



NINE MILE PORTAGE HERITAGE TRAIL

Biographical Notes for Prominent Characters associated with the Nine Mile Portage prepared for the Nine Mile Portage Heritage Trail Group by Keith HJ Bacon of the Fort Willow Improvement Group, January 2003.

Brief Biographical Notes in the chronological order of the person's association with the Portage and indicating their rank at that time.

Richard Titus Willson, 1793 - ??

- 1793 Born on 5th April near Poughkeepsie, New York State.
- 1800 Family moved to Canada, settling near Kingston.
- 1803 – 1810 Family lived in hardship on Wolfe Island.
- 1810 Family moved to East Gwillimbury, leasing a farm opposite Sharon Temple.
- 1812 – 1813 Richard left home, worked in a whiskey still and as a lumberman.
- 1813** In April, after the timber raft he was on ran aground near Kingston, he volunteered as a "landsman" in York (Toronto). He was stationed at Presque Isle Point when Toronto fell to the Americans.
In July he sailed from York to Kingston and back in a small boat, under the nose of an American Cruiser.
In November he was hired by the Hon. Duncan Cameron, to manage the transporting of two boats up Yonge Street with the intention of shipping supplies of flour and clothing to Michilmackinac. The supplies were taken from where Barrie now stands, by horses, to the head of Willow Creek, the eastern branch of the Nottawasaga River [Fort Willow].
The 20 or so horses that carried the flour were taken from near Aurora to Barrie employing a Snake Indian guide.
The frost set in and the supplies had to remain there until the next Spring.
- 1814** In that winter he was hired by Capt Dennis and joined a party of men who built some 25 to 30 boats at Willow Creek.
In April he went to Little York where he took a Government contract to transport stores by boat from Holland Landing to Barrie.
In August he married Eleanor Emes of North Gwillimbury.
About 1st December he was employed by the Commissariat Department, opening up a road between Kempenfeldt Bay and Penetanguishene (Penetanguishene Road or Nine Mile Portage?)
- 1815** When news of peace reached the area about 1st April, work on the road was stopped by Commissary Head, brother of Sir Francis Bond Head. At the time Richard was superintending the building of some houses in Barrie whilst his brother John was working in a similar capacity in Penetanguishene. He settled on a farm in East Gwillimbury, later known as Spruce Dale. His brother John was employed building a schooner at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River for Peter Robinson.
- 1822 ??** A short time before 1823 he entered into a government contract to supply beef to the Naval Establishment at Penetanguishene.
- 1823 Worked superintending excavation work on the Erie Canal at Lockport, NY.
- 1832 Entered into partnership with his brothers in a tanning business at Holland Landing, financially unsuccessful.
- 1832** On the recommendation of the Hon. W.B. Robinson he was hired by Francis Huston to superintend the work on the Sunnidale Road, starting about 3 miles north-west of Barrie, striking off south-westerly from the Portage Road. The work was discontinued until a new line could be run, the line laid out by Samuel Lount being deemed unuseable. At this time he reports that only two families lived in Barrie, David Edgar, a land speculator, and Alexander Walker who kept teams on the Portage between Barrie and Willow Creek.
Went from Barrie to superintend the opening of the Town Line between Oro and Medonte.
Contracted Cholera from settlers at Bass Lake, but recovered.

- 1833 In the summer, the Sunnidale Road line was run out and he bid for the contract, but it was let to Walker and Drury.
- 1834 He and George McCarty contracted to extend the Sunnidale Road to Lake Huron and to build a bridge thereon.
- 1836 - 1837 Worked on the road from Lake Simcoe to Balsam Lake and the Bradford Road improvement.
- 1837 Mackenzie's Rebellion -
 On 7th December he met a group of 60 to 70 Mackenzie's rebels marching along Queen Street in East Gwillimbury towards Queensville, on their way to Toronto. At the time he held the rank of Lieutenant, and he raised the alarm, although his brother John, a Captain, did not join him. On the 9th they heard that the advance party of Mackenzie's Band were headquartered at Montgomery's Tavern. On the Thursday the loyalists received orders to prepare to march to Toronto the next day, and they assembled at McLeod's Inn on Yonge Street, under Colonels Hill and Duson. They bivouacked the following night near Thornhill, where they learned that the rebels had been dispersed. They captured 25 to 30 prisoners. In Toronto they paraded and were reviewed by the Governor. Col Carthew praised Richard by stating, "This is Titus Willson, a more loyal man does not live". He subsequently led a party of men rounding up rebels in the Sharon area. He participated in the founding of a company of Militia for their mutual defence. He remained a member of the sedentary militia, eventually obtaining the rank of Lt Colonel. Over the following years he worked on the Welland Canal, the Port Stanley piers, McAdamizing Yonge Street, the Coldwater Road, and the Mara Road.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDouall, Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles, ?? – 1848.



<http://www.thequartermasters.com/glipics.htm>

- 1796 Entered British Army as Cornet.
- 1813 Served in Battle of Stoney Creek on June 6th.
- 1813 **Appointed Commanding Officer of the beleaguered Michilimackinac, and to lead the heroic relief expedition to Michilmackinac, via the Nottawasaga route, in early 1814, passing through York (Toronto) on 15th / 18th February 1814, arriving at Michilimackinac on 18th May. Successfully defended the post against an American attack in August.**
- 1816 Retired on half pay.
- 1817 Awarded Companion of the Bath (CB).
- 1841 Promoted to Major General.
- 1848 Died in Scotland.

Captain William McKay, Lower Canada Militia, 1772 – 1832.

- 1772 Born.
- 1790 Joined North West Company.
- 1796 Appointed Partner.
- 1799 In charge at Lake Winnipeg.
- 1805 In charge at La Prairie.
- 1807 Retired from Fur Trade and elected to Beaver Club.
- 1814 **Participated in relief and defence of Michilmackinac, passing through York (Toronto) on 14th / 17th February 1814, later dispatched to capture Prairie du Chein.**

1832

Died in Montreal with rank of Lt Colonel in the Indian Department.
McKay Street in Montreal bears his name.

Lt Andrew Bulger, Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 1789 – 1858.



The colours of the ROYAL NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT advance during the Battle of Georgian Bay, Penetanguishene, a re-enactment of military tactics during the early 1800's

(photo by Arthur Hemming)

- 1789 Born in Newfoundland.
1804 Entered Army as Ensign in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.
1806 Promoted to Lieutenant.
1806 - 1812 Served in Canada.
1812 Participated in capture of Detroit for which he received a medal and clasp.
Served in detachment aboard armed vessels on Lake Ontario.
1813 Participated in Battles for Fort George and at Burlington Heights and served on board ships under Commodore Yeo's command. Received clasp for action at Crysler's Farm in November.
1814 **Active participant in relief expedition to Michilimackinac, serving as Adjutant to Lt Colonel McDouall. He passed through York (Toronto) on 17th / 18th February 1814 with a party of 68 troops of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. His Autobiographical Sketch published in 1865 provides a first hand account of the expedition and subsequent events. On 4th August, participated in successful defence of Michilimackinac against American attack. In September, employing 4 boats, with Lt Worsely RN, he jointly lead the capture of the American ships Tigress and Scorpion. Seven Royal Newfoundlanders, including Bulger, were wounded in the action. He was awarded the Naval War medal and clasp.**
In October he was promoted to Captain and appointed to command Fort McKay at Prairie du Chein and operations on the Mississippi. He arrived under severe conditions at that post on 30th November, and subsequently suffered through the winter with very low provisions.
1815 Returned to Quebec to find his promotion to Captain had not been ratified, he remained a Lieutenant.
Placed on half pay following the disbanding of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.
Eventually granted 500 pounds compensation and an allowance equal to half pay of a Captain.
1822 Governor of Assiniboia.
1858 Died in Montreal.

Lt Poyntz, Royal Navy,

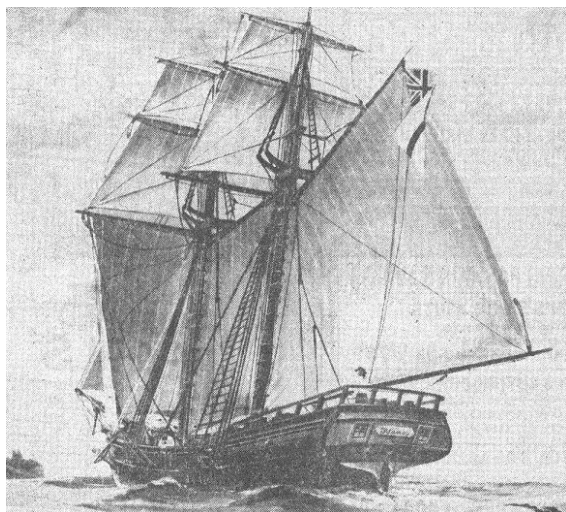
- 1798 Served under Nelson at Alexandria, Egypt.
1801 Served under Nelson during the Battle of Copenhagen.
1814 **Passed through York (Toronto) on 18 February.**
Passed north on the Portage with McDouall's expedition to Michilmackinac.
As senior Naval Officer, he commanded British Naval Forces on Lake Huron.
Commanded the "Nancy" from May through July, shipping supplies from the Nottawasaga River to Michilmackinac. He was replaced by Lt Worsley in July, due to differences with McDouall.
In November he was appointed to the first Hydrographical survey of Penetanguishene

Harbour.

1815 He participated in a second survey with Capt Edward Collier.
Promoted to the rank of Commander.

Lt Miller Worsley, Royal Navy, 1791 – 1835

1791 Born in Gatcombe, England.
1803 Joined Royal Navy as First Class Volunteer.
1813 Promoted to Lieutenant and posted to Upper Canada.
1814 Served as First Lieutenant aboard HMS Princess Charlotte at Oswego in May.
Replaced Lt Poyntz on HMS Nancy, tasked to supply Michilmackinac, in July.



[H.M. Schooner Nancy](#)

B&W Nancy in Georgian Bay

<http://members.rogers.com/kingsharbour/nancypics.htm>

Nancy attacked and sunk by Americans in mouth of Nottawasaga River in August. Worsley and his surviving crew retreated upriver to Fort Willow. Here they found troop reinforcements and supplies, which they transported in 3 bateaux and a large canoe, to Michilmackinac. Observing the American ships Scorpion and Tigress nearby, Worsley, supported by Lt Andrew Bulger and troops of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, subsequently captured the American vessels.

1815 After falling ill and reverting to half-pay, he returned to England.
Promoted to the rank of Commander in July.
1835 Died in England.

Lieutenant Henry Wolsey Bayfield, Royal Navy, 1795 – 1885

1795 Born in Kingston-upon-Hull, England.
1806 ?? Joined the Royal Navy at age 11. Saw wide service in Napoleonic War.
1816 Assisted Capt William Fitz William Owen with his survey of Lake Ontario.
1817 - 1823 Commanded the Hydrographical Survey of Lake Erie and the East Coast of Lake Huron. Probably passed along the Nine Mile Portage during this time on his way to / from Penetanguishene, where his headquarters were located 1820 – 1823. He is quoted as stating, "It is my ambition to render this work so correct that it will not be easy to render it more so". Indeed much of his work remains the basis for present day charts. His party suffered great deprivations including mosquitoes and scurvy.
1823 - 1825 He went on to survey Lake Superior, and returned to England to complete his charts.
1827 - 1841 Appointed superintendent of the St Lawrence River Survey, which occupied him for 14 years. In 1834 he was promoted to Captain.
1841- 1856 Transferred his headquarters from Quebec to Charlottetown, PEI, and surveyed the coasts of PEI, Nova Scotia, and parts of Labrador.

1856 Retired from active survey work.
 1863 Promoted to Vice-Admiral.
 1867 Promoted to Admiral.
 1885 Died in Charlottetown.

Alexander Walker, ?? - ??

?? Born in Scotland.
 ?? First settler in Barrie. Occupied 100 acres, with his log house located at the top of the first hill going north from the Lake, on the NE corner of Bayfield and Collier Streets. This house, together with the Government Storehouse on the lakeshore, were the only buildings in Barrie until the arrival of David Edgar.

1824 Contractor to the Commissariat and the Fur Trade. Operated three ox team carts on the Portage (see biographical note for Thomas Williams below).

1828 Married Betsy Sweezy.
 1833 Contracted to build a number of miles of the Sunnidale Road, but lost money. Later contracted to cut down the hill on Yonge Street near Holland Landing, but failed in this endeavour, again losing money.
 1838 Left Barrie.

David Thompson, 1770 – 1857



<http://www.davidthompsonthings.com/thompsondavidtombstone.html>



1770 Born in London, England.
 1784 Joined the Hudson's Bay Company as an apprentice,
 1797 – 1812 Employed by the North West Company exploring north west Canada.
 1812 – 1814 Produced invaluable maps from the detailed notes made from his astronomical and geodetic observations.

1816 – 1826 Appointed Boundary Surveyor on the International Boundary Commission that defined the US / Canada boundary, following the Treaty of Ghent. Passed southward on the Portage with his American counterpart, a US Officer of Engineers, in 1823, travelling with two large canoes crewed by voyageurs.

1837 Surveyed the Muskoka region to investigate an alternative canal route to avoid the Great Lakes.
 1847 Wrote his "Travels" whilst living destitute with his wife and daughter Charlotte in Longueuil, a suburb of Montreal.
 1857 Died in Longueuil. His grave stone in Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery is inscribed with the words, "DAVID THOMPSON 1770 – 1857. To the memory of the greatest of Canadian geographers, who for 34 years explored and mapped the main travel routes between the St Lawrence and the Pacific".

Captain John Franklin, 1786 – 1847



<http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/frank2.htm>

- 1786 Born in Spilsby, Lincolnshire, England.
- 1801 Participated in the Battle of Copenhagen.
- 1805 Participated in the Battle of Trafalgar.
- 1818 Commanded the "Trent" in an unsuccessful Arctic expedition.
- 1819 - 1823 Commanded an overland expedition to explore the northern coast of Canada east of the Coppermine River
- 1825 - 1827 He traced the coastline from the mouth of the Mackenzie River to about the 150th meridian. Passed along the Nine Mile Portage with his party in 1825 heading north.**
- 1829 Knighted and awarded the Gold Medal of Geographical Society, Paris.
- 1836 - 1843 Lt Governor of Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania).
- 1845 - 1847 Appointed to command expedition to discover the North West Passage. The expedition, consisting of the ships "Erebus" and "Terror", with 129 officers and men, was last seen on 26 July 1845, by a whaling vessel in Baffin Bay. Between 1848 and 1859 numerous expeditions were launched to the Arctic. It was eventually determined that the ships became icebound and the expedition perished, including Franklin who died 11 June 1847.

Thomas Williams, 1809 – 1899

- 1809 Born in London, England.
- 1822 Son of Richard Williams who settled on Lot 36 on the west or Vespra side of the Penetanguishene Road.
- 1824 At age 14 he worked as a teamster for Alexander Walker, a contractor to the Commissariat and the Fur Trade. Walker operated three ox team carts of approx one ton burthen, carrying supplies on the Portage. Thomas worked with a black man called Ben. Each team with its teamster spent a day each way on the portage, spending the third day resting and minding the store on Kempenfeldt Bay.**
- 1830 approx Taught school in Craighurst and Orillia.
- 1838 Entered the Methodist Ministry in which he served for 55 years.
- 1845 Married Deborah Keays of London Township, Ontario. They had 10 children.
- 1890 - 1891 Wrote a number of reminiscient articles for the Orillia Packet Newspaper which were subsequently published in the Simcoe County Pioneer Papers.
- 1899 Died in Orillia, Ontario.

Sources of Biographical information -

- MacMillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography.
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- Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopaedia.
- An Autobiographical Sketch of the Services of the late Captain Andrew Bulger of the Royal Newfoundland Fencible Regiment published in 1865 in Bangalore by the Regimental Press of the 2nd Battalion 10th Regiment.
- Simcoe County Pioneer Papers.
- Streetwise in Barrie by Bradley ES Rudachyk, 2001.
- The Mainsail, an official Journal of Discovery Harbour.
- Various Internet Web sites.