabited for a brief time during the Rebellion of 1837 and then slowly disintegrated with the passage of time.

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