

British Raid on Charlotte
and
Ston's Dragoons
1812-1814

By Philip G. Maple
July 1969

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BRITISH RAIDS ON CHARLOTTE

and

STONE'S DRAGOONS

1812 - 1814

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22 July 1969

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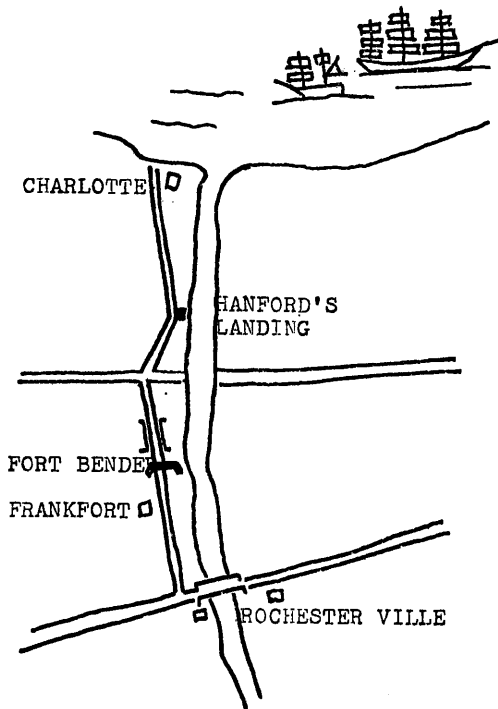
INTRODUCTION

This paper encompasses one of my key interests, local military history. Our local military heritage can be traced back to Denonville's expedition against the Seneca Indians around Victor in 1687. In the 1750's the British built Fort Schyler in what is now Ellison Park.

About every 15 to 20 years some author-historian drags out Commodore Yess's mis-adventures around Charlotte. With each story the context has been changed a little. I have attempted to tell the story as it originally happened. I have relied heavily on Elisha Ely's eye witness account of the British raid in 1814. His account seems to coincide with ^{that of} most of the other historians of that period. I have also attempted to use more than one verifying source for my facts. I have found that there is some confusion ^{about} ~~with~~ Stone's Squadron of dragoons and the "33" from Rochester. Also there is a good deal of confusion or whitewash over Isaac W. Stone's war record. The state Adjutant-General lists several Isaac W. Stones. However when the information is used from other sources the Adjutant-General's information seems to relate to the same Isaac Stone. This paper was not written to throw mud upon one of Rochester's founding father's reputation but instead to give us a clear picture of him and his contribution to our heritage.

I have intentionally left out the traditionally accepted line about "Blood knee deep first." This is probably a fabrication of historian Henry O'Reilly in his Sketches of Rochester that was published in 1838.

The problem with local history is that so much of it is colored and protected by our folklore that when something contrary to the folkmind is uncovered it is promptly buried and denied its rightful place in our heritage.



The map shows the ^{relative} positions of Rochesterville to the surrounding towns. The map is not to scale.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS

Charlotte lies at the mouth of the Genesee River on lake Ontario. It is hard to believe that this [?]thriving international port was once the site of a running naval battle and at least three British naval raids between 1812 and 1814.

The first pioneer trader at Charlotte was Erastus Spalding who operated a hotel on the bluff overlooking the river, it was known for many years as "Stutson House."¹ William McKinstry and Spalding had owned two schooners and carried on trade with Canada before the War of 1812.

Congress declared war on Great Britain 18 June 1812. It took a week for the news of war to reach Canandaigua, ~~then and~~ a few more days via the "frontier grapevine" to ^{reach} the Genesee settlements. The fears of the settlers can well be imagined. However, in time they returned to their own pursuits and were not too greatly upset by "Mr Madison's War."²

They were not upset, that is, until October, when a British squadron under Commodore Earle, a Canadian officer, anchored off Charlotte. Earle's flagship the Royal George, discharged two boats with 70 men. They rowed in and towed two American vessels away. One was a U.S. Revenue cutter

¹ Monroe County History Office, War at the Lakeshore, p. 7.

² R. Marsh and D.S. Truesdale, "War on Lake Ontario" Rochester History, IV. (October, 1942), p. 9.

and the other, the Lady Murray^{was} owned by William McKinstry. The British discovered that the sails and rigging were missing from the latter and returned the following day to Spalding's store. They recovered the missing equipment and Mr. Spalding gave them two gallons of whiskey if they would leave the place intact.³ Shortly later they sailed away.

During the winter months both navies rested, built and fitted out ships for the lake squadrons. The lake war became a building war under the two new commanders. Captain Isaac Chauncy replaced Commodore Woolsey in command of the U.S. Squadron in October 1812. In May 1813 Commodore Sir James Yeo, of the Royal Navy replaced Earle Little did they expect that the lake war would ruin both their reputations through their continued stalling and failure to bring on a decisive engagement.

Commodore Yeo started harrassing American shipping soon after he took command at Kingston. On 13 June 1813, he captured two schooners off Pultneyville laden with supplies for the army. From these Yeo learned of the supply depot that was being built up at Charlotte.

The British squadron, of eight vessels, arrived off Charlotte later that same day. A landing party consisting of the 1st Scotts (1st Foot), Marines and Sailors, about 150 men invaded the depot. The inhabitants did not offer

³Monroe, op. cit., p. 8.

resistance. They were shut up in one or two buildings to prevent them from warning the countryside. Yeo's men camped there for the night. They confiscated between 400 - 500 barrels of flour, pork and a sloop laden with 1200 bushels of corn destined for the Niagara Troops.⁴

The British also took some provisions from Frederick Bushnell's store. George Latta, Bushnell's clerk, received a receipt from the British officer for the goods. This, as Parker reports in her Rochester a Story Historical (p. 98), The "British took what they needed paying for the same, however, which gave rise of course to suspicions that it was a pre-arranged plan for a profitable business transaction on both sides."

Meanwhile word spread of the alien landing. A militia force, composed of local citizens, assembled at Hanford's Landing under Lt. Colonel Caleb Hopkins. The force marched to Charlotte the following day, 14 June. They arrived in time to watch the British landing party board their boats, and sail away.

NAVAL BATTLE

The American squadron had also been busy in the Spring of 1813 with the fall of York and the capture of Fort George, across the river from Fort Niagara. It was not until early September that Commodore Chauncy found time to

⁴Blake F. McKelvey, Rochester the Water-power City 1812 - 1854, p. 42.

chase his English counterpart, Sir James Yeo. On 7 September, Chauncy found Yeo's Squadron near the Niagara River. Yeo fled northward with Chauncy immediately behind him towing his heavy schooners. They proceeded around the lake, frequently sailing within 1-2 miles of each other but not close enough to use their guns. The chase continued night and day until Yeo's fleet fell becalmed at the mouth of the Genesee. This was 11 September, the day after Perry's victory on Lake Erie. Yeo would remain in this position for almost 5 hours. During this time riders were sent to the inland settlements to call up the militia. Within a few hours a considerable number of men had gathered at Charlotte. Then Chauncy's fleet was sighted rounding "Bluff Point!" Chauncy closed to within three-quarters of a mile of Yeo before the British took the wind. The American squadron was able to use their 24 and 32 pounder guns that had range over the British short-range Carronades. Of Yeo's 92 guns only 6 guns could reach the Americans. A few shot struck the General Pike's hull and a little rigging was cut.

The British fared worse. In addition to having several of their hulls punctured, ^{they lost} midshipman William Ellery and three seamen were killed and seven seamen wounded. Yeo managed to sail to the safety of Amherst bay off the False Duck Islands. Then he slipped away to the safety of Kingston where Chauncey blockaded him for the rest of the year.

The engagement was indecisive; Chauncy blamed it on the "superior sailing of his advisary and the unwillingness of his pilots to follow Yeo into Amherst bay because of the unknown sandbars." Yeo's excuses were similar, he couldn't "close" with the Americans. They both said that they wanted to fight although ^{each said} the other was superior.⁵ The table on the following page shows the comparative strengths of the squadrons.

The building war centered around the column marked Broadside Iron. This broadside iron is the total weight of shot that every gun in the squadron can fire at one time ie. 10-24 pounders = 240 pounds of broadside metal. To recapitulate, the Americans had more ships and more guns than the British but the British had more broadside iron. Yeo's cannons were suited for short range, point blank warfare, whereas Chauncy's cannons were more suited for a long range fight.

With yeo bottled up at Kingston, Chauncy spent the rest of the year, until navigation closed, transporting troops and supplies along the lake.

⁵Franklin Hanford, "Visits of American and British Naval Vessels to the Genesee river 1809-1814," Rochester Historical Society, III, p. 48.

SIR JAMES YEO'S SQUADRON

SHIP	WT.	CREW	BROAD- SIDE METAL	ARMAMENT
Wolf	637	220	392	1 long 24 pdr 8 long 18 " 4 short 68 " 10 short 32 "
Royal George	510	200	360	3 long 18 " 2 short 68 " 16 short 32 "
<u>Brigs</u>				
Melville	279	100	210	2 long 18 " 12 Short 32 "
Maira	262	100	153	2 long 9 " 12 short 24 "
<u>Schooners</u>				
Sydney Smith	216	80	172	2 long 12 " 10 short 32 "
Beresford	187	70	87	1 long 24 " 1 long 9 " 6 short 18 "
6	2,091	770	1,374	92 guns
				TOTALS

ISAAC CHAUNCEY'S SQUADRON

SHIP	WT.	CREW	BROAD- SIDE METAL	ARMAMENT
Pike	875	300	360	28 long 24 pdr
Madison	593	200	364	24 short 32 "
<u>Brigs</u>				
Oneida	243	100	172	16 short 24 "
<u>Schooners</u>				
Syph	300	70	146	4 " 32 " 6 " 6 "
Conquest	82	40	56	1 " 32 " 1 " 12 " 4 " 6 "
Thompkins	96	40	62	1 " 32 " 1 " 12 " 6 " 6 "
Ontario	53	35	44	1 " 32 " 1 " 12 "
Fair America	53	30	36	1 " 24 " 1 " 12 "
Pert	50	25	24	1 " 24 "
Asp	57	25	24	1 " 24 "
10	2,402	865	1,288	98 guns
				TOTALS

STONE'S SQUADRON

That winter the British captured Fort Niagara, burned Lewiston and Buffalo. As the refugees streamed eastward concern mounted for the safety of the Genesee settlements. An ex-captain of cavalry, Isaac W. Stone, a tavern keeper in Rochesterville went to Albany early in 1814 to petition for a company to be stationed at the mouth of the Genesee, for without such protection the settlers "do not think it safe to go on with building here next summer."⁶

Isaac Stone was born in Gilford, Connecticut on 19 May 1774. In 1800 he moved to Bloomfield in Ontario County. Ten years later he moved his wife and five children to the "falls" settlement.

He erected a frame house at the corner of ^{what is} the now South Avenue and Main Street. Stone Street is named for the captain. His daughter's name graces Minerva Place. Isaac opened a tavern in 1812; his wife continued the business after his death until 1817.

Isaac Stone's name appears on the muster roll of U. Beach's cavalry company in 1809, as 1st lieutenant. Then as captain he served on the Niagara frontier,⁷ probably in

⁶ McKelvey, op. cit., p. 46.

⁷ Wheeler Chapin Case, "Rochester's Citizen Soldiers," Rochester Historical Society, XIV, p. 226.

Major VanRensselaer's 12th regiment of Cavalry.⁸

Stone was Authorized by General Peter B. Porter commanding the Western New York Militia to raise a squadron of dragoons in the Rochesterville area for six months service. The primary purpose of the squadron was to guard the Genesee river settlements.⁹ They were to be stationed at Charlotte. Isaac Stone became captain with Claudius V. Boughton of Pittsford as lieutenant and Abell Parkhurst of Lima, ensign. Doctor Simon Hunt of the town of Greece enlisted as the surgeon. The enlistment roll was opened in March 1814 and a full squadron of 162 men was recruited by April. The men came primarily from Lima, Bloomfield and Pittsford. With a few from Leichester and the towns surrounding Rochester.¹⁰ The squadron was divided into three troops centered around Rochester, Bloomfield and Lima.

The contract for uniforming and equipping the unit was secured by Abelard Reynolds, the village saddler and Harvey Ely a merchant. The officers were uniformed in a brass-buttoned, blue swallow-tailed coat and a pair of brownish-yellow nankeen pantaloon tucked into a pair of leather boots. Their caps were of black leather with a brass visor and chin strap; along the back seam was a buck's tail. Whereas the

⁸The Adjutant-General at Albany lists the following
 Isaac Stones:
 Captain Isaac W. Stone - 12th Regiment of Cavalry
 25 September 1812 to 30 December 1812.
 Lieutenant Colonel - Regiment not shown - 1 July
 1814 to 1 August 1814.
 Cornet - 12th Regiment of Cavalry.

¹⁰Lockwood L. Doty, History of Livingston County, p. 320.

⁹Case, op. cit., 226.



CAPTAIN
STONE'S
DRAGOONS

r.j. Starbuck

enlisted men wore buckskin shirts and leggings. For a military accent they wore a sprig of pine or a turkey feather in their felt hats.¹¹ Later, those who could afford the leather caps and blue coats bought them.

Their mounts were farm horses which were used primarily for mobility. When they came in contact with the "enemy" they would dismount and fight from behind a convenient forest tree. Stone trained his troop in the tavern's wagonyard.

Two fieldpieces were sent by Porter from the Canandaigua arsenal to Stone for the defense of Rochester and adjacent shipping points on the lake in April, 1814. One was an iron 18 pounder and the other a brass 4 pounder. The guns were hauled together with a scant supply of ammunition over muddy roads by ox teams. The four pounder was stored in Stone's barn while the 18 pounder proceeded to the lake.

A chronic lack of gunpowder has been a problem of the American artillerist until recent times. This lack generally made artillery practice impossible. The Rochester men received their live gunnery drill as a result of a prank. During a practice Elisha Ely attempted to sneak a ball into the cannon without Stone's noticing. He was caught and Stone admonished him for his waste of public property.

Ely replied, "Nevermind captain we will find it again."

"Find the devil," said Stone.

¹¹Case, op. cit., p229



ENLISTED MAN
STONE'S DRAGOONS

Enos Stone and Fredrick Hanford acted as chief engineers with Elisha Ely as assistant. Their target was a large white spot on a tree across the river. The cannon fired, the ball struck the tree about 4 feet below the mark. The ball was recovered and returned to the cache.¹²

CHARLOTTE 1814

In early May word spread that the British squadron was at Oswego and heading west. Chauncy had not left Sackett's Harbor and would not be able to have his ships fitted out until the end of July. Thus Yeo was able to roam the lake at his will.

Stone took 50 of his men to Charlotte to prepare some fortifications. He had a breastwork of ship's timber and barn refuse built for the 18 pounder. It was located near the Commercial hotel, or Stutson House, and commanded the road leading from the warf.

There were 33 men left at Rochester capable of bearing arms. They were organized into a company with Elisha Ely and Francis Brown acting as Captains. Ely took part of the men to Deep Hollow, a ravine crossing Lake Avenue, and built Fort Bender, a breastwork for a last ditch stand if the British should invade the Genesee Country. The fort was named for H. R. Bender the first magistrate in Frankfort who was foremost in having it built.¹³ The fort was situated

¹²Hanford, op. cit., p55.

¹³Edward R. Foreman, "Historical Street Name," Rochester Historical Society, III, p. 385.

on the south side of Deep Hollow built from fallen trees. The 4 pounder was placed in it covering the approaches to the bridge. The bridge planks were loosened for easy removal, hopefully to delay or halt the enemy's march. Years later a school was built on the site.

Yeo's ships appeared off the Genesee in the early evening of 14 May 1814. Stone sent messengers to the surrounding militia for aid. Elisha Ely received word around sundown to notify the inhabitants that the British fleet was in sight. He was also to organize his men and bring them up the following morning. About 11 p.m. another messenger arrived requesting Ely to come up immediately.

H. Ely and Company had received 50 muskets and 3000 rounds of ammunition; it was divided up among Elisha's men. Two men were left behind at Rochester, one to take the women and children to safety, the other declined to go. Jenny Marsh Parker gives us an insight into the men's character:

One was the left handed fiddler of the settlement and another, whose character has been drawn with a suggestive indistinctness that leads us to conclude the women were his protectors, and he must have been an addition to some mother's burden, but possibly we are mistaken.¹⁴

¹⁴Parker, op. cit., p. 101.

The remaining 31 men started for Charlotte about 2 a.m. on the 15th. It was raining hard and the roads were exceedingly muddy. They arrived at the lake soon after daylight in the midst of a fog. Meanwhile contingents from Colonel Atkinson's Militia Regiment, from the northwestern towns, and Captain Rowe's Company from Gates had arrived.¹⁵

The heavy ^{fog} shrouded the British vessels, although their small boats could be heard rowing in various directions on the placid water.

Captain, then acting Major, Stone suggested that Brown and Ely take some volunteers and an old boat, that had been used for lighting channel markers, to try to capture some of the British boats. Brown found six men to man the oars and another dozen armed with muskets were hidden in the bottom of the boat. They rowed out about a mile drawing fire from their men on shore. As the fog disappeared they found their little craft within range of the British squadron's guns. Brown's boat turned slowly toward the shore. Shortly a twelve oared barge came in pursuit from one of the British vessels. Brown now headed his boat eastward toward Irondequoit hoping to give Stone's 18 pounder a shot at the barge. The barge stopped, probably the commander thought that it was some kind of trick. Brown's boat stopped, he waited to see what would

¹⁵William F. Peck, History of Rochester New York, p. 104.

happen next. The British started rowing and turned toward the ships. Brown returned to the shore.

A British barge was sighted rowing ashore from the flag ship, Prince Regent about 10 a.m. Stone chose Brown and Ely to meet it. He told them, "Don't let them come into the river --- don't let them land at all --- their feet shall not pollute our soil."

The white flag was received near the mouth of the river where a large tree had fallen into the lake. Brown and Ely walked out on the tree with a handkerchief tied to a stick. The boat pulled along side, the British officer attempted to come ashore, however he was dissuaded from doing so. Then a dozen armed men appeared on the shore. The alarmed officer exclaimed, "Is it your custom to receive a flag of truce under arms?" Brown apologized for his lack of military knowledge, after all he was a civilian not a soldier. The men were ordered to return to the "fort!"

During this conversation Stone staged a review for the British with his handful of men, probably not more than 200 men. He had them march into the fort in plain view of Yeo's emissary, then around in back of the hill where they reformed and marched in again. Thus they were under the opinion that there was several hundred troops in the vicinity.

The officer gave Yeo's demand for all public stores to be

surrendered and private property would be respected. He also produced a paper signed by a number of Oswego citizens who readily handed over the government stores to the British rather than "risk their lives and property to defend it."¹⁶ Ely took the paper to Stone who told him to inform the emissary, "That the public property is in the hands of those who will defend it."¹⁷

The message was delivered and the boat returned to the Prince Regent. Shortly afterward a gunboat was seen being towed by four smaller boats. Brown and Ely with 18 men returned to their boat so that another attempt could be made to capture a British boat.

Judge John Williams led a dozen riflemen across the river to the east side, too far up to be seen from the fleet. They were positioned behind a gravel ridge to catch the gunboat in a crossfire and if it was possible to cut off their retreat.

As the gunboat came closer to shore the British fired a gun. An over excited gunner in the fort prematurely fired the 18 pounder. The gunboat was still out of range, with this warning all hope of capture by surprise was gone. After firing a few more shots she returned to the fleet.

¹⁶Hanford, op.cit., p. 60

¹⁷Ibid, p.61.



CHARLOTTE HARBOR, IN 1816

The Stutson House overlooking the harbor was probably known as the United States or the Commercial Hotel when Lesueur made this sketch during his visit to Charlotte. The scene has been reproduced from a photostat of the sketch as it appears in a recent Paris edition of Lesueur's works.

General Porter arrived from Canandaigua with some 500 or 600 militia early in the afternoon.¹⁸ About 4 p.m. another flag came in. Major Darby Noon, Porter's aide received it. Yeo threatened to land his army and 400 Indians to take the property if it was not handed over. Porter replied that he would take care of the troops and Indians if they were landed. He also stated that he would fire on the flag if it came in again. During the night the British sailed away, without the stores and without a fight. This was the last time that the fleet would appear off Charlotte.

By the second night about 800 men had gathered at Charlotte. They were fed from the stores, for there was plenty of pork, flour, and whiskey. Ely relates that they did not have cooking utensils so they used a shovel to bake their flour and water cakes ~~ex~~ and toasted the pork on sticks over the fire. It was considered quite unhealthy to drink Genesee water without whiskey, and the salt pork without vegetables made the men exceedingly thirsty. The result can be readily conceived. In one instance, "a captain was informed by one of his men that, if it were not for the coat he was wearing he would be due for a sound thrashing; where upon the captain divested himself of the protective coat and administered a trouncing instead of receiving one."¹⁹

¹⁸Marsh, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁹Lockwood R. Doty, History of the Genesee Country, p. 747.

Another incident happened on the road between Charlotte and Rochester. A mute was captured under the suspicion that he was a British spy. His captors treated him cruelly while trying to make him talk. They suspended him by a rope over a high river bank, with a man standing with an axe to cut the rope if he did not break his silence. Finally his captors were convinced that he was a mute. They released him, "and (he) made off like a maniac to the woods and was never heard of afterwards."²⁰

ST. DAVIDS

Between late May and July, Stone's squadron rendezvoused at Rochester and were mustered into Porter's Volunteer Dragoons. Stone was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel about the same time. Lieutenant Boughton took command of the squadron.²¹

Stone's military career was short lived. While engaged in a skirmish near the village of St. Davids outside Queenston, Stone supposedly ordered the burning of the village. His reason is not clear ^{is it clear that} or if it really was burned under his orders. A marker on the site tells us:

The Burning of St. Davids 1814
 On July 18, 1814 during the final American campaign on the Niagara frontier Major General Peter B. Porter sent a detachment of militia from the United States encampment at Queenston to attack St. Davids. This force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Isaac W. Stone was joined later by a small group of American Regulars. Despite opposition

²⁰Parker, op. cit., p. 105.

²¹L.L. Doty, op. cit., p. 321.

from the 1st Lincoln Militia the enemy captured the village, looted it and burned most of the buildings. Stone was severely censored for the destruction of private property and summarily dismissed from the U.S. Army.²²

Stone died at LeRoy while returning from the front in August, 1814. His squadron was involved in the battle of Lundy's Lane, 25 July 1814. The records do not show when they were mustered out. However of the 162 men that joined Stone in April only 48 were mustered out.²³

In December a treaty of peace was signed. Rochester's population had grown during the war to over 300 inhabitants. In the future the village would grow into the metropolis of 300,000 that it is today. And with its growth it would absorb the little hamlets of Frankfort, Hanford's Landing and Charlotte.

²²George W. Healy, Niagara Calling, p. 36.

²³L.L.Doty. op. cit., p. 322.

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