

Major Robert Matthews, who had been Military Secretary to General Haldimand and his successors in command for nearly eight years, 1778-1786, and was known to have made an official tour of inspection of the western frontier posts, had been called upon to make a special report on the subject of their contemplated evacuation for the information of the Colonial Secretary.

FROM MAJOR ROBERT MATTHEWS TO EVAN NEPEAN

Plymouth Barracks, 9th July, 1790.

Sir,

I am sorry that, owing to the Reviews and sudden march of the 53rd Regiment, from Bridgnorth to this place, I should thus long have been prevented communicating to you, for Mr. Grenville's information remarks upon the upper country and Posts in the Province of Quebec from reference to my notes when in that Country such as they are, I have now the honor of submitting them.

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In the year 87 I went from Quebec to Detroit having various instructions from Lord Dorchester, one of which was to make every possible enquiry respecting places of Embarkation and fit

Posts upon the Lakes Ontario and Erie as substitutes for those at present occupied, in the event of their being given up to the United States of America. From the best information as well as from my former knowledge of the Country, I found that on Lake Ontario there is no place beyond Niagara fit for that purpose nearer to it than Toronto (about 60 miles) the shore on that side being shoal and without any harbour this seems to preclude all communication between these Lakes in the vicinity of Niagara should that place be given up (unless a Post is established on the opposite side of the River) which, on account of the Trade as well as the fine settlement thence to Fort Erie and beyond it (about 80 miles in Extent) would be a melancholy necessity, as it would lay them open to the Americans, which the sanction of a post at present prevents. There is a point of land, on our side of the River, opposite to Niagara which forms the mouth of the River, equally well situated to command the entrance of it—this Point and a necessary portion of land was reserved to Government by Sir Frederick Haldimand with a view to the necessity of, one day, taking Post there—about 1100 yards up the River, on the same side there is a harbour where the vessels formerly wintered, & where they can run alongside a Quay.

Fort Niagara is situated upon an angle formed by the Lake and River; the side next the land was two half Bastions with a long curtain and Ravelin all of sod work; there is a strong stockade in the ditch, which is dry, and on the Berm a smaller line of Pickets sloping outwards, there are two Blockhouses of mason work in the gorges of the Bastion, mounting each two pieces of cannon en barbette which commands the whole country within their range.

The sides next the Lake and River are stockaded, the former not open to attack except from the Lake, nor the latter but from the opposite side of the River (at the distance of 7 to 800 yards) this side has two Bastions mounting 12 & 18 pounders the whole in a good state of defence.

Fort Schloser, or little Niagara is situated at the upper end of the carrying place, 14 miles from Niagara; it is an inconsiderable stockade intended merely for the protection of stores & merchandize, while in waiting for conveyance, and will lodge an officer and 40 men—On the opposite side of the River a reserve of land was also made in order, when it might be necessary to remove the carrying place.

London, 31 May, 1790.

(Q 49, pp. 289-90.)

Captain (afterwards Admiral) John Schank, who had commanded the naval force on the lakes, supplies the Minister with precise information respecting the state of the military posts and ships on those waters, based on personal knowledge.

MEMORANDUM BY CAPTAIN JOHN SCHANK, R.N.

1st. Oswegatchie is the first place, on the navigable part of Lake Ontario at the East End, and on the American side, but should it be necessary there is ground on the British side, which would answer the purposes intended for the Fort & Storehouses.

2nd. Oswego is next on the American side, and in my opinion is the only place of any great consequence to them, and indeed the only one that would give them any advantage over the British in the Fur Trade, as it is the leading passage from New York through the Oneyda Lake, and as there is no ground nearer than the opposite shore, which is about 40 miles across, it would not be possible to prevent British Merchants from trading with those of the American States, and carrying their Furs to New York in preference to Quebec.

From Oswego to Niagara there are some few Bays where Boats may lie in Summer, but of no great consequence.

3rd. Fort Niagara is the largest Fort and of the greatest force, both with respect to guns & Barracks &c. on the American side, but the ground on the opposite shore is in my opinion equally high, and the soil better, so that every conveniency necessary for a Post could be erected on the British side, with a Carriage road as good, as that now on the American shore, and the conveniences for shipping are all, and ever were, on the British side.

4th. Fort Slosser is the next on the American side, and above the Falls of Niagara, chiefly intended to protect the Provisions and merchandize which may be sent up Lake Erie. A Fort with all other conveniences may be erected on the opposite shore.

5th. Fort Erie is on the British side, and at the foot of the Lake, and is as well suited for the protection of Merchandize &c. as appears to me to be necessary, and is near the Road where the Shipping lie.

The other shore is not in my opinion so well adapted for the above purposes.

6th. The next place on the American shore, that forms anything like a Harbour for the reception of Vessels, is Presquisle, which river leads near to the branches of several others, running towards the States.

7th. At the West end, and towards the South side, are the Sandusky & Miamis Rivers, They lead away to the South into the States, and towards the Mississippi and many other branches of that River, and I believe is a good Country for Furs.

8th. The next place on the American side is the Town & Fort of Detroit, and a Settlement of some miles distance on both sides of the River; but a Fort could be erected equally as commodious on the other side as I believe there is little difference with respect to the ground. The River is about the same breadth as that of Niagara, which I consider to be nearly the distance of a musket shot.

9th. Michillamakinac and the Falls of St. Mary's, Lake Superior, and the Lake of the Woods,

From Fort Schloser, the conveyance is in Bateaux to Fort Erie, 18 miles farther and the Post of Embarkation upon Lake Erie for Detroit this is the only Post remaining to us by the Treaty.

The work consists of four small Bastions, two of bad mason work washed by the Lake, and two on the land side stockaded, it is quite in ruin, and was originally very improperly placed, being commanded within a short musket shot, and exposed to injury from the Lake in Southerly and Westerly winds; if we keep that Country, a good Post here will be indispensably necessary.

Detroit is situated 18 miles up the River from Lake Erie, its principal defence is a sod work hastily thrown up on the commencement of the Rebellion it has four sides with half Bastions, a Fraise upon the Bern, and a good stockade in the Ditch, the greatest diameter of this work is not 300 feet; it commands the upper part of the Town (at the distance of 250 yards) but the other part, situated upon a slope to the River, is not seen from it, there are about 22 nine & six pounders mounted here, with Barracks, Stores, &c proportioned to its size, it is connected with the Town by a strong stockade flanked by wooden block houses, all which form a good defence against musketry, or any sudden attack. Should this Post be given up, and another taken, the most convenient place will be at the entrance of the River, upon a point at present occupied by some officers & men who served the war as Rangers with the Indians—the channel for ships runs between this Point and Isle au bois blanc, which should be also fortified, the distance from each to mid-channel about 200 yards. There is a fine settlement running 20 miles from this point on the north side of the Lake.

The next and last Post on this communication is Michilimackinack, at the farther end of Lake Huron, situated upon an Island about nine miles from the main, the works here never were finished, and its insular situation is its chief defence, this is the great resort of the Fur Traders, fitting out for the N. West Trade, and the centre of a very considerable one in that vast Country to the Mississippi for this Post, no good one, I am inclined to think, can be substituted nearer than the Falls of St. Mary, very many leagues from thence, that might answer for the N. West Trade as the Furs are brought from thence down the Grand or Ottawa River directly to Montreal, leaving the Lakes to the Westward, but the loss of Makina will entirely sever from us the Western Trade above mentioned, which is carried on by the Lakes, the greatest part of which, there can be little doubt, will pass by the Oswego River into the United States, and the N. West Trade, or a part of it, must ultimately be drawn that way also from the same cause.

I cannot finish without taking notice of the Post of Cataragui (now Kingston) situated in a Bay on the Lower end of Lake Ontario— it was a considerable Post for Trade with the French, well fortified and garrisoned, but was never occupied by us until the year 83, when the Commander in Chief considering it a proper

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Brig. General E. Cruikshank