

1760's

The articles of capitulation signed at Montreal provided for the surrender of all the military and trading posts still occupied by the French to the westward of Niagara. The difficulty of maintaining garrisons in these distant posts at once became evident. Since the loss of the Griffon the French had contented themselves with the navigation of the upper lakes in canoes and large flat-bottomed bateaux, capable only of transporting a few tons of cargo. This method of transport was slow, dangerous, and required the employment of many skilled boatmen. Writing from Fort Pitt to General Monckton on 30th June, 1761, Colonel Henry Bouquet, who had lately taken possession of Presqu'Isle on Lake Erie, said that "a Vessel upon Lake Erie would be of great service to support the advanced Posts." As a result of this recommendation and others, before the end of that year, a party of workmen with necessary tools and materials came from New York and established a small shipyard on what became known as Navy Island in the Niagara river above the Falls. Sir William Johnson gave some personal supervision to the work which ^{was} ^{on} carried under the direction of John Dease, his nephew. A considerable quantity of sawn timber and plank, prepared by the French was opportunely discovered in Chippawa creek, and a sloop or a schooner, named the Huron, was launched and rigged, and sailed for Detroit in October. During the next two years, the sloops Beaver and Charlotte, and the schooners Boston, Gladwin, and Victory were built and equipped at Navy Island. All the stores for these ships and supplies for the western posts were laboriously brought over the portage on the east side of the river to ^{the storehouse at} the upper landing, which had received the name of Fort Schlosser, in honour of a Swiss officer of the Royal Americans, of that name, who was temporarily in command.

The Huron, commanded by Captain Thomas Robison, and the Beaver were usefully employed in the exploration of Lake Erie and the river channels, and the transportation of provisions and troops but the Beaver was wrecked on the 28th August, 1763, and the Huron was lost later in the same year. The hostilities begun by the western confederacy of Indians, usually called "the conspiracy of Pontiac," were at first amazingly successful. All the smaller military stations were either taken or abandoned by their garrisons, and Detroit and Fort Pitt were closely besieged. (The remaining ships on Lake Erie were employed in carrying supplies and a small reinforcement to the beleaguered garrison at Detroit, which had been reduced to the greatest straits. Without that seasonable aid, it

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would seem that successful resistance would scarcely have been possible.

Even a convoy on the Niagara portage was annihilated and further transport rendered for some months impracticable.

This disaster was described by Sir William Johnson in a letter to Lord Amherst, then Commander in Chief in North America, dated 25th September, 1763.

"This morning I have received an express informing me that an officer and 24 men, who were escorting several waggons and ox-teams over the carrying-place at Niagara, had been attacked and entirely defeated, together with two companies of Colonel Willmott's regiment, which had marched to sustain them. Our loss on this occasion consists of Lieuts. Campbell, Frazier, and Roscoe of the regulars, Captain Johnson and Lieut. Drayton of the Provincials and sixty privates killed, with about eight or nine wounded. The enemy, who are supposed to be Senecas of Chenussio or Genesee, scalped all the dead, took all the clothes, arms, and ammunition, and threw several of the bodies down a precipice. I am greatly apprehensive of the fate of the Detroit, they being in much want, I fear in that garrison; and as all the cattle, &c., which were at Niagara are either killed or taken, it will be impossible to get any necessaries transported over the carrying-place for the remainder of this season.

"I shall immediately send belts to all the friendly nations and use every effectual measure for preventing the destruction of our settlements by the enemy Indians, who are but too much encouraged from their repeated successes."

Amherst lost no time in making preparations for the relief of Detroit, for which he considered it of the utmost importance to increase the number of ships on Lake Erie.

"As I intend to Assemble a Large Body of Troops at Niagara Early in the Spring," he wrote from New York to the commandant of Fort Niagara, on the 29th October, 1763, "& that Vessels will be wanted for their Transportation & the Service to Detroit, &ca., I have directed Colonel Bradstreet to write to Boston for a Master Builder, who will proceed directly to Niagara that the proper Timbers may be prepared for Building Three Sloops or Schooners, as Early as the Season will Permit. Order him Every Assistance in the power of your Garrison, for preparing & getting Ready the Timbers, that no Delays may happen thro' the want of them, when the Carpenters can Work."

CRUIKSHANK Papers
Memorials of Fort Erie--
Early Navigation on Lake Erie.

From the Public Archives of Canada
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