

Notes on the Visits
of
AMERICAN AND BRITISH NAVAL VESSELS
TO THE GENESEE RIVER
1809-1814

By
Franklin Hanford

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It is difficult for the summer residents who people the shores of Lake Ontario from Nine Mile Point on the east to Manitou Beach on the west of the Genesee river, or for the holiday makers who wander among the trivial or amusing shows of Ontario Beach park at Charlotte to realize that the now peaceful waters of "the beautiful lake," as the Iroquois called it, were once plowed by hostile fleets. And yet, for a period of three years, nearly a century ago, during our war of 1812-14 with Great Britain, both American and British fleets appeared off the Genesee at intervals, and the pioneers of Monroe county witnessed naval maneuvers, heard the sound of an enemy's guns, and actually gathered to resist the invasion of their country.

It is proposed to mention here all the authenticated visits of American and British naval vessels to the mouth of the Genesee river up to the year 1815. While it is generally supposed that no men-of-war's men ever entered the Genesee in a government craft before the year 1812, there was certainly one such visit as early as June, 1809, nearly three years before the commencement of the War of 1812. An entertaining account of that visit will be found in J. Fenimore Cooper's "Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers," published in 1846, in two volumes. In the second volume Cooper devotes thirty-three pages to his friend, Melancthon Taylor Woolsey, U. S. Navy. Following Cooper's account it appears that in 1808, our relations with Great Britain being strained, Woolsey, who was then a lieutenant, was selected by the Navy department to proceed to Oswego and superintend the construction of a brig of sixteen guns for service on Lake Ontario, and to command the first regular armament ever made under the Union on our inland waters. Woolsey took with him to Oswego two midshipmen, Messrs. Gamble and Cooper, the latter being James Cooper (whose name was afterwards changed to James Fenimore Cooper), the celebrated American novelist and

naval historian. They spent the winter at Oswego and in the spring of 1809, the brig, named the Onelda, was launched and equipped for service. Her contractors were Christian Bergh and Henry Eckford, both of whom became eminent naval constructors.

Woolsey now decided to take a holiday and get a view of Niagara. Manning and provisioning the Onelda's launch he and Midshipman Cooper sailed from Oswego late in June, 1809. Relying upon the boat's sails, only four seamen from the Onelda's crew were taken along, and as they soon met strong head winds, there was not enough force to do much with the oars. Three times they beat up to a headland called the Devil's Nose [which is in the present town of Hamlin, Monroe county] before they could pass it. "Four nights were passed in the boat, two on the beach, and one in a hut on the banks of the Genesee, a few miles below the falls, and of course quite near the present site of Rochester." Their provisions having failed they were actually suffering for food. One old seaman of the crew, who had passed forty years on the lake, and knew the position of every one of the few dwellings near the shore between Oswego and Niagara, guided the two officers to some log huts where they obtained a loaf of bread, two pies, and a gallon of milk. Returning to the launch, sail was made and the party proceeded, but "hunger and head winds again brought the adventurers to a stand. A solitary hut was known to be at no great distance inland from the point where the boat now was, and again the party landed," having been driven to leeward of the river. "The boat entered by a narrow inlet into a large bay that was familiarly called Gerundegutt (Irondequoit), and was hauled up for the night. The whole party bivouacked supperless." Next morning, however, they found a house, a mile or two inland, and bought a sheep for a half eagle. Woolsey contrived to make a sort of soup of part of the mutton. Having appeased their hunger they

again set out for the westward, but again the weather was foul and squally. In crossing Genesee bay, the boat nearly filled and they had to bear up again for the river. "Here the party passed another night, in a solitary log cabin, at, or near the point where the steamers and other craft must now make their harbor. A little bread was got in exchange for some sheep, and milk was purchased." In the morning, however, they again headed to the west and finally got past the Devil's Nose and into the Niagara river. "It was the Fourth of July, [1809], and the launch entered the river with an American ensign set. It proceeded to Newark, where the two officers took up their quarters for a week. In an hour a deputation from Fort Niagara came across to inquire who had brought the American ensign, for the first time, in a man-of-war's boat, into that river. On being told, a formal invitation was given to join the officers on the other side in celebrating the day."

"Woolsey and his party remained some time in and about Niagara. He passed up on the upper lake, and paid a visit on board the Adams, a brig that belonged to the War department. The return to Oswego was less difficult, and was accomplished in two days. These were the first movements by American man-of-war's men that ever occurred on the great lakes—waters that have since become famous by the deeds of McDonough, Perry, and Chauncey."

Woolsey remained on the Lake Ontario station until after the close of the War of 1812, but Cooper not long after the trip to Niagara returned to the Atlantic coast. His winter at Oswego and his trip to Niagara by way of "Gerundegutt," the Genesee river, and the Devil's Nose gave him a personal knowledge of the inland sea and of the wilderness which then surrounded it, and to that experience we owe the vivid pictures of Lake Ontario drawn in his story of "The Pathfinder."

At the beginning of our second war with Great Britain, neither party to the contest had more than an insignificant force on Lake Ontario. The British had the greater number of vessels, but they lacked regular and experienced officers to command. Hence the American navy under Lieutenant Melancthon T. Woolsey, of our regular service, was able to hold in check the British squadron under the Canadian Commodore Earle during 1812, until the arrival of Captain Isaac Chauncey, U. S. Navy, in October of that year, when he assumed command of our

forces on the lake and continued in command during the rest of the war.

In May, 1813, Captain Sir James Lucas Yeo, of the Royal Navy, together with four captains, eight lieutenants, twenty-four midshipmen, and about 450 picked seamen, arrived on the scene of action, sent out by the home government especially for service on the lakes, and Sir James continued in command of the British naval forces there until the close of the war.

Both Chauncey and Yeo held the actual rank of captain, but by custom and courtesy were called commodore from the fact that they had command of squadrons.

The headquarters of the Americans was at Sacketts Harbor, and of the British, at Kingston. Both parties, from the beginning, made strenuous efforts to increase their fleets, especially by building vessels at the ports mentioned. The Americans, in 1812, purchased a number of small vessels and converted them into gunboats. Shipwrights and other mechanics were brought from the seaboard by both the British and Americans and employed constantly at shipbuilding until the war closed, by which time both fleets had some vessels of considerable size, mounting guns ranging from 6-pounders to 68-pounders.

Among the vessels sold to our government were several which were engaged in the lake commerce to and from the Genesee river. The following extract from the "Recollections of George C. Latta" in "Early Rochester Records," as published in the Rochester "Post Express" of May 27, 1911, refers to some of these vessels: "As early as 1809 Roswell Lewis & Co. of Ogdensburg built a schooner called the Experiment, Captain Holms, and began the forwarding business from Genesee to Ogdensburg. They afterwards built a vessel called the Captain Dickson and the schooner called the Genesee Packet, Captain Ober Meeyer. These vessels continued to do business between Ogdensburg and Genesee river until the spring of 1812, when war was declared between the United States and Great Britain, and the vessels were then sold to the government and sent into service on the lake."

None of the American or British histories of naval operations on Lake Ontario which I have consulted, make any reference to events at or near the Genesee during the year 1812, though vessels of both nations were cruising on the lake during the latter part of that year, and there is good reason to

believe that vessels of our squadron ascended the river as high as Hanford's Landing, not only in 1812, but subsequently, for refuge, for recruits or for supplies. But I am able to quote from a broadside printed in 1843, which contains an address given by Mr. Donald McKenzie before the Mumford, N. Y. Lyceum in that year. Mr. McKenzie was one of the Scotch pioneers who had settled near the Caledonia "Big Springs." He said:

In the latter part of the year 1812, being on a visit with my wife at her father's at the mouth of the river, he accompanied us on horseback to the residence of my brother-in-law, Abel Rowe, on the Ridge Road. The next morning, as we were mounting our horses to return, a messenger arrived with an express, stating that a British fleet was approaching the mouth of the river, and requesting Captain Rowe to call out the militia immediately. Returning, on our way towards the landing, we could hear distinctly the report of every cannon fired by the enemy. After leaving my wife with the family of my worthy friend, Benj. Fowle, at the landing, we hurried on as fast as possible to the mouth of the river. But nothing was to be seen of the fleet nor of the few families there. We rode immediately to my father-in-law's old log house, standing then on the very spot where now stands the United States Light House, fastened our horses, and from there, with my brother-in-law, William Hencher, Jr., went on foot to the beach of the lake. We soon discovered the fleet sailing towards us, from the direction of Braddock's Bay, but not anticipating any danger, we remained on the spot until it approached quite near us. We were shortly saluted with a 24-pounder, which whistled through the bushes near where we stood, and entered the bank of the lake in our rear. This shot was in rather too close proximity to us to be agreeable. I afterwards dug the ball out of the bank and used it for a number of years to grind indigo with in my woolen factory.

The British squadron then, according to Mr. McKenzie, retreated, "without landing or doing any injury." It was probably in command of Commodore Earle, a Canadian officer, and composed of the Royal George, and a brig, and two or three smaller vessels. Mr. McKenzie's visit was probably in October or November, 1812, as navigation closed by the middle of the latter month. I have endeavored to find out what became of the British shot, but regret to say that all trace of it is lost, as I learned from Mr. McKenzie's daughter, Miss Elizabeth McKenzie, and his nephew, Mr. William S. McKenzie, of Caledonia.

James Fenimore Cooper, in his History of the Navy of the United States, says that on June 16, 1813, Sir James

Yeo went off the Genesee with his squadron where some provisions were seized and carried away. The following official report from Commodore Yeo to Mr. John Wilson Croker, Secretary of the Admiralty, includes a reference to this event. It is given in "A Full and Correct Account of the Chief Naval Occurrences of the Late War between Great Britain and the United States of America," by William James, published at London, in 1817:

H. M. S. Wolf, Kingston, Upper Canada,
29th June, 1813.

Sir:

I have the honor to inform you, for the information of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that on the 3d instant, I sailed with His Majesty's squadron under my command from this port, to co-operate with our army at the head of the lake, and annoy the enemy by intercepting all supplies going to the enemy and thereby oblige his squadron to come out for its protection.

At daylight on the 8th, the enemy's camp was discovered close to us at Forty-mile creek. It being calm, the large vessels could not get in, but the Beresford, Captain Spilsbury, the Sir Sidney Smith, Lieutenant Majoribanks, and the gun-boats under the orders of Lieutenant Anthony (first of this ship) succeeded in getting close under the enemy's batteries, and by a sharp and well-directed fire, soon obliged him to make a precipitate retreat, leaving all his camp equipage, provisions, stores, etc., behind, which fell into our hands. The Beresford also captured all his batteaux, laden with stores, etc. Our troops immediately occupied the post. I then proceeded along to the westward of the enemy's camp, leaving our army in front. On the 13th we captured two schooners and some boats, going to the enemy with supplies; by them I received information that there was a depot of provisions at Genesee river. I accordingly proceeded off that river, landed some seamen and marines of the squadron, and brought off all the provisions found in the government stores; as also a sloop laden with grain for the army. On the 19th I anchored off the Great Sodus, landed a part of the 1st Regiment Royal Scots and took off 600 barrels of flour and pork, which had arrived there for their army.

I have the honor to be, etc.,

J. L. Yeo, Commodore.

Nearly all the writers on events connected with the local history of Monroe county and Western New York refer to this incident of the carrying away of provisions by Sir James Yeo's fleet. A very clear account of the affair is given by a writer in the Rochester "Post Express" of May 19, 1894, as follows:

Coming to anchor he sent a party ashore for plunder. There was no military organization at the mouth of the river and no opposition was offered. The enemy remained over night, keeping sentries posted, and retired to their

ships next morning, taking salt, whisky, and provisions from the storehouse of Frederick Bushnell. George Latta, who was Bushnell's clerk at the time, obtained a receipt from the British officer for these goods. It has been said that the British hurriedly boarded their ships because they heard that an armed force was collecting at Hanford's Landing and intended to move against them. Probably the British remained until they had gathered the supplies they needed and left at their own convenience and in accordance with their original plan. At this time the British squadron consisted of the Wolfe, Royal George, Moira, Melville, Beresford, Sidney Smith, and one or two gunboats.

"The Post Express" writer's view of the affair (that Commodore Yeo left at his own convenience and to carry out his original plan), is borne out by the British officer's letter quoted above. And it will be noted that while off the Genesee, on this occasion, he had on board the vessels of his fleet at least a part of the First regiment of Royal Scots. It is not probable, therefore, that he was driven off by fear of the force of hurriedly gathered militia up the river.

Turner, in his History of the Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, says, with reference to this affair of June 16, 1813, that "the only restraint that was put upon a few captured citizens, was the preventing their going out to warn the inhabitants of the neighborhood of their presence," and that a body of armed men that had collected at Hanford's Landing "marched down, arriving at the Charlotte Landing just as the invaders were embarking on board their boats. Some shots were fired upon them, but from too great a distance to be made effective."

The men to whom Turner refers were probably those under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Caleb Hopkins. The following letter to Hopkins from Major-General Amos Hall, of Ontario county, refers to the event under discussion:

Bloomfield, June 16th, 1813
4 o'clock, P. M.

Lt. Col. Caleb Hopkins.

Sir: I this moment received your letter by Major Norton advising me of the landing of the enemy from their fleet off the mouth of the Genesee river. Your calling out your Regiment was perfectly correct. You will please to collect as many men as appearances will justify until the enemy's vessels leave the mouth of the river. It cannot be expected they will make much stay. But you will be able to judge of their movements by to-morrow morning. I shall expect you will give me immediate notice if you think more force will be wanted.

Yours respectfully,

A. Hall.

Hopkins at that time held the double position of collector of customs and inspector of customs at the port of Genesee, both commissions having been issued by President Madison, but his civic duties did not prevent his engaging in military pursuits, as is shown by the above letter.

The effect of this invasion was to spread alarm through the community and it was feared that the British Commodore might at some subsequent day land a large force of troops from his fleet and march up the river. Some families of settlers at and below the falls of the Genesee removed to other places. In several instances the women and children were sent away while the men of the family remained. The settlement and development of the Genesee region were much retarded by the War of 1812.

About August 10-12, 1813, according to Fenimore Cooper's account of Naval Operations on Lake Ontario, Commodore Chauncey, after a running fight with the British squadron at the western end of the lake, determined to run with his vessels for the Genesee, on account of a gale which had sprung up, but as the gale increased and two of his vessels had but a day's provisions on board, he stood in for Sacketts' Harbor, where he arrived August 13, 1813. The following is taken from Chauncey's official report to the Secretary of the Navy, dated on board the U. S. ship General Pike, 13th August, 1813, at Sacketts' Harbor:

Sir: I arrived here this day. . . The gale increasing very much, and as I could not go into Niagara with this ship, I determined to run to Genesee Bay, as a shelter for the small vessels, and with the expectation of being able to obtain provisions for the squadron, as we were all nearly out, the Madison and Oneida having not a single day's on board when we arrived opposite Genesee Bay. I found there was every prospect of the gale's continuing, and if I did, I could run to this place, and provision the whole squadron with more certainty, and in nearly the same time that I could at Genesee, admitting that I could obtain provisions at that place.

After provisioning his ships for five weeks, Chauncey, according to Cooper, "sailed on another cruise the very day of his arrival. On the 16th, the squadron was off the Niagara, and the same day the enemy was made, being eight sail in all. Some maneuvering to obtain the wind followed, but it coming on to blow, the vessels ran into the mouth of the Genesee and anchored. The wind, however, freshened so much as to compel the whole squadron to

weigh and bear up, forcing them down the lake under easy canvas." The American squadron on this occasion consisted of the Pike, Madison, Oneida, Tompkins, Conquest, Ontario, Pert, and Lady of the Lake. As the gale continued to increase, Chauncey took his vessels to Sackett's Harbor where they arrived on the 19th of August, 1813.

Following Cooper's History it appears that "on the 11th of September, [this was the day after Perry's victory on Lake Erie, September 10, 1813,] the enemy was becalmed off the Genesee, when the American vessels got a breeze and ran within gunshot, before the English squadron took the wind. A running fight, that lasted more than three hours, was the result; but the enemy escaped in consequence of his better sailing, it being out of the power of the American commander to close with more than two of his vessels, the Sylph being totally unfitted for that kind of combat. As the Pike succeeded in getting several broadsides at the enemy, he did not escape without being a good deal cut up, having, according to his own report, an officer and ten men killed and wounded. The Pike was hulled a few times, and other trifling injuries were received, though no person was hurt. Previously to this affair, Commodore Chauncey had been joined by the Fair American and Asp. On the 12th, Sir James Yeo ran into Amherst bay, where the Americans were unable to follow him, on account of their ignorance of the shoals. It was supposed that the English commodore declined engaging on this occasion, in consequence of the smoothness of the water, it being his policy to bring his enemy to action in blowing weather, when the American schooners would be nearly useless."

Nearly all writers on the history of the United States navy mention this skirmish off the Genesee. Willis J. Abbott in his "Blue Jackets of 1812," says: "On the 11th of September [1813] the enemies met near the mouth of the Genesee river and exchanged broadsides. A few of the British vessels were hulled, and, without more ado, hauled off into the shallow waters of Amherst [Amherst?] bay where the Americans could not follow them."

In John R. Spear's four-volume "History of the Navy," he says, referring to the operations on Lake Ontario in 1813: "On the day after Perry's victory, the two squadrons did have a brush at long range in a light breeze. It was a good day for the Yankee schooners and Sir James, by his own confession, sailed away after a few

shots had been fired. The Americans lost nothing. The British lost four killed and seven wounded."

Theodore Roosevelt in his "Naval War of 1812," gives a very full discussion of this event. He says: "On the 11th of September a partial engagement, at very long range, in light weather, occurred near the mouth of the Genesee river; the Americans suffered no loss whatever, while the British had one midshipman and three seamen killed and seven wounded, and afterward ran into Amherst bay."

The latest American writer on the Naval War of 1812 is Captain Alfred T. Mahan, who, in his "Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812" says: "On one occasion, off the Genesee, on September 11, [1813] a westerly breeze carried the United States squadron within three-quarters of a mile of the enemy, before the latter felt it. A cannonade and pursuit of some hours followed, but without decisive results."

William James, the English author of "A Full and Correct Account of the Chief Naval Occurrences of the Late War between Great Britain and the U. S. of America," already referred to, says of this engagement off the Genesee: "The only shot received by the British fleet that wanted a plug, struck the Melville, and that so far under the water, that Captain Spillsbury had to run his guns in on one side, and out on the other, to enable him to stop it."

James also wrote "The Naval History of Great Britain," and in the London, 1837, edition of that six-volume work, he says: "On the 11th of September [1813], while the British squadron lay becalmed off the Genesee river the American fleet of eleven sail, by the aid of a partial wind, succeeded in getting within range of their long 24- and 32-pounders, and during five hours cannonaded the British who did not fire a cannonade, and had only six guns in all the squadron that could reach the enemy. At sunset a breeze sprang up from the westward when Sir James steered for the American fleet; but the American commodore avoided a close meeting and thus the affair ended. It was so far unfortunate for Sir James Yeo that he had a midshipman (William Ellery) and three seamen killed and seven wounded."

It will be seen that the English author's statement that Chauncey avoided a close contest is directly contrary to Sir James Yeo's own account of the affair which is given herewith in that officer's official report to Admiral Sir John Warren who was then in command of the British naval forces on

the American coast. This report is taken from William James's "Naval Occurrences." London, 1817:

H. M.'s Ship Wolfe, off the False Duck Islands, on Lake Ontario, Sept. 12, 1813.

Sir:

I have the honor to acquaint you that H. M.'s squadron under my command, being becalmed on Genesee river, on the 11th instant, the enemy's fleet of eleven sail, having a partial wind, succeeded in getting within range of their long 24- and 32-pounders; and from their having the wind off us, and the dull sailing of some of our squadron, I found it impossible to bring them to close action. We remained in this mortifying situation five hours, having only six guns in the squadron that would reach the enemy; (not a carronade being fired); at sunset a breeze sprang up from the westward, when I steered for the False Duck Islands, under which the enemy could not keep the weather-gauge, but be obliged to meet us on equal terms. This, however, he carefully avoided.

Although I have to regret the loss of Mr. William Ellery, midshipman, and three seamen killed, and seven wounded, I cannot but conceive it fortunate that none of the squadron have received material damage, which must have been considerable, had the enemy acted with the least spirit, and taken advantage of the superiority of position they possessed.

Inclosed is a list of killed and wounded.

Killed, 3; wounded, 7.

J. L. Yeo.

In order to complete the account of this skirmish off the Genesee, Commodore Chauncey's official report to the Secretary of the Navy is also given. It is taken from H. A. Fay's "Collection of the Official Accounts, in Detail, of all the Battles fought by Sea and Land, between the Navy and Army of the United States, and the Navy and Army of Great Britain, During the years 1812, 13, 14, & 15," published at New York, 1817:

On board the U. S. S. Gen. Pike off Duck Island, Sept. 13, 1813.

Sir—

On the 7th, at daylight, the enemy's fleet was discovered close in with the Niagara river, wind from the southward. Made the signal, weighed with the fleet, (prepared for action) and stood out of the river, after him. He immediately made all sail to the northward; we made sail in chase, with our heavy schooners in tow—and have continued the chase, all round the lake, night and day, until yesterday morning, when he succeeded in getting into Amherst Bay, which is so little known to our pilots and said to be so full of shoals, that they are not willing to take me in there. I shall, however, (unless driven from my station by a gale of wind), endeavor to watch him so close, as to prevent his getting out upon the lake. During our long chase, we frequently got within from one to two miles of the enemy; but our heavy-sail-

ing schooners prevented our closing in with him, until the 11th off Genesee river; we carried a breeze with us, while he lay becalmed, to within about three-fourths of a mile of him, when he took the breeze, and we had a running fight of three and a half hours; but by his superior sailing, he escaped me, and run into Amherst Bay, yesterday morning. In the course of our chase, on the 11th, I got several broadsides, from this ship, upon the enemy, which must have done him considerable injury, as many of the shot were seen to strike him, and people were observed, over the side, plugging shot-holes; a few shot struck our hull, and a little rigging was cut, but nothing of importance—not a man was hurt.

I was much disappointed, that Sir James refused to fight me, as he was so much superior in point of force, both in guns and men—having upwards of 20 guns more than we have, and throws a greater weight of shot.

This ship, the Madison, and Sylph, have each a schr. constantly in tow; yet the others cannot sail as fast as the enemy's squadron, which gives him decidedly the advantage, and puts it in his power to engage me when and how he chooses.

I have the honor, &c.

Isaac Chauncey.

Hon. W. Jones, Sec'y Navy.

Roosevelt condemns both Sir James Yeo and Commodore Chauncey for not making the most of the opportunity to fight on this occasion, and calls attention to the fact that each claimed that the other tried to avoid a battle. He says, "both sides admit that Yeo got the worst of it and ran away, and it is only a question as to whether Chauncey followed him or not."

Cooper, whose opinions on our naval operations are always worth considering, thought that Chauncey behaved well and praises his conduct while in command of the naval force on Lake Ontario; he also praises Yeo's ability and energy, but is of the opinion that Yeo had orders from higher authority to avoid a general contest for the supremacy of the lake, unless absolutely sure of a victory, and that this accounts for his not being willing to bring on a real battle.

In this affair off the Genesee, the American had ten vessels as follows:

CHAUNCEY'S SQUADRON.

Ships.

Pike. Tonnage, 875; crew, 300; broadside metal, 360 lbs.; armament, 28 long 24-pounders.

Madison. Tonnage, 593; crew, 200; broadside metal, 364 lbs.; armament, 24 short 32s.

Brig.

Oneida. Tonnage, 243; crew, 100; broadside metal, 172 lbs.; armament, 16 short 24s.

Schooners.

Sylph. Tonnage, 300; crew, 70; broadside metal, 146 lbs.; armament, 4 long 32-pounders, and 6 long 6s.

Conquest. Tonnage, 82; crew, 40; broadside metal, 56 lbs.; armament, 1 long 32-pounder, 1 long 12-pounder and 4 long 6s.

Tompkins. Tonnage, 96; crew, 40; broadside metal, 62 lbs.; armament, 1 long 32-pounder, 1 long 12-pounder, and 6 long 6s.

Ontario. Tonnage, 53; crew, 35; broadside metal, 44 lbs.; armament, 1 long 32-pounder and 1 long 12-pounder.

Fair American. Tonnage, 53; crew, 30; broadside metal, 36 lbs.; armament, 1 long 24-pounder and 1 long 12-pounder.

Pert. Tonnage, 50; crew, 25; broadside metal, 24 lbs.; armament, 1 long 24-pounder.

Asp. Tonnage, 57; crew, 25; broadside metal, 24 pounds; armament, 1 long 24-pounder.

Commodore Yeo's squadron was composed of six vessels as follows:

YEO'S SQUADRON.

Ships.

Wolfe. Tonnage, 637; crew, 220; broadside metal, 392 lbs.; armament, 1 long 24-pounder, 8 long 18s, 4 short 68s and 10 short 32s.

Royal George. Tonnage, 510; crew, 200; broadside metal, 360 lbs.; armament, 3 long 18s, 2 short 68s, and 16 short 32s.

Brigs.

Melville. Tonnage, 279; crew, 100; broadside metal, 210 lbs.; armament, 2 long 18s and 12 short 32s.

Moira. Tonnage, 262; crew, 100; broadside metal, 153 lbs.; armament, 2 long 9s and 12 short 24s.

Schooners.

Sydney Smith. Tonnage, 216; crew, 80; broadside metal, 172 lbs.; armament, 2 long 12s and 10 short 32s.

Beresford. Tonnage, 187; crew, 70; broadside metal, 87 lbs.; armament, 1 long 24-pounder, 1 long 9-pounder, and 6 short 18s.

The above tables are taken from Roosevelt's "Naval War of 1812" and were compiled by him after a careful study of the reports of both British and American authorities.

To recapitulate: Chauncey had ten vessels with a total tonnage of 2,402, 865 men in their crews, and 98 guns throwing a broadside of 1,288 lbs. of metal. And Yeo had six vessels with a total tonnage of 2,091, 770 men in their crews, and 92 guns throwing a broadside of 1,374 lbs. of metal.

Chauncey's squadron was the largest and he had the greater number of men and guns. Yeo's squadron was much more homogeneous and he had a slight advantage in the total weight of his broadside. If the British commodore had really wanted to fight it would seem that this was an opportunity not to be missed.

Of the American vessels engaged in this affair, the Flagship Pike was commanded by Captain Arthur Sinclair; the Madison, by Master Commandant Wil-

liam M. Crane; the Onelda, by Lieutenant Thomas Brown; the Sylph, by Master Commandant Melancthon T. Woolsey; the Conquest by Lieutenant John Pettigrew; the Tompkins, by Lieutenant William Bolton Finch; the Pert, by Lieutenant Samuel W. Brown, and the Asp, by Lieutenant Smith. It is uncertain as to who commanded the Ontario and Fair American. Nor can the names of the commanding officers of the British ships be given at present with certainty, except that the Royal George was in command of Captain William Howe Mulcaster.

While the writers on naval affairs give considerable space to this 11th September, 1813, skirmish, few of the historians of Monroe county and Western New York give it space. But it will be of interest to quote from Turner's "Phelps and Gorham's Purchase" in order to get the point of view of onlookers from the shore. Turner's account is as follows:

Toward the last of September, of the same year, [1813] both the British and American fleets were at the upper end of the lake, Commodore Chauncey making frequent demonstrations to Sir James Yeo, of his readiness to contend for the supremacy of the lake, but the latter declining, and gradually making his way down the lake. Arriving off the mouth of the Genesee river the fleet was becalmed and lay almost motionless upon the water. The inhabitants at Charlotte supposed the fleet had anchored preparatory to another landing; expresses were sent into the country; men armed and unarmed flocked from the back-woods settlements, and in a few hours a considerable number of men collected ready to fight or to run, as chances of invasion should make it expedient. While anxiously watching the British fleet, expecting every moment to see their boats coming toward the shore, a light breeze sprang up, and, soon after, the fleet of Commodore Chauncey was seen rounding Bluff Point. It was a welcome advent, was hailed with joyous shouts from the shore; at a moment when a weak force had supposed themselves about to engage with a vastly superior one, succor had come—a champion had stepped, or rather sailed in, quite equal to the task of defence, in fact seeking the opportunity that seemed to have occurred. Commodore Chauncey brought his fleet within a mile from the shore, and when it was directly opposite the becalmed fleet of the enemy, he opened a tremendous fire upon it. At first a sheet of flame arose from the American fleet, and then a dense cloud of smoke that rolled off before a light breeze, blowing off shore, as completely shut out the British fleet from view as if the curtains of night had been suddenly drawn; while the American fleet remained in full view. The fire was returned, but as the breeze increased both moved down the lake, continuing to exchange shots until after dark. The fire upon the British fleet was pretty effective, until by its superior

sailing abilities it had got out of the reach of Commodore Chauncey's guns. The British fleet was a good deal disabled; and an officer and ten men were either killed or wounded. A vessel of the American fleet got a few shots through its hull, but no one was either killed or wounded on board of it.

We find no further references to events at the mouth of the Genesee during 1813, except the following from Cooper and Roosevelt:

Cooper says that on the 13th of November, 1813, "Commodore Chauncey, who had now almost an undisturbed possession of the lake, went to the Genesee, where, on the 16th of the month, he took on board 1,100 men, belonging to the army of General Harrison. A severe gale came on, by which the vessels were separated, some being driven as far west as the head of the lake. The transports, into which most of the small schooners were now converted, having been finally despatched, the commodore went off Kingston again to occupy the enemy and to cover the passage of the troops. All the transports had arrived on the 21st but the Julia, which did not get in until a few days later. The Fair American had gone ashore near the Niagara during the gale, but was got off, and reached the harbor [Sacketts harbor] on the 27th. By this time the navigation of the lake was virtually closed, and it being too late to attempt any naval operations, while the duty of transporting the troops and stores had been successfully performed, preparations were made to lay the vessels up for the winter. Thus terminated the naval operations on Lake Ontario during the season of 1813."

Roosevelt's account of this duty of Chauncey's squadron is that after October, 1813, "Yeo remained in Kingston, blockaded by Chauncey for most of the time; on November 10th he came out and was at once chased back into port by Chauncey, leaving the latter for the rest of the season entirely undisturbed. Accordingly, Chauncey was able to convert his small schooners into transports. On the 17th these transports were used to convey 1,100 men of the army of General Harrison from the mouth of the Genesee to Sacketts Harbor, while Chauncey blockaded Yeo in Kingston. The duty of transporting troops and stores went on till the 27th, when everything had been accomplished; and a day or two afterward navigation closed."

The following extract from a letter from Hamlet Scrantom to his father Abraham Scrantom gives a good idea

of the state of excitement which existed among the pioneers of Western New York in general and of Rochester in particular, at the close of the year 1813:

Rochester, Sunday Evening,
26th December, 1813.

Dear sir:

You will doubtless have news of the serious affair on our frontiers before you receive this. On Sunday morning, the 19th, the British troops and Indians crossed the river at the five mile meadows; they proceeded to Fort Niagara, entered, and commenced the horrid massacre of the sick and wounded.

Our first accounts stated that all that came in their way were butchered without regard to age or sex, but it is not correct. But the distress of the inhabitants whose lot it was to fall into their hands is indescribable. Daily are passing here in sleighs and wagons, families deprived of their all. Not a cent of money, no provision, no bedding; children barefoot, etc., all depending on the charity of the people. The enemy continued their ravages from Sunday morning until Monday afternoon. Early on Tuesday morning an express arrived in our village relative to the above affair; orders were issued by the captains of companies, the men were warned out forthwith and the next morning whole companies were on their march. On Thursday morning an express arrived at break of day, that the enemy were landing from their boats at Oak Orchard Creek about forty miles from this and were proceeding this way desolating the country and it was expected another party would be in at the mouth of the Genesee river. All were alarmed. Some thought best to be on the move; others did not apprehend danger. The militia were all called upon to repair to the bridge and the mouth of the river; the whole country in confusion. Captain Stone (who keeps the tavern on the other side of the river) sent in all directions to assemble his company of dragoons (a very fine company), sent his children to Bloomfield, and made preparations to move his most valuable effects at short notice. The merchants went to packing goods (of which there are four very full stores here), some running balls, others making cartridges. I yoked my oxen, packed up all our bedding and clothing and moved my family up to my log house on a back road about a mile from the bridge on the east side of the river, together with all my provisions and cooking utensils that were of immediate use. Before night our village was crowded with militia coming in all night and next; but the whole of this proved to be a false alarm; the enemy have never been but ten miles this side of Lewiston. The next week I moved back again to the village, and now rest secure, I think, for this winter. Israel and his family and one other family remained in the village all night, the rest crossed the river.

Fear of further appearances of the British fleet induced the military authorities of the state to organize a force to prepare for a possible invasion.

This force was composed entirely of militia, and, in the spring of 1814, there was a company of about fifty men which had been recruited by Captain Isaac W. Stone, stationed either at Charlotte or at Rochester. Brigadier-General Peter B. Porter had command of all the militia in Western New York, and in April, 1814, he had sent to Captain Stone from Canandaigua two cannon, an eighteen-pounder and a four-pounder, the latter of brass, for the defence of the Genesee river. Elisha Ely, in his reminiscences of early days in Rochester, printed in 1848, in a pamphlet entitled "Proceedings at the Annual Festivals of the Pioneers of Rochester, Held at Blossom Hall, September 30, 1847, and October 12, 1848," gives an amusing account of the arrival of these guns at Rochester. He says:

I think it was in April, 1814, an eighteen-pound cannon and a four-pounder, the latter of brass, were sent by General P. B. Porter to the care of Captain (afterwards Colonel) Isaac W. Stone. It required seventeen yoke of oxen to draw the eighteen-pounder through from Culvers to this place, such was the state of the roads. With the cannon came powder and ball. We soon collected some powder in the village and had a few rounds, very much to the amusement of all of us. It was suggested that we should see what effect a ball would have. The cannon was placed on Main street at the corners near Blossom's hotel. On the rise of ground very near the residence of the lamented General Matthews, a large limb about forty feet from the ground was cut from a tree, which left a white spot for a target. I went rather clandestinely to Captain Stone's barn, got a ball and intended getting it into the cannon without his noticing it. He observed it, however, and said I ought not to waste the public property in that way. I replied, "Never mind, Captain, we will find it again." "Find the devil," said he. Enos Stone and Frederick Hanford acted as chief engineers, and myself as assistant. All things being ready, the cannon was fired. The ball struck the tree about four feet below the mark. The top quivered a moment and fell. This was our experience in gunnery. The boys soon brought us the ball, so that the United States lost nothing by the operation.

The expected British fleet actually appeared off the Genesee on the evening of May 14, 1814, in command of Commodore Yeo, and came to anchor. Commodore Chauncey's squadron, at this time, had not left Sacketts Harbor, and, indeed, did not get away from that place until July 31st, owing to delays in getting guns and stores for his new vessels, built during the preceding winter. Hence Yeo had practically the entire command of the lake until after midsummer.

From William James's "Naval History of Great Britain," Vol. VI, from Roosevelt's "Naval War of 1812," and from an article in the Rochester "Post Express" of May 19, 1894, the following table, giving the details as to Yeo's squadron in May, 1814, is compiled. In addition to the vessels given in the table, there were a number of smaller ones, gunboats, barges, etc.:

YEO'S SQUADRON.

Ships.

Prince Regent, flag ship, a new vessel, Captain Richard James Lawrence O'Connor; tonnage, 1,450; crew, 485; broadside metal, 872 pounds; armament, 32 long 24-pounders; 4 short 68s; 22 short 32s; total, 68 guns.

Princess Charlotte, a new vessel, Captain William Howe Mulcaster; tonnage, 1,215; crew, 315; broadside metal, 604 pounds; armament, 26 long 24s, 2 short 68s, 14 short 32s; total, 42 guns.

Montreal, former name Wolfe, Captain Stephen Popham; tonnage, 637; crew, 220; broadside metal, 258 pounds; armament, 7 long 24s, 18 long 18s; total, 25 guns.

Niagara, former name Royal George, Captain Francis Brockell Spisbury; tonnage, 510; crew, 200; broadside metal, 332 pounds; armament, 2 long 12s, 20 short 32s; total, 22 guns.

Brigs.

Charwell, former name Molra, Captain Alexander Dobbs; tonnage, 279; crew, 110; broadside metal, 236 pounds; armament, 2 long 12s, 14 short 32s; total, 16 guns.

Star, former name Melville, Captain Charles Anthony; tonnage, 262; crew, 110; broadside metal, 236 pounds; armament, 2 long 12s, 14 short 32s; total, 16 guns.

Netly, former name Beresford, Lieutenant Owens; tonnage, 216; crew, 100; broadside metal, 180 pounds; armament, 2 long 12s, 14 short 24s; total, 16 guns.

Magnet, former name Sidney Smith, Captain Henry Collier; tonnage, 187; crew, 80; broadside metal, 156 pounds; armament, 2 long 12s, 12 short 24s; total, 14 guns.

Summary.

Eight vessels; tonnage, 4,756; crews, 1,620; broadside metal, 2,874 pounds; guns, 209.

This was a powerful force compared with the 600 to 800 militia who could at most be brought to oppose their landing had Commodore Yeo decided to take possession of the mouth of the Genesee river. But it is more than probable that, had Yeo attempted to send a force into the country and away from the range of his naval guns, the militia would have been able to prevent much progress towards Rochester.

None of the naval writers concerning events on Lake Ontario in 1814 mentions this appearance of Yeo's squadron off the Genesee; but all the writers on the history of Rochester, of

Monroe county, or of Western New York give it considerable space, for while it was of little moment in considering the campaigns of the year, or in its effect on the general result, it was a very important event in our local history and created great excitement all through the Genesee Country, and from Canandaigua to Le Roy and Batavia. One of the earliest accounts of the affair is found in the first Rochester Directory, published at Rochester in 1827, and is as follows:

"On the 14th of May [1814] Sir James L. Yeo, admiral of the British fleet on Lake Ontario, anchored off the harbor at the mouth of the river with five large and eight small vessels of war; when all the male inhabitants of the village, capable of bearing arms, (being 33) turned out with the Militia of the neighboring towns, to prevent his landing, leaving only two men to take the women and children into the woods, in case he should land and send a detachment of troops, as had been threatened, to burn the bridge across the river."

Henry O'Reilly, in his "Sketches of Rochester," published at Rochester in 1838, devotes over two pages to this visit of the British squadron, and while his account contains some decided errors, it is given herewith in full:

A serious alarm, attended by some amusing consequences, occurred in May, 1814, when Sir James Yeo, with a fleet of thirteen vessels of various sizes appeared off the mouth of the Genesee, threatening the destruction of the rude improvements in and around Rochester. Messengers were despatched to arouse the people in the surrounding country for defence against the threatened attack. There were then but thirty-three people in Rochester capable of bearing arms. This little band threw up a breastwork called Fort Bender, near the Deep Hollow, beside the Lower Falls, and hurried down to the junction of the Genesee and Lake Ontario, five miles north of the present city limits, where the enemy threatened to land, leaving behind them two old men, with some young lads, to remove the women and children into the woods, in case the British should attempt to land for the capture of the provisions and destruction of the bridge at Rochester, etc. Francis Brown and Elisha Ely acted as captains and Isaac W. Stone as major, of the Rochester forces, which were strengthened by the additions that could be made from this thinly settled region. Though the equipments and discipline of these troops would not form a brilliant picture for a warlike eye, their very awkwardness in those points, coupled as it was with their sagacity and courage, accomplished more perhaps than could have been effected by a larger force of regular troops bedizened with the trappings of military pomp. The militia thus hastily

collected were marched and counter-marched, disappearing in the woods at one point and suddenly emerging elsewhere, so as to impress the enemy with the belief that the force collected for defence, was far greater than it actually was. (The circumstances here related are substantially as mentioned to the writer by one who was then and is now a resident of Rochester). An officer with a flag of truce was sent from the British fleet. A militia officer marched down, with ten of the most soldier-like men, to receive him on Lighthouse Point. These militiamen carried their guns as nearly upright as might be consistent with their plan of being ready for action by keeping hold of the triggers! The British officer was astonished; he looked "unutterable things." "Sir," said he, "do you receive a flag of truce under arms, with cocked triggers?" "Excuse me, excuse me, Sir: we backwoodsmen are not well versed in military tactics," replied the American officer, who promptly sought to rectify his error by ordering his men to "ground arms!" The Briton was still more astonished, and, after delivering a brief message, immediately departed for the fleet, indicating that the ignorance of tactics he had witnessed was all feigned for the occasion, so as to deceive the British commodore into a snare!

Shortly afterward, on the same day, another officer came ashore with a flag of truce for a further parley, as the British were evidently too suspicious of stratagem to attempt a hostile landing if there was any possibility of compromising for the spoils. Captain Francis Brown was deputed with a guard to receive the last flag of truce. The British officer looked suspiciously upon him and upon his guard; and, after some conversation, familiarly grasped the pantaloons of Captain B. about the knee, remarking, as he firmly handled it, "Your cloth is too good to be spoiled by such a bungling tailor;" alluding to the width and clumsy aspect of the garment. Brown was quick as well as resolute, and replied jocosely that "he was prevented from dressing fashionably by his haste that morning to salute such distinguished visitors!" The British obviously imagined that Brown was a regular officer of the American army, whose regimentals were masked by clumsy overclothes. The proposition was then made, that, if the Americans would deliver up the provisions and military stores which might be in and around Rochester or Charlotte, Sir James Yeo would spare the settlements from destruction. "Will you comply with the offer?" "Blood-kneedeep first!" was the emphatic reply of Francis Brown.

While this parley was in progress, an American officer, with his staff, returning from the Niagara frontier, was accidentally seen passing from one wooded point to another; and this, with other circumstances, afforded to the British "confirmation strong" that their suspicions were well founded; that there was a considerable American army collected; and that the Yankee officers shammed ignorance for the purpose of entrapping ashore the Commodore and his forces!

The return of the last flag to the fleet was followed by a vigorous attack in bombs and balls, while the

compliment was spiritedly returned, not without some effect on at least one of the vessels, by a rusty old six-pounder, which had been furnished and mounted on a log for the important occasion. After a few hours spent in this unavailing manner, Admiral Yeo ran down to Pulteneyville, about twenty miles east of the Genesee river, where, on learning how they had been outwitted and deterred from landing by such a handful of militia, their mortification could scarcely restrain all hands from a hearty laugh at the "Yankee trick."

O'Reilly's informant as to the events he somewhat flippantly describes could hardly have been a personal observer of them, or he would not have given the historian the "Blood knee-deep first" story, which is entirely unsubstantiated; nor would he have called the eighteen-pounder mounted near the mouth of the river, "a rusty old six-pounder."

The clearest and best account of this visit of Commodore Yeo to the Genesee is that given by Elisha Ely in the "Proceedings at the Annual Festivals of the Pioneers of Rochester" published in 1848, already referred to, and is here given in full, as he was an active participant in the "flag of truce" incident:

"It was soon known that the British fleet was on our own coast, and that it was at Oswego. Captain, now Colonel Stone of Porter's Volunteers, was commissioned to raise a regiment of dragoons. He had recruited about fifty men with whom he went to the mouth of the river. He directed the eighteen-pounder to be sent there and the four-pounder to Deep Hollow Bridge. On the Sabbath we threw up a breastwork on the south side of the bridge, loosened all the plank which were pinned down, and finished our work in the evening. About sundown on the 14th of May, 1814, I received a message from Colonel Stone, saying the British fleet were in sight, and requesting me to notify the inhabitants; but that we need not come until the next morning. About 11 o'clock p. m., another messenger came requesting us to come immediately. H. Ely and Co. had previously received fifty muskets and 3,000 fixed ammunition; these were distributed among the inhabitants as far as was necessary. Each man took twenty-four rounds of cartridge. At that time there were but thirty-two men in the place; one was left to cart off the women and children if necessary, and another declined to go. The cart was the only conveyance in the place. About 2 o'clock in the morning we started. It rained fast and was very dark; the

roads were exceedingly muddy. We arrived at the mouth of the river soon after daylight in the midst of a fog. The lake was perfectly calm, and we could distinctly hear the British boats rowing about in various directions. An old boat was lying near which had been used as a lighter. Colonel Stone proposed to Captain Francis Brown and myself to take some men, and see if we could not capture some of the British boats. Six seamen were soon found to man the oars, and twelve volunteers with muskets were stowed out of sight in the bottom of the boat. Captain Brown stood upon one thwart and myself upon another, and then with muffled oars we put to sea. At the point a sentry had been placed who hailed us. We did not answer and he fired. The ball passed between Captain Brown and myself and struck the water beyond us. We rowed on slowly and noiselessly into the lake. When we were out a mile or more, a gun was fired from shore, and soon another and another. We lay to conjecturing what it could mean. The fog was disappearing very rapidly; we soon could see Colonel Stone on his white horse, and beyond us the topmasts of the fleet which lay at anchor in a line, up and down the lake. Directly the fog had entirely disappeared, and we lay within the range of the guns of the whole fleet, seventeen sail in all. We turned and rowed slowly towards the shore. Soon a twelve-oared barge was in pursuit of us, and gained on us very rapidly. We feared they might have a swivel on board and they were so near us that we could distinctly count their oars. After a moment's consultation, we concluded to head our boat for Irondequoit. The object was to give our 18-pounder on shore an opportunity to fire upon the pursuing boat. Brown observed to me, 'Well, Ely, we shall have to go to Halifax.' I replied, 'It looks very much like it.' Jehiel Barnard, now of this place, raised his head, and with compressed lips said, 'I hope you will let us fight first.' We had not gone far towards Irondequoit before the British boat stopped. Brown observed, 'They think there is some trap.' We stopped rowing; they soon commenced again, and we too. They pulled a few strokes and then turned towards the shipping, and we to the mouth of the river. The guns from the fleet could have sunk us at any time.

"About 10 o'clock a flag of truce put off from the flagship of the enemy. Colonel Stone asked me whether I was used to receiving a flag of truce. The

answer was, 'No!' Captain Brown was asked; the reply the same. Colonel Stone then told Brown and myself to do the best we could, adding, 'Don't let them come into the river—don't let them land at all—their feet shall not pollute our soil.' Up the lake, a little above the mouth of the river, a very large tree had fallen into the lake where there was sufficient water for the boat to lie alongside. We went out on the tree and tied a white handkerchief to a stick. The boat came alongside; the officer, who was in full dress and a splendid looking man, proposed going on shore. We told him our orders were positive; by this time twelve armed men made their appearance on the shore of the lake. The officer bearing the flag said, 'Is it your custom to receive a flag of truce under arms?' We told him he must excuse us, as we were not soldiers but citizens; we however requested the men to return. He then said he was commanded by his Excellency Sir James Yeo, to say that, 'if we would give up the public property, private property should be respected.' He then produced a paper signed by quite a number of citizens of Oswego, the contents of which, as near as I can recollect, were that, as the government had left a large quantity of stores and munitions of war at that place, without adequate force to protect it, they would not risk their lives and property to defend it. It was arranged that Brown should stay with the flag officer and I return to our commander, Colonel Stone. I delivered the message and read the paper above alluded to, which the officer had handed me with a pledge to return it when read. Colonel Stone rose and said, 'Go back and tell them that the public property is in the hands of those who will defend it.'

"Soon after the flag had returned to the ship a gunboat was seen coming from the fleet, towed by four boats. After a short consultation Judge John Williams was requested to select twelve good riflemen and take a position under a ridge of gravel thrown up by the waves at the point on the east side of the river. A small boat was sent up to the turn of the river, out of sight of the enemy, to ferry the men across. Soon we saw them crossing the marsh through the tall grass and placed in the desired position—all lying on the ground, from which they were to rise on a given signal from Colonel Stone. Brown and myself were to occupy our position in the boat. Our

twelve men were again selected, with six sailors to row the boat. The object was to let the gunboat get within reach of the riflemen, and then that we should go and capture her. The lieutenant having charge of the cannon had positive orders from Colonel Stone not to fire until he was directed. By this time the gunboat was in thirty or forty rods of where we wanted her. The boats towing her opened to the right and left, and she fired a six-pound shot, which fell into the river several rods below the storehouses. The moment they fired our cannon was discharged, and with it went all our hopes. Colonel Stone was standing within ten feet of the cannon. He turned, drew his sword, and I believe would have done serious injury had not his arm been arrested. The first gun from the gunboat was evidently a trial shot. She would undoubtedly have come a little nearer the shore had we not fired, and if so we should have assuredly captured her. She was a vessel of from 90 to 100 tons, sloop rigged. I hardly know whether the incident is worth relating, but at the moment it was extremely exciting, for we considered the gunboat already our prize. She then fired fifteen or twenty sixty-eight pound shots, which did no injury except one, which struck one of the storehouses. Where they struck the ground they turned up a deep furrow, sometimes several rods in length. Some of the balls were used in this city a long time afterwards in breaking stone for buildings.

"Soon after this occurrence General Porter arrived. About 4 o'clock p. m. another flag was seen coming from the fleet. General Porter sent Major Darby Noon, his aide, to receive it. The demand then was that if the property was not surrendered he would land his army and 400 Indians and take it. General Porter answered that if he chose to send his troops and Indians ashore, we would take care of them, and that if they sent another flag he would fire upon it. General Porter appeared to be very indignant at the threat contained in the message from the enemy.

"Perhaps I ought to mention that Colonel Hopkins called out his regiment. Some companies came from the west side of the river, and many in small parties, so that the second day at night we had 600 or 800 men. There was plenty of pork, flour, and whisky, but nothing else, and we were without utensils for cooking. I well

recollect Esq. Scrantom as belonging to the same mess with me. We used to mix flour and cold water in little cakes and bake them on a common shovel. We toasted our pork on sticks over a fire and drank water for coffee. The thought never occurred to any of us belonging to Rochester that we could send home and get food.

"It will be recollected that at this time the temperance reformation had not begun in Western New York. It was considered quite unhealthy to drink Genesee water without whisky; and the salt pork without vegetables made the men exceedingly thirsty. The result may readily be conceived. I saw a captain the third morning throw aside his sword and military coat and fight with one of his own men. It was a well-contested battle. The captain at length conquered his man, which was of course his undoubted right under military discipline. The third morning the fleet hoisted sail and stood down the lake, and we went to our homes."

From the pamphlet to which we are indebted for Mr. Elisha Ely's excellent narrative quoted above, the following paragraph is taken from that part of the proceedings relative to the Festival of 1847:

"Mr. Hervey Ely, who came here in 1813, gave a full account of the attack of the British upon the American works at the mouth of the river. He was one of the party who marched to the defence of the place. As our readers are familiar with this action, we must for want of space omit the particulars. Judge Sampson called upon all who were present at that engagement to rise. Messrs. Ely, Kempshall, Scrantom, Smith, Graves, and Green rose."

In 1851, three years after the publication of the pamphlet containing Elisha Ely's account of the British "flag of truce" incident, Orsamus Turner published in Rochester his well-known "History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase." In this work he devotes over two pages to the incident under discussion, and his account is evidently based almost entirely upon Ely's narrative. The only additional information given by Turner is quoted from page 518 of his work:

In addition to the force of Captain Stone, there was stationed at Charlotte a volunteer company, under command of Captain Frederick Rowe; the men principally citizens of what are now the towns of Gates and Greece; and Colonel Atkinson's regiment, from what

are now the northwestern towns of Monroe county, were either there previously or as soon as the exigency required. The only fortification at Charlotte was a breastwork upon the bluff, near the old hotel, so located as to command the road leading up to the bank from the wharf. It was composed of two tiers of ship timber with a space between the tiers filled in with barn manure.

Neither William F. Peck in his "Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester" (Syracuse, 1884), or in his contribution to the "Landmarks of Monroe County" (Boston, 1895), nor Jenny Marsh Parker in her "Rochester: A Story Historical" (Rochester, 1884), adds anything authentic to Ely's or Turner's narrative. But the latter writers base their accounts either directly or indirectly, it would appear, upon O'Reilly and Turner, quoting from both.

An article in the Rochester "Post Express" of December 18, 1897, signed W. H. S. and dealing with the various appearances of Commodore Yeo off the Genesee, gives an interesting and pertinent letter from Brigadier-General Porter to Governor Tompkins, concerning the last appearance of the British fleet. Porter's letter is as follows:

Canandaigua, May 17, 1814.

Sir: I returned yesterday with Major Noon from the mouth of the Genesee river, where we were called on Friday last by information of the approach of the British fleet.

We saved the town and our credit by fairly outbullying John Bull. The discovery that we had troops, without knowing their number, concealed in a ravine near the mouth of the river to cut off their retreat in case they entered it, together with the tone of the defiance with which we answered their demands (the last answer having been conveyed by our friend Major Noon), made them think it prudent to be off. We had, however, some excellent officers and good men well prepared, and in case the enemy had landed I had no doubt of a result creditable to the state.

When the enemy left Genesee they stood to the eastward, and a cannonading has been heard in the direction of Pultneyville, whither I believe General Swift has proceeded with some volunteers and militia.

P. B. Porter, Brig.-Gen.

General Porter's letter and Mr. Ely's reminiscences appear to be the only first-hand reports by eye-witnesses of the locally famous events of May 14-16, 1814.

There has been much discussion as to why Sir James Yeo did not land a force and take such supplies as he wanted from those on hand at the mouth of the river. The probabilities are that he did not consider the "game

worth the candle," as he had much more important work to do, either in blockading Commodore Chauncey's squadron at Sacketts Harbor, or preparing to meet him on the lake. At all events there is no further record of Yeo's appearance off the Genesee.

A large portion of the American fleet, however, did appear there once more, when on September 22, 1814, it arrived with 3,000 men under Major-General Izard. This force left Sacketts Harbor on the 21st, and after being taken to the Genesee river by Chauncey's squadron, proceeded to Batavia. The incident is reported to the secretary of war by General Izard in a letter dated "Northern Army Headquarters, Batavia, September 28, 1814." It is taken from an article in the Rochester "Post Express" of December 18, 1897, and signed W. H. S., and is as follows:

On the 21st instant the fleet under Commodore Chauncey sailed the forenoon from Sacketts Harbor, and the wind favoring us, we were off the mouth of the Genesee river the next morning early. The troops were all disembarked before night and encamped near the lake. Every exertion was used to collect a sufficient number

of wagons and horses for the transportation of our camp equipage and provisions, but our appearance being unexpected, and that part of the country thinly peopled, it was not until the 24th that we could resume our march. Part of the tents and stores were unavoidably left, to follow as fast as means could be procured for that purpose.

Through excessively bad roads and amidst continual and heavy rains we proceeded, the officers of every grade, with very few exceptions, being dismounted. On the 26th, some hours before night, the whole of our corps arrived in good spirits at this village, and with a less proportion of men disabled for immediate duty than could under such circumstances have been expected.

General Izard's force marched up the west side of the river as far as the Ridge road, and then west along that road until it struck off to the left for Batavia. Meanwhile the American fleet returned down the lake to Sackett's Harbor or to blockade the British fleet in Kingston.

So far as available sources of information show this was the last appearance of a naval force at the mouth of the Genesee river during the War of 1812.

Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT JAN. 21, 1908



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