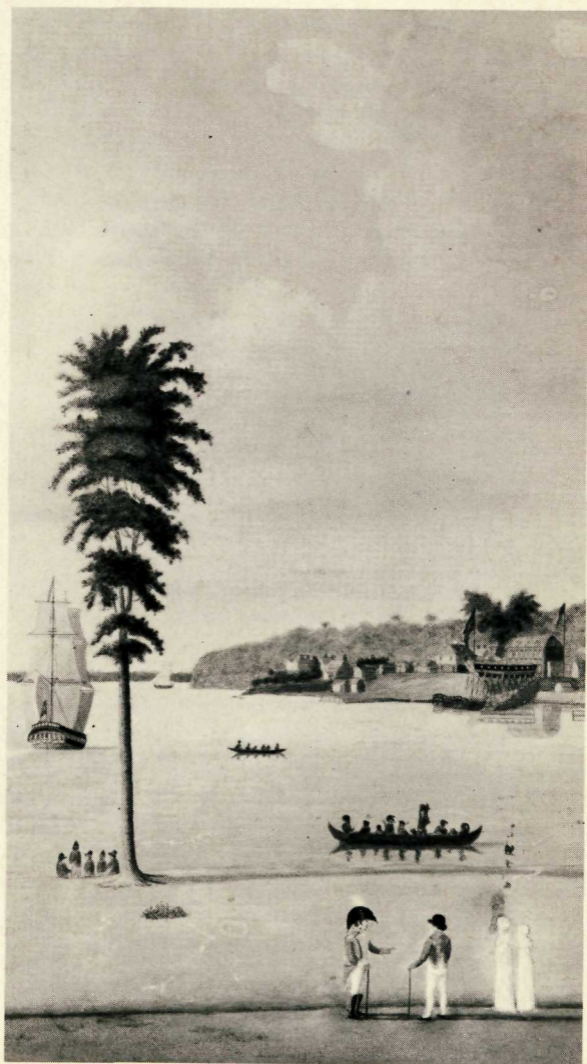


Ontario

Shipbuilding at Fort Amherstburg 1796-1813

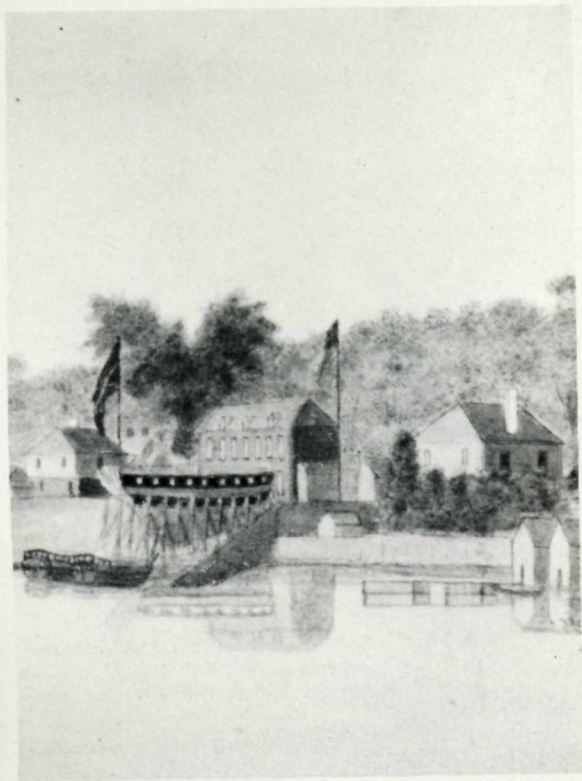


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Cover: Detail from a watercolour by Reynolds.

The Navy Yard for the Upper Great Lakes 1796-1813. Located at Amherstburg, this view shows the *Detroit* under construction July 1813. Detail from a watercolour by Reynolds.



Shipbuilding at Fort Amherstburg (Fort Malden) 1796-1813

By the terms of Jay's Treaty of 1794 all territory in dispute in the area of the Great Lakes was to be given up by Great Britain as soon as possible. This was done by the end of August 1796. For the British it meant losing the defences and dockyards located at Detroit, Oswego, Niagara and Carleton Island. Defence and dockyard facilities at Detroit were transferred across the river to a new site subsequently known as Fort Amherstburg or Fort Malden.

In February 1799 the commandant at Amherstburg reported that carpenters had been at work for some time taking out all the old and decayed timbers found in the schooner *Ottawa* and replacing them with new ones. The vessel had been found to be in a state of decay and to require considerable rebuilding which used up the greater part of the materials, especially timber, available at Amherstburg. Most of the timber used in the Amherstburg yard, especially pine and cedar, was obtained by contract with settlers and merchants. When finally ready to sail in the fall of the year, the extensive repairs and alterations made the *Ottawa* the equal of any new vessel and allowed her to carry one hundred more barrels than she formerly did. The following list indicates the material and cost which went into providing the *Ottawa* with new main and quarter decks, new waterways, two hundred and ten feet of new binds, besides the usual calking.

Pine Plank 2 inch 4,100 feet at 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ d	59	15	10
Pine Timber for Waterways 140 feet at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d	4	7	6
Oak Plank 4 inch 210 feet at 9d	7	17	6
Oak Plank 3 inch 420 feet at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d	13	2	6
Nails 8 inch 150 lbs at 1/3	9	7	6
Nails 6 inch 280 lbs at 1/3	15	12	6
Nails Double Deck 400 lbs at 1/3	25		
Nails Sorts 100 lbs at 1/3	6	5	
Pitch 4 barrels at £ 18.15.0	75		
Iron of Sorts 100 lbs at 10d	4	3	4
Oakum 400 lbs at 10d	16	13	4
White Paint 196 lbs at 2/6	24	10	
Black Paint 50 lbs at 5/	12	10	
Yellow Paint 60 lbs at 2/6	7	10	
Red Paint 100 lbs at 1/10	9	3	4
Linseed Oil 24 gallons at 12/6	15		
	£ 305	18	4
Workmanship: 170 days work for one man at 5/6 per day	46	15	
Total	£ 352	13	4

Similar lists were also prepared at Amherstburg for projected repairs and alterations to the snow *Chippawa*, the schooner *Dunmore* and the sloop *Francis*.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century Fort Amherstburg had become an important base for the Provincial Marine. In the early fall of 1801 the

deputy commissary general at Quebec requested his subordinate, the commissary at Kingston, to send on to Fort Amherstburg all the carpenters then engaged and "judged worthy to be employed", that could be spared from the ordinary duties. These artisans were to be employed at Amherstburg under the direction of John Norman. Boats were being built and repaired there, though at first only small craft were turned out by the shipyard as indicated in the following estimate of materials and workmanship in building a small 14 foot boat for the vessel *Maria*.

12 feet of oak timber for the frame	14		
16 feet of 3 inch oak plank	8		
7 feet of 2 inch oak plank	2	4	
15 feet of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch oak plank	4	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	
252 feet of 1 inch oak plank	2	7	3
24 feet of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pine plank	4	6	
14 feet of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pine board	2	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	
24 lbs of boat nails	1	4	
11 lbs of iron	7	4	
1/10 barrel of pitch	10		
4 lbs of oakum	2		
30 days work, one carpenter at 4/ per day	6		
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ days work, blacksmith and assistant at 5/3 per day	7	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	
	£ 12	13	8 $\frac{1}{2}$

This was followed the next year, 1804, by an estimate of expenses for building a long boat for H.M. Snow *Camden*.

8 feet of oak timber 12 x 12 inches	8	
16 feet of oak timber 6 x 6 inches	5	4
17 frames	2	11
35 feet of 3 inch oak plank	17	6
60 feet of 1½ inch plank	15	
344 feet of 1 inch oak plank	2	17 4
48 feet of ¾ inch oak plank	6	
8 small knees	8	
30 feet of 1½ inch pine plank	2	6
44 lbs of nails	2	4
34 lbs of iron	1	2 8
9 lbs of pitch	9	
12 lbs of oakum	8	
2 gallons of linseed oil	1	5
	£ 13	19 4

It was now decided to build a new vessel at Fort Amherstburg to replace the *Francis and Maria* which had a combined burthen of 115 tons. Mr. Bell, foreman of the yard at Amherstburg, proposed a sketch of a new vessel – a 90 ton craft with a shallow draft. Since it was to be a single-decked vessel in which troops would be occasionally embarked, it was decided to have a part of the hold capable of being separated by the bulkhead from the portion allotted to the troops in order that the stores carried in the vessel could be made secure from either damage or theft. Great expense was involved in hauling timber out of the woods, due to

The *Detroit*, Captain Robert H. Barclay's flagship during the Battle of Lake Erie, 10 September 1813. Watercolour by C. J. H. Snider, courtesy of the John Ross Robertson Collection, Toronto.



the distance it had to be brought to the yard, and the bad condition of the roads. Consequently it was decided to provide by contract all the oak timbers for making the planks and knees for fastenings and to employ the carpenters in the winter to cut the timber for the frame. Providing knees was also an expensive and laborious work which was done by taking up oak trees by the roots. Dimensions and qualities of the timbers were specified in the contracts and the deliveries of materials were carefully examined and certified by the master builder.

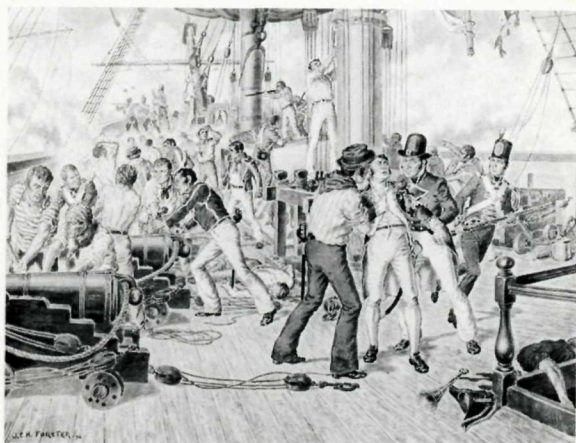
When finally constructed and launched in 1805 the 80 ton brig *General Hunter* carried a crew of 45 and was armed with 4 short six pounders, 2 four pounders, 2 two pounders and 2 twelve pounders.

In 1806 the new commander-in-chief of the forces in Upper Canada, Major General Isaac Brock, decided to improve the Provincial Marine Department which had been allowed to deteriorate. Brock appointed Lieutenant Colonel Pye "to take charge of the entire Marine Department with definite orders to create an active and efficient naval service." Pye undertook to build new vessels and to overhaul, repair and if necessary make alterations to each vessel in the marine. One of the results of Pye's programme was the eventual construction and launching of the large vessel *Queen Charlotte* at Fort Amherstburg.

In January 1809 the assistant quartermaster general at Amherstburg forwarded to the lieutenant governor an estimate of pine timber required by his shipyard. At the time of writing there was only one piece of timber in the shipyard fit for use and not a single foot of timber fit for making spars. Since the winter was the only time of year when this kind of timber could be obtained it was necessary to act quickly to get a sufficient supply for the construction of a new vessel as well as for repairing the *Camden* and the *General Hunter*. The lieutenant governor directed the officer commanding the Provincial Marine on Lake Erie to arrange for the immediate purchase of sufficient timber to meet the needs of the shipyard at Amherstburg. Three months later in April 1809 the lieutenant governor received the following brief note from the governor at Quebec respecting the building of a new vessel at Amherstburg.

You are already acquainted with the State of our Marine and the means taken to preserve our superiority on Lake Ontario and that we may remain masters of the navigation of Lake Erie.

Scene on board the *Detroit* during the Battle of Lake Erie, 10 September 1813. Built at Amherstburg that year, it was one of six British vessels surrendered to the American fleet. Watercolour by J. C. H. Forster.



I have ordered a new vessel to be built as soon as possible at Amherstburg on which subject the Quarter Master General writes you this opportunity.

The quartermaster general's letter offered a much fuller explanation of why a new vessel was required and the type of vessel it should be:

I have the honour to acquaint you that His Excellency has determined that a new vessel shall be built at Amherstburg as soon as possible to replace the Camden. To maintain the Command upon the Lake is certainly an object of the first importance and His Excellency wishes that the new vessel should be a Force perfectly capable of doing so; - His idea is that a large stout Caravelle Brig to carry sixteen Guns upon one Deck with good quarters for the men will be the best adopted for the object in view. Unacquainted however as His Excellency is with the depth of water in the Lake and Harbour, and the local circumstances which must be particularly attended to in regard to the size and construction of the vessels navigating Lake Erie. He is pleased to leave entirely to you the description of vessel to be

The *Queen Charlotte* sailing up the Detroit River past the Navy Yard and Fort Amherstburg July 1813, with the *General Hunter* in the background. Detail from a watercolour by Reynolds.



built . . . His Excellency is desirous that the new vessel should be built exclusively for fighting and sailing and the navigation of Lake Erie, having at the time as much accommodation as possible for the conveyance of Troops . . . The Deputy Commissary General has received orders to forward without delay to the Post at Amherstburg spike nails, oakum and such other Articles as may be immediately wanted, and the requisite stores of every description shall be sent up the moment the Estimates are received.

It is expected that the Ship Corvette now building at Kingston will be launched in June, and it may be advisable to engage some of the ship Carpenters now there to go to Amherstburg: a Blacksmith now at Kingston may also be sent up.

Actually at this time some of the Kingston carpenters had already decided to go to Amherstburg for one year at the rate of ten shillings eight pence a day. Meanwhile suitable timber had to be found. A good stand of oak was located on the Indian Reserve near Amherstburg and red cedar could be had in abundance on Pelee Island.

The middle of June 1809 found the lieutenant governor sending a letter to the quartermaster general at Quebec regarding the building of the vessel at Amherstburg.

I shall give directions to Colonel Grant to procure the Cedar Timber by employing Civilians under the inspection of the Master Builder and should it be His Excellency's pleasure to postpone the hauling of the Oak Timber until the Winter, the whole of the Materials may be ready for the Carpenters on the opening of the Communication in the Succeeding Year, when probably they may be procured at a more reasonable rate and until their arrival at Amherstburg the Master Builder with such carpenters as he has already or can procure at a reasonable price may be going on with the Vessel. With regard to compensation to be

made to the Indians on whose Lands the Oak Timber has been cut, I shall direct the Superintendent of the Post to make a Requisition as may be judged necessary amounting to a reasonable satisfaction to those people.

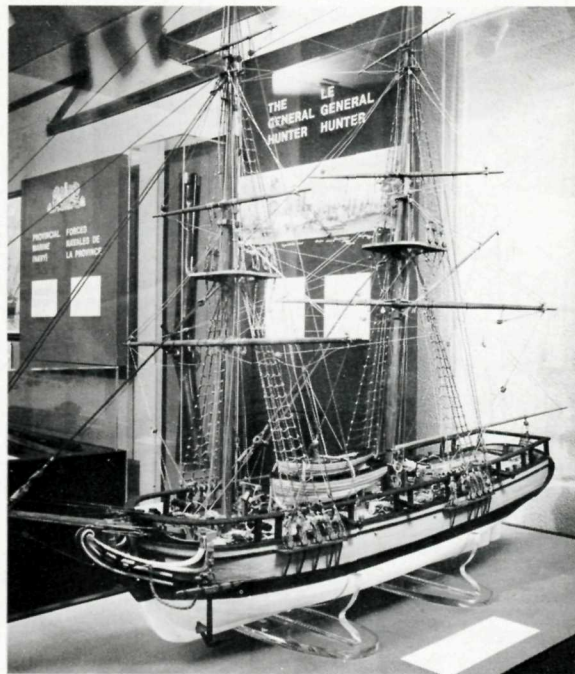
By this time a few more of the carpenters employed in the dockyard at Kingston were prepared to go to Amherstburg and work there until the new vessel was finished.

In July the commander in chief changed his mind about necessity of building a vessel at Amherstburg. Whereupon the quartermaster general advised the lieutenant governor to postpone building the proposed new vessel.

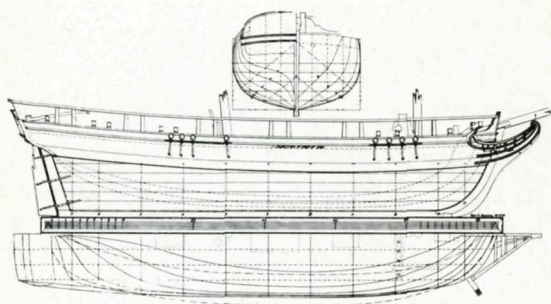
The thorough repair given to the Camden will enable her to navigate as a Troop or Store Ship for two Seasons which in a good measure removes the necessity of immediately building at Amherstburg. The Guns and Ordnance Stores sent up for the new vessel will of course remain in Store.

Construction of the vessel at Amherstburg was finally authorized in October 1809. When built and launched in 1810 the 400 ton ship, named the *Queen Charlotte*, was very similar to the *Royal George* newly built and launched at Kingston, though slightly smaller in tonnage. The *Queen Charlotte*'s dimensions approximated those of the *Royal George* – length of keel 101 feet, breadth 27 feet 7 inches, depth of hull 12 feet. "She [Royal George] was designed in England" and extant pictures of her show that she was similar in build and appearance to other comparably sized frigates in the Royal Navy. Prior to the completion of the *Royal George* no attempt had been made to build a large square rigged vessel on the Lakes larger than a corvette. That the *Royal George* and *Queen Charlotte* were square riggers with three masts was due to the fact that they might, at some time in their careers, fight a naval action. In an age when most naval engagements consisted of broadside fire,

Scale model of the *General Hunter* as it appeared in 1813. This vessel was originally constructed at the Amherstburg Navy Yard in 1805.



fore-and-aft sail vessels were much easier to put out of action either by filling the large sails full of holes or "shooting away the gaff and boom", thereby rendering the vessel difficult to manoeuvre or useless. Square sails were smaller and more numerous and "being set at right angles to the mast in most cases or at least not at full broadside as with fore-and-aft sails, they were less liable to damage by broadside fire." Another unique feature of these vessels was their shallow draft. In this respect these vessels marked a significant departure in hull design from other vessels. The *Queen Charlotte* carried a crew of 126 and an armament consisting of 1 long twelve pounder, 2 long nine pounders, and 14 long twenty-four pounders.



Along with the *Queen Charlotte*, another vessel was built and launched at Amherstburg in 1810. This was the 230 ton schooner *Lady Prévost* which carried a crew of 86 and had an armament of 13 guns including 1 long nine pounder, 2 long six pounders, and 10 short twelve pounders. The Provincial Marine establishment in Upper Canada now consisted of two divisions. The second division navigated on Lake Erie and occasionally on Lake Huron and was stationed at Fort Amherstburg. It consisted of three vessels: *Queen Charlotte*, *Lady Prévost* and *General Hunter*.

Following the outbreak of war in 1812, Sir George Prevost, the commander in chief, urged upon the British government the necessity of constructing new vessels to strengthen Britain's position on the Lakes. Once the home government gave permission for Prevost to proceed with an emergency ship building programme, work was immediately begun on a new frigate and two armed gunboats at Amherstburg. On 28 December 1812, a master builder arrived at Kingston with 128 carpenters and shipwrights. Of these, fifty remained at the Kingston yard and the remainder were sent on to the shipyards at York and Amherstburg. There a new frigate, *Detroit*, and two small gunboats, *Eliza* and *Myers* were built. The 490 ton *Detroit* was launched on 12 July 1813, and carried an armament

of 1 long eighteen pounder, 2 long twenty-four pounders, 6 long twelve pounders, 8 long nine pounders, 1 twenty-four pounder carronade and 1 short eighteen pounder carronade. However, this vessel still required a large proportion of stores before being put into service. Moreover, there were not seamen available to put on board. Captain Barclay, commanding His Majesty's ships on Lake Erie, continually complained of a lack of trained seamen and stated that some of the crews on his ships were not only untrained but could not speak English. He also complained of a lack of good shipwrights. On one occasion in the spring of 1813 the British general operating in that area took all the carpenters away from working on a new vessel and had them build gunboats which he needed. This kind of interruption was just another factor, among many, hindering naval construction on Lake Erie.

The *Detroit* was the last vessel to be completed at the Amherstburg Navy Yard. On September 10, 1813 the entire British fleet on the Upper Great Lakes was forced to surrender to the United States after a hard-fought attempt to break a naval blockade on Lake Erie. Shortly afterwards the British retreated from Amherstburg, first burning the Navy Yard and the Fort.

The Americans occupied the site of Fort Malden throughout the remainder of the War. During that time the British made plans for a new navy yard, but not at Amherstburg. When peace was restored the British returned to Fort Malden and the naval establishment was relocated at Penetanguishene on Lake Huron.

naval, mais pas à Amherstburg. Après la guerre, ils revinrent au fort Malden et le quartier général de la marine fut établi à Penetanguishene, sur le lac Huron.



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et du Nord

Indian and
Northern Affairs

Parcs Canada

Parks Canada

Publié par Parcs Canada avec l'autorisation
de l'hon. J. Hugh Faulkner
ministre des Affaires indiennes et du Nord,
Ottawa, 1978
QS-C041-000-BB-A1

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Services Canada 1978
Présentation: Eiko Emori