

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS COMPLIMENTS OF THE MINISTRY
OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AN INVENTORY OF THE HISTORICAL RESOURCES OF
WASAGA BEACH:
THE NOTTAWASAGA RIVER, A ROUTE TO THE NORTH-WEST
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MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES HURONIA DISTRICT WASAGA BEACH**

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**THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE NOTTAWASAGA RIVER ROUTE
AND
THE CARRYING PLACE PORTAGE ROUTES**

The Huron and Petun people who had settled in the vicinity of Midland and Collingwood respectively had used the Nottawasaga River and the Carrying Place Portage routes between Lake Huron, Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario during the 17th century. The Nottawasaga route followed the river from Lake Huron as far as Willow Creek and then a nine mile portage was made from Willow Creek to Kempenfeldt Bay on Lake Simcoe. The northern end of the Carrying Place Portage route followed either the Severn River or the Coldwater trail from Lake Huron to Lake Simcoe. The Nottawasaga route joined the Carrying Place Portage south of Lake Simcoe as it followed the west branch of the Holland River and then crossed over to the valley of the Humber River. The Huron and Petun, moreover, showed these routes to the Jesuit Priests and French explorers who came among them. Then between 1646-1650, their enemies, the Iroquois, also travelled by these ways to attack them and finally in a bloody massacre to disperse them altogether. For almost half a century traffic on these routes ceased. Archeological excavation has provided this evidence.

In the early 18th century Algonquin and Chippewa Indians bringing furs from the Upper Lake reopened these portages for their trade with the French, who controlled the north side of Lake Ontario, and with the British and Dutch merchants who had posts on the south side of the lake. The French, who realized the value of this traffic attempted to gain absolute control over it by building first posts and then forts in the

early 1750's at the south end of the Carrying Place Portage near the confluence of the Humber River and Lake Ontario. However, with the defeat of the French at Niagara and then at Quebec in 1759 and 1760, their authority vanished in Upper Canada, but some Frenchmen stayed behind to continue their trade with the Indians on the portage.

British interest in the routes between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron was postponed by first the Pontiac Rebellion and then by the American War of Independence. By 1785, however, two different parties wished to gain control of the Carrying Place Portage, but the British Government at Quebec had to acquire the necessary land from the Indians, before private individuals could use it for their own ends.

The two competitors for the route were the North-West Company and Baron Philippe de Rocheblave. The North-West Company officials Benjamin Frobisher and Captain Robertson, who were seeking a shorter and more economical route to the northwest than by the Niagara Frontier, explored the route in 1785. They then petitioned the Governor-General for a grant of land covering the route between Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario. Baron de Rocheblave also realized the potential wealth to be gained by controlling the Portage and petitioned for a grant of land covering the south end of the portage and the site of Toronto as compensation for the losses he had sustained in the British service as the Governor of Illinois.

No action was taken on either of these petitions before the arrival of Sir Guy Charlton, Lord Dorchester, in 1786. In September 1787 Deputy Governor General Collins was ordered to negotiate with three Mississauga Indian chiefs for the purchase of the land in question. Even though the exact extent of the Toronto Purchase was not defined in the treaty with the Indians it was understood to cover the land crossed by the Portage between Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario, and the Coldwater portage between the Narrows and Matchedash Bay.

Once the land had been purchased from the Indians Lord Dorchester was unwilling to allow any group of individuals to gain a monopoly of trade on the route. Nevertheless in 1787 De Rocheblave was granted 1000 acres in the vicinity of Toronto as were other Frenchmen who had served the British Crown in the American War of Independence. But the surveying of these grants had not been undertaken by 1791 when the separate provinces of Upper and Lower Canada were formed. The Constitution Act postponed the surveying of the land until the grants had been reaffirmed by the Lt. Governor of Upper Canada.

When Colonel Simcoe arrived in Upper Canada as the first Lt. Governor in 1792, he had already formulated his own plans for the development of the Province. Upper Canada was to become a model of British Government in action and a suitable home for the United Empire Loyalists. Moreover he planned to set up the military headquarters of the province at Toronto, and develop the Carrying Place Portage into a military highway. Clearly, Frenchmen such as De Rocheblave, whatever their loyalties, did not fit in with his plans for the future development of Upper Canada. No more was heard of De Rocheblave's land grants and all the vestiges of the previous Indian and French occupations were swept away, and for the next, fifty years Toronto was to be called York.

Simcoe immediately plunged into the development of the Province. One of his early acts was to explore the Carrying Place Portage, or Yonge Street as it was to be

called. He set off with a small expedition in 1793 for Matchedash Bay. There he found that the harbour at Penetanguishene was very much more suited to the type of traffic he had in mind than Matchedash Bay, which had been considered adequate by his predecessors.

While Simcoe and his party were investigating the various harbour sites, George Cowan a storekeeper on the Coldwater Trail, told A. Aiken, Simcoe's surveyor, of the existence of the Nottawasaga route from the west end of Kempenfeldt Bay. Cowan had been trading with the Indians from about 1778, and knew of the Nottawasaga route from Indian traders who came to his store. It is for this reason that the Nottawasaga route is mentioned on the map drawn by Robert Pilkington, Simcoe's aide-de-camp in 1793.

Despite Simcoe's enthusiasm over the development of Yonge Street, Lord Dorchester refused to provide him with either the money or the physical resources to complete the project. In fact the Queen's Rangers, Simcoe's own regiment, whom he was employing in the clearing of the road were deliberately removed from York. Yonge Street was surveyed to Holland Landing by 1794 but the clearing of the trees was not completed until 1798. Even then, stumps and logs in the roadway made it unusable by carts and wagons. No progress was made north of Lake Simcoe in the clearing of a road and no attempt was made to develop the harbour at Penetanguishene. Frustrated and ill, Simcoe left Canada in 1796 with his term of office still uncompleted.

Had Simcoe's plans for a road between York and Penetanguishene materialized, the Nottawasaga route to Lake Huron would have passed unnoticed in history books. The clearing of Yonge Street to Holland Landing, however, encouraged traders to use the road to that point, but thereafter any of the three possible routes, the Nottawasaga River, the Coldwater Trail and the Severn River could have been used. Of these routes the Nottawasaga River had physical advantages over both the Coldwater and the Severn for the traveler starting out from Holland Landing.

The Nottawasaga route commenced at the head of Kempenfeldt Bay 32 miles by water from Holland Landing whence there was an eight or nine mile portage to Willow Creek. Then twenty-seven miles were covered on Willow Creek and the Nottawasaga River. Both stretches of water were sufficiently deep to accommodate bateaux. The rapids six miles from the mouth of the river were not extensive enough to present much of an obstacle. The Coldwater Trail struck off across land from the west side of Lake Couchiching some 40 miles from Holland Landing. Eighteen miles of portage then lay ahead of the trader before he reached Matchedash Bay (at Waubaushene). Although the Coldwater route was a little shorter than the Nottawasaga route, the portage was longer and became impassible for much of the summer. The Severn route to Lake Huron had been used extensively by Indian tribes and in 1793 by Col. Simcoe, but it was more than 70 miles long. Moreover, there were a number of sizeable rapids and water falls which had to be avoided by portaging. Only canoes could be used on this route. Nevertheless, none of these three routes had any clear cut advantage over the others. What advantages the Nottawasaga River may have had in economic terms were probably off set by the traditional Indian use of the Severn and Coldwater trail which also served the Trent river route to Lake Ontario. The eastern part of Simcoe County was a traditional meeting ground for Indian tribes, and it was for this reason that George Cowan set

up his store at a point accessible from both the Coldwater and Severn routes in about 1778 long before there were any other trading posts in the area.

Col. Simcoe's successors to the post of Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada lacked his vision for the defense and development of the province. The Government took no active part in the improvement of Yonge and the upkeep of the road was left to the settlers whose land fronted on to it. However, they were few in number and their attentions were rarely directed towards maintaining the road.

BRITISH MILITARY INTEREST IN THE NOTTAWASAGA ROUTE

Prior to 1810 British military planners appeared to have paid little attention to the possibility that American forces might block their Great Lakes route to the north west in the event of renewed hostilities. The defense of the Upper Great Lakes region west of Lake Huron was considered to be the concern of the North-West Company; the regular forces would defend the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada and would lend what assistance they could to the North-West Company, when such was required. Consequently, it was pressure from the North-West Company and not from military planners that encouraged Lt. Gov. Francis Gore and his successor Major General Isaac Brock to order a survey of the Penetanguishene road in 1810. This was the government's response to the Memorial presented to Gore by the partners of the North-West Company. The completion of a road to Penetanguishene was essential to the continued maintenance of the fur trade when North-West Company ships were being delayed at Niagara and even fired upon by the guns of the fort at Detroit. Gen. Brock wrote to Lord Liverpool for instructions:

Previous to the departure of Lieutenant Governor Gore, His Excellency directed a survey of a tract of land belonging to the Indians upon Lake Simcoe to be made, with a view of meeting the wishes of the gentlemen engaged in the fur trade, as expressed in their memorial to His Excellency here with enclosed...

I shall only presume to detain your Lordship to request that as the merchants are particularly anxious in the present uncertain state of our relations, to obtain a route for their goods unconnected with the American territory, I may be honored as soon as convenient with your Lordship's commands on the subject.

It should be noted that in 1810 the lands between Kempenfeldt Bay and Penetanguishene were still the property of the Chippewa Indians, a fact which demonstrates the lack of government concern in developing an alternative route to the Northwest. The land needed for the road was acquired by Treaty in 1811, but in practice it remained Indian property until 1815 because the terms of the treaty were not fulfilled.

All the lands north of Lake Simcoe remain the property of the Indians because the treaty of 1811 which would have acquired lands covering the New Penetanguishene Road 250,000 acres, has never been fulfilled due to the fact that the 4,000 Pounds was never paid to the Indians. The money was forwarded to Montreal from England in 1812 but due to the war was spent elsewhere.

Lands covered by the Nine Mile-Portage to the Northwest of Kempenfeldt Bay, including the Nottawasaga river system were not a part of this treaty. Acquisition of

these lands took place in 1817, by which time both military and civilian supplies had been forwarded by way of the Nottawasaga route for more than three years.

In addition the company was prepared to lend their schooners on the Lakes to the government to assist in transporting military supplies, and were willing to proceed in an offensive capacity if such action should be required of them.

The crucial factor in the switch of supply routes to the northwest from the Great Lakes to the Yonge Street route was the completion of the Penetanguishene road before the outbreak of hostilities. Without this road, the entire support of the northwest could be put in jeopardy.

By the outbreak of the war the Penetanguishene road had been surveyed by Samuel Wilmot but the roadway had not been cleared. Fortunately British forces had singular successes with the capture of Michilimackinac and Detroit. The seizure of these forts strengthened British hold on the Great Lakes route to the Continental interior, and consequently there was less incentive for the government to press on with the building of the Penetanguishene road. Military and civilian supplies could now be shipped in relative safety through Lake Erie and the St. Clair river to Lake Huron.

Nevertheless the entire transportation system was dependent on the maintenance of British naval supremacy on Lake Erie. This supremacy remained unchallenged until 1813, but then the Americans were able to launch a superior fleet on Lake Erie with which they destroyed the British squadron at Put-In Bay on Sept. 10, 1813. The Americans followed up their victory with an invasion of southwestern Ontario from across the Detroit River. With the defeat of General Proctor at Moraviantown and the slaying of the Indian Chief Tecumseth the British were deprived of any suitable route by which to supply Michilimackinac, the fur posts, or the Indians dependent on the North-West trading Company.

THE WAR OF 1812

On the eve of the war the British army and the North-West Company had come to some understanding over the defense of the Upper Lakes region. Captain A. Gray in a dispatch to General Prevost in June 1812 set down the results of his discussions with officials of the North-West Company.

In the event of War the route by Detroit and the River Sinclair must be abandoned and that by York adopted. From York they will proceed by Lake Simcoe to Gloucester Bay in Lake Huron and along the north shore of the lake....and from there into Lake Superior. The only part of this route they feel any apprehension of being intercepted or cut off by the Enemy, is upon Lake Huron. An armament may be fitted out at Detroit to intercept them in their return from the North West (when their cargoes are more valuable). It is therefore upon this line of communication they will probably require our support.

Company officials felt confident that they could contain any American force that might oppose them on Lake Superior, and if the American should establish themselves on Lake Huron the company would arm one of their schooners and muster a force of about 300 voyageurs and as many Indians. Moreover, Company officials strongly recommended the capture of Fort Michilimackinac which they described as:

very weak being commanded within pistol shot, etc.

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PLANS FOR THE CAMPAIGN IN 1815

During the summer of 1814 it had become evident that the Nottawasaga River was not the most satisfactory supply route to Michilimackinac. When a northwesterly wind blew it was almost impossible to leave the river. Furthermore the shifting sands at the river mouth often reduced the depth of water to no more than three feet and caused the channel to change its position. Consequently, it was necessary to take soundings every time a ship entered or left the river. The shallowness of the water made it necessary for the loading of the schooners to take place outside the bar where they lay exposed to the weather.

On account of these limitations on the use of the Nottawasaga, plans were made during October to set up a dockyard and fort at Penetanguishene. Lieut. Poyntz, the former commander of the Nancy was sent to Penetanguishene in November 1814 to examine the sites. He went by way of the Nottawasaga but on his arrival at Schoonertown discovered that due to the severe weather neither the Confiance nor Surprise could cross the bar. Consequently he proceeded to Penetanguishene in a bateau.

On the basis of his favourable reports, it was decided that a 44 gun and a 74 gun frigate should be constructed there. But shipwrights who had been ordered to proceed to Penetanguishene during December were delayed at Willow Creek by the freezing over of the Nottawasaga River. Consequently 18 shipwrights were left there

under Lieut. Poyntz to construct bateaux which would be required on the Nottawasaga River during the next season. Other shipwrights wintered at Holland Landing and built boats for use on Lake Simcoe.

There was constant activity throughout the winter. In December 1814, Dr. Dunlop with a party of 35 men of the Canadian Fencibles began the arduous task of clearing a road between Kempenfeldt Bay and Penetanguishene. In spite of the enormous hardships a rough track was made to within seven miles of Penetanguishene by the end of February 1815. Sir James Yeo, Commander of the Royal Navy on the Great Lakes visited Penetanguishene in January to view the site. Then Colonel George Head in company with shipwrights arrived on February 28 to supervise construction of the base.

It appeared that the route to Michilimackinac by way of the Nottawasaga was to be abandoned in favour of the Penetanguishene Road. But on March 9 the base at Penetanguishene was ordered disbanded. The war was over and Col. Head with his Canadian woodsmen were ordered to proceed to Kempenfeldt Bay and there to await further instructions. However, by the time instructions were given to stop construction of the frigates, the guns, carriages, sailing canvas, iron, etc. had already started from York and were scattered all along the route particularly at Kempenfeldt Bay and Holland Landing. Over the next few years some of these goods were slowly moved to Drummond Island and Amherstburg while others such as the anchor remain at Holland Landing to this day.

EXTENT OF TRAFFIC, 1815

Some estimate of the traffic on the route can be gauged from the amount of provisions which still remained in the various store houses' on the route which the Surprise and the other schooners had been unable to ship during the navigating season. Assistant Commissary General George Crookshank's survey in November revealed that 115,257 lbs. of flour, 13,971 lbs. of biscuit, 121,882 lbs. of salt pork, 6,635 lbs. of salt beef, as well as over a thousand pounds of sugar and coffee and 1,215 gallons of rum was in storage between Holland Landing and Nottawasaga Bay. This amounts to about 120 tons of provisions. In addition to these, there were 177 packets of Indian presents at Willow Creek and another 143 packets at the Nottawasaga River depot. (Read [The Jury Report Appendix](#))

The transportation of provisions was only a part of the total traffic on the route. All the guns, gun carriages, ammunition, tools, cables, canvas, etc., which were required at Drummond Island had to be brought over the Portage. For example, in August Captain Hambly had been instructed to proceed to Holland Landing with thirty marines and ten seamen to collect up the guns which had been destined for the frigates at Penetanguishene. When Hambly and his party arrived at the store house on the Holland River they found 17 long 24 pounders and three 18 pounders as well as 15 thirty-two pounder cannonades. His men repaired the store houses at Holland Landing and built an additional one to house the cannonades, and forwarded the long guns to Kempenfeldt Bay.

Everything that was to be used by the army or navy had to be transported up Yonge Street, a distance of 36 miles by cart. An average cart load was a little less than a ton. The supplies were then stored at Holland Landing to await bateaux to carry them across Lake Simcoe. A bateau could carry a cargo of about 3 tons. At

Kempenfeldt Bay these provisions had to be unloaded, stored and then carted 8 miles to Willow Creek and stored; then loaded once more onto bateaux, they were shipped 27 miles to the Commissary store at the mouth of the river, where they were either stored once more or loaded directly onto a schooner if one should be available. It was a slow and tedious route to follow. The Rev. Thomas Williams described the equipment that the contractor used in transporting supplies across the Nine Mile Portage in 1824.

There were three strong wagons with racks on them, such as a man would make with an axe, a drawing knife and a couple of augers with two loose planks for a bottom and a yoke of strong oxen to each wagon. The load was twelve barrels of flour (200 lbs each) or their equivalent in weight of other matter. It was never expected that all three teams should be on the road on the same day. Each team with its teamster had two days in succession on the road then a day of rest for the team while the driver had charge and care of the premises and goods received and receipted if any came by boats and did the hospitalities besides keeping busy chiming up the barrels for next day's load. The portage being only a short nine miles and, the storehouses ample and secure it was easy to make the journey, deliver the goods and return while a good portion of the afternoon remained.

The economic effect of this transportation was felt all throughout townships adjacent to Yonge Street and particularly at York:

The Government is carrying out a great many expensive undertakings at York such as building barracks, storehouses, wharfs and a house for the Governor. This makes labor very high and hands very hard to get \$1.50 per day being the common price with victuals and grog. There is very little done in the farming line on that account and the high wages that are given for people with wagons to carry goods through the country to the lakes for the North-West Company to trade with the Indians and bringing back stores for Government which were conveyed up at immense expense during the war. They pay no regard to economy. They are bringing thousands of barrels of pork from Ireland and flour also up the St. Lawrence to Kingston.

It is probable that the use of the Nottawasaga route to Lake Huron had a considerable impact on the development of York as a transportation and commercial centre, for the city underwent considerable expansion in the decade after the War of 1812.

TRAFFIC ON THE NOTTAWASAGA RIVER IN 1816

Navigation on Lake Huron was delayed by ice which prevented the schooners from leaving the river until after May 20. Meanwhile Lieutenant Wingfield was transferred to Kingston to command H.M.S. Beckwith and Lt. Clapperton took over command of H.M.S. Surprise. Perhaps due to the long delay in forwarding fresh provisions from the Nottawasaga to Drummond Island, the garrison on the island suffered severely from scurvy of which 14 men died. The schooners Surprise, Confiance and Sauk were employed in accelerating the delivery of both provisions for the garrison and presents for the 1000 or more Indians who had come to Drummond Island.

Lt. Col. McDouall was particularly anxious to supply the Indians with liberal distributions of food and presents. Fortunately he had adequate supplies as a large shipment of both had been forwarded from York and were either at Drummond

Island or at the storehouses on the Nottawasaga or at Willow Creek. The allegiance of the Indians to the Crown was important to the defence and economy of the Upper Great Lake Region. The Indians' confidence had been undermined by the return of Michilimackinac to the United States. They regarded this island as their own property. They were extremely hostile to the United States Government because of the treatment they had received both before and during the War of 1812; and they now sought British assistance in opposing American military encroachment on their territories. Although the British were unwilling to assist the Indians in any manner which might arouse the hostility or suspicion of the Americans, they did not wish to lose their confidence.

Already there were discussions in 1816 involving the future of the Nottawasaga route to Drummond Island, and the impending removal of the Naval Establishment at Schoonertown to Penetanguishene. The principle concern of Commissary General W.R. Robinson was to reduce the cost of supplying and maintaining military installations in Upper Canada:

The first step . . . would be the reduction of the Naval Establishment and the abandonment of many posts in Upper Canada, particularly those in the communication from York to Drummond Island by Nottawasaga and Penetanguishene Bay, these in my humble opinion are no longer of utility, the route by Lake Erie being preferable for the conveyance of stores.

However, Captain William Owen, representing the Navy's view of the defense of Upper Canada, would not accept that the Lake Erie route was in fact preferable to the Nottawasaga under the existing circumstances. Owen conceded that the route by Lake Erie was the cheapest means of conveying supplies to Drummond Island but expense could not be the only consideration. At the Niagara Frontier Americans could block the route at will, and in times of war it could be open to the British only when they held both sides of the river.

On both the Detroit and on the St. Clair Rivers, boats were often detained for fourteen and sometimes for forty days particularly in the spring. Sailing vessels could not beat up into Lake Huron with a west wind blowing. The rapids on the St. Clair river posed another obstacle which could delay shipping almost as long as the wind could. Delays on the Lake Erie route and its vulnerability to American interference offset the savings in cost. Time was the crucial factor. Despite the numerous transshipments between carts, bateaux and schooners on the Nottawasaga route to Drummond Island it was still possible to delivery on average one shipment per week while an average number of shipments by way of Lake Erie to Drummond Island was one per month. Owen suggested that savings could be made on the Nottawasaga route by reducing the number of staff at the storehouses; and by the Navy taking over the storehouses from the Commissary department of the Army. Both these recommendations Here adopted in the fall.

As to the future of Schoonertown as the Naval Establishment on Lake Huron, Sir Edward Owen had recommended in July 1816 that the base be transferred to Penetanguishene as soon as was practicable. The Admiralty agreed:

In proceeding to the consideration of Sir Edward Owen's suggestions for the transportation and defense of Lake Huron, I am to acquaint you that their Lordships completely agree with Sir Edward in the propriety of moving the Naval Establishment

on that lake from Nottawasaga to Penetanguishene and that they will therefore give instructions to the Commissioner to take immediate measures for that purpose accordingly.

Henceforth, Schoonertown would be occupied until the necessary naval dockyard and building had been erected at Penetanguishene. In the fall of 1816 there were preliminary preparations for the moving of the establishment from Schoonertown. Captain Hambly requested that six shipwrights and five sawyers be hired. These men were possibly employed at Schoonertown during the winter in cutting and preparing timber for the three gunboats Wasp, Bee and Mosquito which were constructed in the following spring on the Nottawasaga River. It would appear that a total of eight shipwrights and five sawyers had been hired by March 1817. The pay for experienced shipwrights was 6/- per day with an additional 1/- per day for work in such a remote location, while the pay for inexperienced shipwrights and for sawyers was 5/- per day with the 1/- allowance. In a survey of ships at Penetanguishene in 1819 there is a reference to each of the gunboats as follows:

This vessel was built in the spring of 1817 at the old Establishment at Nottawasaga (sic) principally of oak fallen in the winter of the same year.

These three vessels were referred to as both gunboats and Durham boats due to the fact that they were weakly constructed and not of regulation size. The Bee weighed 40 tons; the Mosquito, 30 tons; and the Wasp, 41 tons. Owen had recommended this type of boat because it could carry much more cargo than the bateaux and yet its draught was such that it was unaffected by the shallowness of the water on the bar at the mouth of the Nottawasaga.

Both the Surprise and the Confiance were laid up on the Nottawasaga for the winter of 1816-1817 as in previous years and their crews were stationed at Schoonertown. In the spring they were joined by the Tecumseh and the Newark from the Lake Erie Squadron in the shipment of supplies to Drummond Island and to Penetanguishene.

Some of the early supplies forwarded from York to the Nottawasaga in 1817 were sails and gunpowder. Particular instructions were sent to David Weeks, the storekeeper at Willow Creek concerning their storage.

A quantity of gunpowder in casks will be forwarded which will require the utmost caution in stowing. You had better keep it distant from any iron work, and cover it with the sails. Indians and boatmen have been in the habit of making fires close to the storehouse and not infrequently have left them burning, to prevent this entirely, will at all times require your attention but more probably when so large a quantity of 'stores and ammunition are deposited there.

Perhaps the storage of such volatile material was too much for the storekeeper who was relieved of his duties in August, on account of his "habit of getting intoxicated".

A substantial quantity of this powder was not forwarded due to the disbanding of the Naval Squadron on Lake Huron. Even though the storekeeper asked for instruction for its disposal in 1818 the powder was not removed, and then in the spring of 1819 most of the, remainder was lost in a sudden flooding of the creek. Eighteen inches of water covered the floor of the storehouse, ruining 3,380 pounds of powder, 10,219

musket and pistol cartridges and 460 quill tubes. Only the ball and a few pounds of powder were saved.

DISARMAMENT ON LAKE HURON

The signing of the Rush-Bagot treaty in April, 1817, limiting the size of vessels on the Great Lakes precipitated a general disbanding of the Naval Squadron on Lake Huron. On July 1 the entire squadron was paid off and "laid up in ordinary" at Penetanguishene. By this action Schoonertown was abandoned. The seamen were paid off and the artificers transferred to Penetanguishene. The buildings were allowed to fall into disrepair.

Captain William Owen had noted in August, 1816 that there was not one inhabited building on the site of Penetanguishene. Some of the buildings required for the establishment were built during 1817 but others which had been erected in the winter of 1814 on the orders of Captain Collier and Colonel Head and then abandoned in the following spring, were now repaired and returned to service. Tenders were requested for three frame houses. These buildings were to be 48' 3" x 32' 6", 73' x 25' and 38' x 25' and were to be finished on or before October 1, 1817. From then on men and supplies were forwarded to Penetanguishene from the Nottawasaga.

By October a party of artificers was returning from the Naval Base under the supervision of George Chiles, storekeeper at Holland Landing. He was anxious that the slowness of the journey to York should not be laid to his account. Their troubles illustrate the slowness of the Nottawasaga route.

From Penetanguishene to Nottawasaga River 3 1/2 days - calm and light winds.
From the mouth of River to (willow Creek) 1 day and 1/2.
On the Portage 5 days: the wagon owner not there and the oxen in the woods.
Employed the men - 2 days searching for the oxen and three days carrying across the portage 9 miles their tool chests and baggage.
From Kempenfeldt to Holland Landing 1 day - strong contrary winds to York and one day and a half.

Following the disbanding of the Lake Huron Squadron and the abandonment of Schoonertown the transportation of supplies continued but at a reduced pace and volume. Activity on the Nottawasaga was centered on the storehouses at the mouth of the river and the boats which docked there. There was a regular schooner service between the Nottawasaga and Drummond Island during 1818 even though Penetanguishene offered better docking facilities for schooners. Col. Claus, from the Indian Department, recommended that the Nottawasaga was still the speediest route for forwarding Indian presents to Drummond Island and to other posts on Lake Huron. It is probable, however, that an increasing percentage of goods destined for Drummond Island was sent from the Nottawasaga in bateaux or in the Durham boats to Penetanguishene before forwarding them to Drummond Island.

Lieutenant Kent, commander at Penetanguishene mentioned the use of the Durham boats in the summer of 1817.

The three Durham boats are employed conveying the gun carriages and anchors from Nottawasaga and to guard against accident I constantly accompany them. The provisions from York and stores from Kingston have arrived at the head of the River and will immediately be brought round.

It would appear that Lieutenant Kent had good reason to supervise these shipments personally for by June 8 all but three of the sailors serving in Lake Huron Squadron had deserted. Ten men from the 70th Regiment who were stationed at Penetanguishene were detached to man the boats even though the security of the naval stores and houses at the naval base might be put in jeopardy. The Lieutenant of the 70th Regiment explained:

Since that period the men have therefore been principally employed between this place (Penetanguishene) and Nottawasaga navigating the bateaux and vessels, as the major part of the men were thus detached I considered it my duty to be with them to prevent any irregularity.

MILITARY USE OF THE NOTTAWASAGA ROUTE DURING THE 1820's

The terms of the contract for the transportation of military supplies from York to Penetanguishene show that two routes were in use during the early 1820's. The material was brought up Yonge Street to Holland Landing, forwarded to Kempenfeldt Bay, and then sent either via the Penetanguishene road or to the storehouse on Willow Creek.

The Penetanguishene road had been cut during the winter of 1814 to within seven miles of the proposed naval base, but work had been suspended when the Establishment at Penetanguishene was abandoned in the following spring. Captain William Owen had pointed out in 1815 that the Penetanguishene road had been surveyed and cleared without regard for the suitability of the ground over which the road would pass.

The road from thence to Penetanguishene already opened in part is not now passable as a summer road, and perhaps never can be made a good one owing to the quantity of swamp it has to cross. There is scarcely a doubt that a road carefully chosen by the sacrifice of lines too straight, to which we in practice seem too much attached might avoid these difficulties, that demand the perpetual renewal of labour in a country where there are no hands.

In 1817 the remaining seven miles of road was cleared of trees but the combination of swamps and the lack of proper maintenance restricted the use of its whole length. So in 1820 the Penetanguishene road could be used only during the winter when the ground and swamps were frozen. The Nottawasaga River route continued to be the natural choice for the transportation of supplies to both Drummond Island and Penetanguishene in the summertime.

The Reverend T. Williams who was working on the Portage as a small boy in the summer of 1824 remembered that government stores were transported in large quantities over the Nottawasaga route. Williams also recorded that Corporal Cannon, the soldier in charge of the stores at Willow Creek vanished under mysterious circumstances in the fall of 1824. He disappeared into the woods and no trace of him

was found. His position was taken by Corporal Stalton. During April 1825 Captain John Franklin at the head of his 2nd Polar Expedition crossed the Portage on his way to Penetanguishene. . Franklin's men arrived at Kempenfeldt Bay on April 9 to find that Alexander Walker, contractor for transporting supplies across the Nine Mile Portage, and his team of oxen were nowhere to be found. So Peter Robinson was obliged to seek the assistance of local residence in the carrying of Franklin's supplies over the Portage. Due to this delay Franklin's party was unable to set out from Kempenfeldt Bay until the afternoon of April 10 and could make four or five miles on account of "the badness of the road, knee deep with wet and mud", and the ensuing fatigue of the teams of oxen. On the following day bateaux from Penetanguishene conveyed the party down the Nottawasaga River to its mouth where they camped.

Lieutenant George Bach, with a second party of men from Franklin's expedition arrived at Holland Landing on April 11. Once more Peter Robinson proved of service by arranging their supplies and transportation. By April 18 Lieutenant Bach and his men were assembled at Willow Creek where they boarded a bateaux. On the following night they camped on the site of Schoonertown where the buildings had fallen into ruins. They reached Penetanguishene on April 22 delayed by strong winds which prevented them from crossing the sand bar at the mouth of the Nottawasaga.

The abandonment of the military establishment on Drummond Island in 1828 and the reduction of men and equipment at Penetanguishene further diminished the military traffic on the Nottawasaga River. It is evident that by 1832 the Nottawasaga River was no longer in use as a summer route for the transportation of military supplies to Penetanguishene. These goods were being forwarded by Lake Erie or by Yonge Street and the Narrows - Coldwater road. The Great Lakes route had been improved by the opening of the Welland Canal and by the use of steam vessels. The Welland canal removed the necessity for transshipment at Niagara, and steam vessels were not delayed by contrary winds and currents on the St. Clair River as were sailing ships. However the possibility of reopening the Nottawasaga as a summer military supply route remained.

The most difficult parts of the route are those by land from York to Holland Landing at certain seasons and from the Narrows to Coldwater at all seasons. The latter road indeed is so bad that unless the Lieutenant Governor causes it to be almost entirely remade which he most likely will, for the sake of the Indian establishment at the Narrows and at Coldwater, the government transport to Penetanguishene must recur to the Nottawasaga and Lake Huron as the making of the Penetanguishene road is to be left to settlers.

Even though the storehouses at the mouth of the river were probably unused from the mid 1820's, the military authorities were unwilling to sell them. John Goessman, the surveyor of the Township of Flos. petitioned unsuccessfully for Lot 27, Conc. 9 in Flos. in 1827 and again in 1837. In December 1848 Mr. Rees was permitted to lease the property with the four buildings which still existed, but he was not allowed to buy it.

TRADING COMPANIES ON THE NOTTAWASAGA RIVER ROUTE

THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

At its inception in 1783 the North West Company used the proven Ottawa River and French River routes to the Upper Great Lakes. But the forty or more portages necessary on these rivers restricted the voyageurs to the exclusive use of canoes. Although this limitation had little effect on the eastward transportation of furs which were light and of small size, it prevented the moving of bulky and heavy supplies to the interior at economical rates.

For sending these heavier articles the North West Company required a route on which larger vessels could be employed, thereby lessening the cost of transportation. This reduction was crucial for as the fur bearing animals became more scarce, the trappers had to go farther afield, and more men and materials were needed to get the pelts to market. The Great Lakes provided an alternative route even though it was slow and often more risky. However it had been closed by a ban on private shipping since the American War of Independence. This restriction had been imposed to prevent the diversion of furs and commerce through American rivers and ports and to insure the commercial prosperity of Canada.

While the North West Company was petitioning for the lifting of these restrictions on private shipping (finally removed by 1789) their agents were seeking other alternatives. Benjamin Frobisher and Captain Robertson investigated the Carrying Place Portage in 1784 and 1785 and planned a road.

This route had the advantage that it was shorter than the Lake Erie route, and despite the difficulties of land transportation it was 30% cheaper than the Ottawa River. However due to the refusal of the Governor General to grant the Company a monopoly control, and to the gradual lifting of the ban on private shipping on the Great Lakes, the North West Company did not take advantage of the Carrying Place Portage at this time.

The building of Yonge Street by Colonel Simcoe must have stimulated the North West Company's interest once more. Simcoe was not blind to the commercial potential of Yonge Street, even if he had no particular liking for fur traders:

There is little doubt that by this communication the North West Company will supply themselves with many of their heavy articles instead of by circuitous route of Lake Erie.

Simcoe regarded Yonge Street not only as a strategic investment but as a potential channel by which the wealth of the west could be diverted through his young capital York, which had no other prospect of commercial prosperity. But the log strewn and almost impassible track from York to Holland Landing was hardly the Yonge Street that Simcoe had in mind when he left Canada in 1796.

Percy J. Robinson who had a particular interest in the history of York and the development of Yonge Street wrote that even though the North West Company had shown this interest in the early development of Yonge Street, the Company did not divert any of its trade to the northeast through York and Yonge Street. He reasoned that the North West Company was not only unwilling to abandon the proven and

traditional routes but also would not use a route through Upper Canada because the Company was unable to wield political pressure on its government in the manner that they could in Lower Canada. Without this political support, they could not be assured that their interests would be promoted and protected in the province. Only between 1810-1812 does P.J. Robinson concede that the North West Company did actively promote the completion of Yonge Street to Penetanguishene.

Your Memorialists since the cession of the Post in 1796 by following the above route (via Lake Erie have on several occasions felt and are continually exposed to the vexatious interference of the American Custom House officers. Your Memorialists having had their boats and property seized and detained to their great annoyance and loss and always without adequate or even any compensation or redress. ...Your Memorialists have been given to understand that it is in the contemplation of your Excellency to open a road and Establishment from Kempenfeldt Bay to Penetanguishene on Lake Huron; and your Memorialists humbly conceive and beg to suggest to your Excellency, that the establishment of the road and the settlement would be more safe and eligible for the transport of goods and provisions to the Upper Country than the route now followed as it will conduct our Memorialists and other His Majesty's subjects by a road which supercede the necessity of their following the Frontier of. the Americans and from passing under their Forts and Guns, and free them also from the very vexatious and arbitrary impositions of the American Government...

Colonel-Brock ordered Samuel S. Wilmot to make a survey of the proposed road from Kempenfeldt Bay to Penetanguishene during the summer of 1811. The land was acquired from the Indians by treaty at the same time (even though the terms of the treaty were not fulfilled until 1815). Samuel S. Wilmot was accompanied by Angus Shaw, a partner in the North West Company during the surveying of the road and William McGillvray travelled with him on his return from the northwest to Montreal. On September 11, 1811, the North West Company presented formal petitions for land at Kempenfeldt Bay, Penetanguishene and Holland Landing, for which fees were paid on February 29, 1812 at York. The grants were made although patents were not actually issued to the Company. Wilmot, accompanied by Shaw, continued the survey of the road in 1812 until the outbreak of war. At that time Wilmot informed Shaw of the existence of the Nottawasaga route to Lake Huron.

By the request of Angus Shaw Esquire Agent of the North West Company I have stated the probability of shorter land carriage than by the street of communication and as water is their element they do not consider the distance but trifling. Mr. Shaw wished me to make a plan of that part of the country.

Together they investigated the route to Penetanguishene via the Nine Mile Portage and the Nottawasaga River rather than via the overland route. Despite this propitious investigation Percy Robinson was of the opinion that the route was not used then or in the years following the war.

So far nothing has come to light to indicate that after the War of 1812 any special steps were taken by the Northwesters to make any use of the Yonge Street communication.

... The Cavalcade of the North West Company's boats mounted on wheels on their way up Yonge Street ... is only another proof of the unreliability of tradition.

This concern of the North West Company with Yonge Street might at first glance seem to be far removed from the subject of the Nottawasaga and the fur trade. However, if Percy Robinson was correct in his conclusion that the North West Company did not use Yonge Street in the transportation of supplies from York to the northwest, then the company could not have employed the Nottawasaga route either. Yonge Street was the only practical connection between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe.

There are some indications however, that fur traders did use Yonge Street to a limited extent prior to the War of 1812, and sufficient documentary evidence to conclude that for a number of years after the War, Yonge Street was a major artery to the northwest both for the North West Company and for other trading companies. Most of this postwar trade was channeled over the Nine Mile Portage and down the Nottawasaga River.

In the Memorial presented to the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, the Directors of the North West Company drew attention to the harassment they had suffered at the hands of the American customs' officials since the Cession of the Posts in 1796". In 1796 the forts and fur posts at Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Grand Portage were handed over to the Americans under the terms of Jay's Treaty. This transaction seriously threatened both the North West Company's trade through the Great Lakes and their communications with the interior. More than ever, the company required a safe route to the continental interior secure from American interference.

The North West Company must have reexamined the possibilities offered by the Yonge Street route after the posts were abandoned. On March 9, 1799 the Upper Canada Gazette reported that the company had contributed 1,200 pounds to the improvement of Yonge Street. On August 12 of the same year the Niagara Constellation understood that the fur company-was about to use this route to the northwest. Smith's Gazetteer drew attention to the advantages of this route:

This communication affords many advantages. Merchandise from Montreal to Michilimackinac may be sent this way at ten or fifteen pounds less expense per ton than the route of the Grand or Ottawa Rivers and the merchandise from New York to be sent up the North and Mohawk rivers for the Northwest trade, finding its way into Lake Ontario at Oswego, the advantage will certainly be felt of transporting goods from Oswego to York and from thence across Yonge Street and down the waters of Lake Simcoe to Lake Erie [Huron]

However settlers on Yonge Street found the road often blocked with trees.

I am sorry to inform you that all the people in my neighbourhood hath been making heavy & grievous complaints to me about shutting up the road so as they cannot go to mill nor town with their teams. I most beg the favour of you to order your people to clear the logs & brush out of the roads that they have cut into it and they should not leave any wood or brush that they cut down in the road in 24 hours as it becomes an impediment to travelers and is contrary to law in this province. In so doing you will very much oblige your most humble servant.

The Gazetteer also described the alternative means of reaching Lake Huron from, Lake Simcoe. Of the Nine Mile Portage and the Nottawasaga the editor wrote "to the

westward is a deep bay (Kempenfeldt Bay) from the head of which is a short carrying place to the Nottawasaga River which empties itself into the Iroquois Bay in Lake Huron." Despite this advertisement, on March 7, 1801 the Upper Canada Gazette found it necessary to reiterate the advantages offered by Yonge Street and to stress that the road had to be improved to attract northwest trade. Clearly there was much work to be done on Yonge Street, for in June 1801 surveyor J. Stegman reported:

That portion of the road from the town of York to the 3 mile post on the Poplar Plains is cut and that as yet the greater part of the said distance is not passable for any carriage whatever, on account of the logs which lie on the street.

The Gazette's message was repeated a year later on March 6, 1802, but on this occasion there appeared to be some prospect that the road would now be repaired. Yet on December 9, 1807, the York Gazette's article on Yonge Street would suggest that little had been accomplished in the preceding years.

To such of our Yonge Street friends as feel themselves interested in its improvement and who can foresee the advantages of turning the northwest communications into this channel, we recommend industry and alacrity. We beg leave to remind them that as the next year will produce a general election the ensuing session will be the proper time to petition for a TurnPike...

The lack of government initiative in improving Yonge Street severely restricted its use as well as the development of York as a commercial centre. Despite government lethargy on August 22, 1809 Joel Beman, son of Elisha Beman of Newmarket and stepbrother of Peter, John and William Robinson, arrived at Newmarket on his way to York "with a load of goods from the northwest - a large canoe and a number of men". Eli Playter's Diary reveals that other traders were traveling along Yonge Street to the northwest. However there is no indication as to their route northward from Lake Simcoe. They might have used the Nottawasaga or either the Coldwater or Severn Rivers.

L. Teefy in "Historical Notes on Yonge Street" has claimed that the North West Company made a number of contributions to the improvement of Yonge Street prior to the War of 1812. She suggested that the company spent as much as 8,000 pounds in this way. Furthermore M. Campbell in McGillvray, Lord of the Northwest stated that the North West Company used Yonge Street and the Nottawasaga route from 1810. However, neither author has substantiated their statements. It is evident however that when Colonel McDouall's expedition was sent by way of the Nottawasaga in 1812, the Nine Mile Portage was only widened enough to permit the transportation of goods in carts. It was not blazed or cleared. Consequently the Nottawasaga River route was undoubtedly in use, but as yet there is no clear indication as to who was using it.

Even with such fragmentary evidence it is unlikely that the North West Company's interest in Yonge Street in 1810 was an entirely new venture. Whatever use they had made of the route in the past, on the eve of war the partners were planning to turn a major portion of their northwest trade through Yonge Street as they had indicated in the Memorial. Such a commitment necessitated the cutting of a road from Kempenfeldt Bay to Penetanguishene. Although General Brock ordered the surveys

of this road to be completed during 1811 and 1812, the road was only partially cut in 1814 and would remain at best a winter route to Penetanguishene until the 1830's.

THE NORTH WEST COMPANY ON THE NOTTAWASAGA DURING THE WAR OF 1812

There can be no doubt that at the outbreak of the war the North West Company through the reports of Samuel Wilmot and Angus Shaw was well aware of the Yonge Street and Nottawasaga River route to the northwest, and with the immediate prospect of a road to Penetanguishene fading, the Nottawasaga must have featured in the Company's plans for wartime communications. Initial British victories at Detroit and Michilimackinac, however, strengthened the North West Company's communications with Upper Lakes so that the Company had no immediate incentive to use the route. This improvement was however, dependent on British naval supremacy on the Great Lakes. With the destruction of the British Squadron on Lake Erie at Put-in-Bay in 1813, this link was severed and the North West Company had only the Ottawa route open to the northwest.

Following this defeat, both the North West Company and the military were compelled to find a route by which they could supply their dependents in the Upper Lakes with provisions and bulky stores. In the winter of 1813-14 the Nine Mile Portage was widened and improved by the army and the North West Company took advantage of the situation by diverting a substantial part of its supplies to this route.

The presence of the North West Company on the Nottawasaga is evident from the lists of cargo that the schooner Nancy transported to Michilimackinac. The Nancy made two round trips from the Nottawasaga to Michilimackinac before she was burned in the river. Following the second delivery of goods on July 7, Lieutenant Colonel McDouall complained to Lieutenant General Drummond that there were "only eleven barrels for Government. I at least expected three hundred". If the Nancy was not carrying Government supplies, North West Company property must have made up her cargo. If the schooner was fully loaded this could have amounted to at least 300 barrels since the Nancy was designed to carry 350 barrels in her hold. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that when the North West Company schooner Mink was captured by American ships on July 29 while sailing from Michilimackinac to St. Mary's, she was carrying a cargo of company flour. This flour must surely have been that which the Nancy had delivered at Michilimackinac on her second voyage.

When cornered on the Nottawasaga River on her third voyage the Nancy was once more carrying North West Company flour. Fifty barrels (5,000 lbs.) of flour were among the items lost when the schooner was set on fire by American guns. Additional Company property may have been destroyed by the explosion of the blockhouse during the same engagement. It is evident that the continued operations of the North West Company were considered equally as important to British interests in the Upper Great Lakes region 'as the maintenance of a strong military presence.

COMPANY VOYAGEURS 1815

At the termination of the conflict, the North West Company continued to use the Nine Mile Portage and the Nottawasaga River as a major artery to the Upper Lakes. When Colonel Head stayed with Peter Robinson he remarked that his host was an agent of the North West Company. Then in February while overseeing the building of military facilities on Kempenfeldt Bay, at Willow Creek and on the Nottawasaga River, he noted the presence of North West Company traders on the Portage. On March 20, 1815, Colonel Head became the owner of a brown water spaniel because his "House was but little removed out of the line of, march of the North West Traders". On June 4, according to his diary, he met "two very pretty Indian Damsels" but to his disappointment he discovered that "they were living under the protection of one of the gentlemen of the North West Company". This incident would suggest that a company agent, quite possibly Peter Robinson who was described as of a roving disposition was well established at Holland Landing. The entry for June 5 to June 15 refers to the increasing activity on the Portage.

Boat loads of government stores were now arriving as well as those of the North West Company on their way to Lake Huron and the margin of the Bay began to be a scene of active bustle. The house of the Canadians ... was crowded with casual lodgers and it was difficult to keep my own house to myself...Long after I had retired to rest at night I heard the bursts of carousel and jollity with a regret to think of the total change of affairs that my days of tranquility had too soon passed away.

There are also a number of references to the activities of the North West Company in military correspondence. Captain William Owen, who had been instructed to survey Penetanguishene and Nottawasaga Bay during the fall of 1815 noted that the Company was using the portage as a route to the northwest:

The latter channel of communication was that and by the Company leading to the N.W. and none could be more convenient, did not the shallowness and intricacies of the Bar make it dangerous for small vessels even, impracticable quite for large.

He also complained of North West Company use of the Nine Mile Portage, because the Company pressed for improvement but contributed nothing to its upkeep:

I have understood that the N.W. Co. press with all their influence the making of roads between Simcoe and Huron because to them the roads are of as much importance as to the Government but they are at no expense on the subject yet use the road constantly to its detriment.

In the same letter to his commanding officer, Owen mentioned "some persons employed by the North West Company to build a schooner on this river cut the necessary timber". This ship was probably constructed in the vicinity of Schoonertown. No other reference is made to a new schooner but it is possible that it was the Vermillion which was hired by the government to transport supplies to Drummond Island during 1815.

On the map which Owen had drawn of the area in 1815 he indicates that a North West Company post was standing at Willow Creek. It would seem probable that this post was erected during the spring of 1815. Furthermore, Owen noted that H.M.S.

Surprise, commanded by Lieutenant Wingfield was transporting North West Company goods to Drummond Island when he made a survey of that ship on September 30, 1815. Lieutenant Wingfield mentioned a North West Company post on the Nottawasaga River in his account of his posting to Lake Huron. On a return voyage from Drummond Island to the Nottawasaga his ship was becalmed and the crew ran short of provisions:

On the eleventh day a breeze sprang up and the same evening we anchored in a destined port where I immediately went on shore to send off provisions for the crew and found the clerk in charge of the North West Company's store busily employed stewing ducks which happened very opportune.

From this statement it would appear that this store was at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River since this was where Lieutenant Wingfield's ship was loaded with the supplies, which had been sent down river from the commissary stores at Willow Creek. The next reference to a fur post near the mouth of the Nottawasaga was in 1821. This store was located on the west side of lot 26, concession 9 in Flos. and was adjacent to the commissary store on lot 27, concession 9. It would appear that the fur posts referred to in 1815 and 1821 are one and the same, particularly when Peter Robinson the subsequent owner had also been an agent of the North West Company.

The amount of North West Company traffic shipped over the Portage immediately after the war was sufficient to require that a number of Company employees be posted on the route to repair boats and buildings. A smith was employed in this way on the Nottawasaga until May 25, 1816.¹³ It is probable that the North West Company agents may have had other buildings on the Nottawasaga route to house their artificers. However at present there is no archaeological evidence to support this supposition.

The presence of traders was noted on the Portage in 1819 by George Chiles, commissary storekeeper at Holland Landing. On March 15, 1819, he wrote to Edward Laws, storekeeper at Kingston, informing him that "a party of men in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company who went through this place (Kempenfeldt Bay) in the month of November last ... had severely damaged storehouses there by removing the floorboards for fire wood". This incident was not the first of its kind as these storehouses, George Chiles reported, were constantly out of repair. It is probable however that these men were actually in the pay of the North West Company particularly as the voyageur in charge was a resident of Drummond Island which was then their headquarters on Lake Huron. M. McGillvary, a partner in the Company came over the Portage in the summer of 1819 on his way to the northwest.

In the seven years following the war the North West Company had experienced growing transportation costs and dwindling profits as the fur bearing animals became more scarce. Their transportation problems were exasperated by the settlement of the Red River Valley which threatened to sever the Company from the western fur bearing regions. This colony had been established by Lord Selkirk in 1812. In 1816 there was a violent and fatal confrontation between the settlers and the fur traders. Lord Selkirk retaliated by imprisoning the partners of the North West Company and seizing their headquarters at Fort William. The cost and inconvenience of the ensuing legal actions held in York in 1818, as well as the disruption of trade, weakened the Company's economic position. In 1821 the Hudson Bay Company and the North West

Company amalgamated and the joint Company operated from Hudson Bay. Subsequently the North West Company ceased to use the Nine Mile Portage and the Nottawasaga River as their route to the northwest.

INDEPENDENT TRADING COMPANIES ON THE NOTTAWASAGA

With the departure of the North West Company to Hudson Bay, the way was open to small companies on the fur trade routes to expand and for ex-employees to go into business for themselves.

When Michilimackinac was returned to the Americans in July 1815 Drummond Island became the principle military and commercial centre on Lake Huron. More than 100 voyageurs and their families were living there until 1828 when it was also handed over to the United States, and most of the military personnel and the voyageurs were moved to Penetanguishene.

From among the many fur companies and traders operating in the Lake Huron-region, two companies, P. and W. Robinson, and Borland and Roe became prominent. Both used the Nottawasaga route.

P. and W. Robinson

The Robinson family (besides wielding great political influence on the affairs of the Province of Upper Canada) had a substantial stake in the fur trade and in the transportation of military supplies in the Lake Huron - Lake Simcoe region. Peter (1785-1838) and William (1797-1873) were the brothers of John Beverly Robinson (1791-1863) who was Attorney General of Upper Canada from 1818 to 1830 and then Chief Justice for the province from 1830.

John Beverly represented the City of York from 1821 - 1830, Both Peter and William, in addition to their commercial interests, were influential politicians. Peter was the member for Simcoe, Durham and the East Riding of York in 1816 and represented the county of York from 1820 to 1823. In 1823 and 1824 he was involved in the settlement of poor Irish peasants at Peterborough and from 1827 to 1836 was Commissioner of Crown Lands and Surveyor General. He was also a member of the Legislative Council.

William represented the riding of Simcoe from 1830 to 1857 with the exception of the years 1841 to 1844. The Robinson brothers were prominent members of the Family Compact, and as such exerted a considerable influence in the Province of Upper Canada. The fact that the development of the Nottawasaga is connected to this family can only underline the significance of the route in the history of the province.

Peter and William Robinson were the only two members of the family involved in the fur trade and the transportation of military supplies, but in this they were assisted by their stepfather Elisha Beman. As a widower, Elisha Beman had moved in 1801 from New York State to York where he ran a store and tavern. In 1805 he married the widow of Christopher Robinson and moved with her to Newmarket in 1806. There he built a mill and store and became a well-to-do land owner. His two sons by his first marriage, Joel and Elisha, were also-involved in the transportation business.

Little is known about Peter Robinson's commercial enterprises before the war besides his partnership with D'Arcy Boulton in the running of a store in York in 1810 where Andrew Borland was employed as the clerk. During the war he served with the militia at Detroit in 1812 and at York in 1813. By the spring of 1815 Peter Robinson was an influential citizen at Newmarket whose home was open to all gentlemen. Colonel George Head on his way to Penetanguishene in February 1815 stayed with him and described his host's activities.

We were hospitably entertained by Mr. Peter Robinson who provided us with a good supper and comfortable beds. Our host as well as being a contractor with the government was an agent of the North West Company and held sundry provincial appointments. Added to this he kept a shop in the house where we now were which was plentifully stocked with all manner of commodities.

Peter Robinson's store was used by military personnel stationed on the Nine Mile Portage and at Schoonertown. Schoonertown was now the naval establishment. On March 22, 1815, Colonel Head dispatched his servant from Kempenfeldt Bay to Newmarket, 47 miles, to buy files so that the Canadians who were building huts could reset their cross-saw blades. During September Lieutenant Wingfield sent two men across Lake Simcoe to purchase livestock and other provisions for his crew who were to winter on the Nottawasaga River. In December Lieutenant Wingfield with a party of sailors once more set out from Schoonertown to Newmarket to buy luxuries for the officers and livestock for Christmas dinner but this expedition ended in tragedy. On the return trip there was a sudden change in the weather after the party had set out on the 22 mile journey between Kempenfeldt Bay and Schoonertown. Driving snow and a sudden freezing of the river prevented them from reaching Schoonertown. Instead of taking one day to make the trip, they struggled through the storm for five days. One man died of exposure. Captain Hambly, commander of the naval establishment, then ordered 182 gallons of port wine from the Robinson store to be used as medicine for the other members of the expedition who became sick. Hambly, when writing to Sir Edward Owen in 1816, said that the store at Newmarket was the closest to Schoonertown although it was 70 miles away.

Peter Robinson also had a contract for the transportation of commissary supplies from York to Willow Creek. Contracts of this kind seem to have been granted on an annual basis commencing in April and from Head's description of his host at Newmarket it would seem that Robinson held the contract for 1814 - 1815. In March 1817 Peter Robinson was referred to as "the contractor for transport". and so must have held the contract for 1816-1817. Then in September 1818 he was responsible for transporting "10,080 lbs. of biscuits and 45 bushels of peas" and again in 1820 he was shipping commissary stores. Consequently he held the contract for most if not all the years between 1814 and 1820.

However in 1821 Mr. Joseph Johnson, who lived at Kempenfeldt Bay, won the contract for 1821-1822 and the terms are contained in the. Various other contracts were granted for, the transportation of particular military items. Peter Robinson's stepbrother Elisha Beman had a contract for shipping some cannonballs from York to Holland Landing during the winter of 1814 - 1815. But due to a change in orders which required Beman to return the cannonballs to York, he dumped them in a farmer's yard saying that he would return for them later.

His father finally delivered these stores to Holland Landing in June 1816. Elisha Beman also was transporting a variety of goods between Holland Landing and 14 Kempenfeldt Bay in a schooner during the summer of 1824. Thus it is clear that the Robinsons and the Bemans had a very substantial stake in the transportation system of the region.

No doubt Peter Robinson made a considerable amount of money out of his association with the commissary stores for he started to acquire extensive land holdings during the early 1820's. Much of this land was situated in choice commercial areas. He bought lots on the north side of Penetanguishene harbour, at the mouth of the Nottawasaga, on the higher reaches of the river at Glengarry Landing, and considerable acreage on Yonge Street at Holland Landing. These land holdings served as the backbone for his other commercial operations especially milling.

Colonel George Head also mentioned that Peter Robinson was an agent of the North West Company in 1815. There is a possibility that his association with the North West Company, began in 1811 for in that year an agent was appointed in Newmarket to handle the anticipated trade on Yonge Street. As the agent in the area Peter Robinson may have been responsible for the North West Company posts on Willow Creek and on the Nottawasaga River.

With the amalgamation of the North West Company with the Hudson Bay Company in 1821, Peter and William went into business for themselves. During that year there were references to stores owned by Peter Robinson at Willow Creek and at the mouth of the Nottawasaga. As these were on the same locations as the North West Company stores, it would seem probable that he took them over on the departure of the North West Company. John Goessman, who was surveying the Township of Flos during 1821 claimed that he was set upon by men of the 68th regiment from Penetanguishene at the store at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River. The soldiers returning from the "head of the Nottawasaga seized upon me when I was in consequence of executing the survey of Flos, lodged in Robinson's store at the mouth of the Nottawasaga abused me to the utmost brutality of drunken soldiers". These charges were denied by Ensign W. Bennet who commanded the detachment. Peter Robinson owned the west side of broken lot 26 in the 9th concession in Flos, an area of 69 acres and his store was situated on the north bank of the river. He sold the land to J. Goessman in 1836. This post was mentioned by J.J. Bigsby in 1823 when he crossed the Portage with boundary commissioners, and by John Franklin on April 13, 1825, while on route to the Arctic on his second polar expedition.

We embarked after breakfast (at Willow Creek) and encamped near two of the fur traders houses not far from the mouth of the Nottawasaga River.

John Franklin's aide, Lieutenant George Bach who came down the river a few days later sketched a picture of the fur post while waiting for the wind to abate before attempting to cross the bar at the mouth of the river. Peter Robinson also provided Franklin's expedition with provisions and arranged their transportation across the Nine Mile Portage.

As Peter Robinson became increasingly embroiled in politics, it is probable that his younger brother William took over the running of the Company. William Robinson was referred to as "one of the chief Indian traders throughout Northern Ontario, a

most intelligent and well informed gentleman and famous for his influence over the Indian population".

The Reverend Thomas Williams who was working on the Portage as a small boy in 1824 remembered that the Company of P. and W. Robinson was one of the two principle firms to use the Portage. The company also had fur posts at Penetanguishene, on Yohocucuba Island and at the mouth of the Muskoka River. Furs from these latter posts would have been taken to Penetanguishene and then transported up the Nottawasaga River and over the Nine Mile Portage on their way to Newmarket and York.
Borland and Roe

In 1824 the Reverend Thomas Williams referred to Borland and Roe as the other principal company to use the Nine Mile Portage and Nottawasaga River route between Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron. The Company was centered at Newmarket. Yet the longevity and scope of this company remains uncertain. The original partners were Andrew Borland and William Roe. At different times William Laughton, John Borland (Andrew Borland's son) and his son John were also partners. Like P. and W. Robinson, Borland and Roe were involved in a variety of activities which included the fur trade, transportation and retailing.

In 1810 Andrew Borland was working in the store owned by Peter Robinson and D'Arcy Boulton at York. During the War of 1812 he served in the regiment raised by Peter Robinson with the rank of sergeant. He was wounded in the defence of York in 1813 and was rewarded for his service with a land grant of 2 200 acres in the Township of Vespra in 1827. William Roe (b. 1795) was also serving in the militia at the fall of York. Soon after the war both Andrew Borland and William Roe moved to Newmarket. Both may have been associated with Peter Robinson and the North West Company. By November 1815 they were in partnership. They were referred to as merchants on the bond of 450 pounds payable to Elisha Beman, stepfather of Peter and William Robinson. From transactions in 1816, it is evident that they were running a general store at Newmarket selling such commodities as cloth, sugar, flour and candles.

At the same time Borland and Roe were involved in the fur trade. Jean Baptiste Sylvestre, the son of a voyageur from Drummond Island recalled that his father had brought him over the Nottawasaga route in 1816. He was left with Mr. Roe while his father with a party of Indians and a shipment of furs went on to Montreal. As Jean was to be educated by Roe and then work for him it would appear that there was some business connection between the two men.

In 1818 William Roe had a contract to furnish the newly established naval base at Penetanguishene with fresh beef. It is possible that the livestock which was acquired at Newmarket for the naval establishment at Schoonertown by Lieutenant Wingfield during the winter of 1815 was also bought from William Roe.

In 1822 the John Borlands, father and son, in partnership with Joseph Johnson of Holland Landing tendered a contract for the transportation of supplies between York and Penetanguishene, but their tender was rejected. Joseph Johnson had obtained this contract during the previous year, and the terms were based on the use of the Penetanguishene Road and the Nottawasaga River. The Penetanguishene Road was

only passable during the winter so the Nottawasaga route must have been used during the remainder of the year.

John Borland and William Roe won the contract for the transportation of government supplies in 1823 over a rival offer from Joseph Johnson. The estimates were again based on the use of the Penetanguishene road and the Nottawasaga River route.

The Company was to continue to operate in Simcoe County during the 1820's and 1830's in a variety of activities but gradually they became less involved with the Nottawasaga River.

CONCLUSIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NOTTAWASAGA ROUTE

The Nottawasaga route from Lake Simcoe to Lake Huron played an essential role in the defence of Upper Canada during the closing year of the War of 1812. Without the forwarding of men and supplies to Michilimackinac by means of this route it was improbable that the garrison could have held out against American forces or that the North West Company could have continued its operations.

It has been established that much more than just the safety of the men in the fort rested on the retention of Michilimackinac in British hands. The fort exerted considerable influence over the Upper Great Lakes Basin. Sir-George Prevost was not overstating its significance when he wrote that:

...the island and fort of Michilimackinac is of the first importance as tending to promote the Indian connection and serves them in our interest. Its geographical position is admirable, its influence extends and is felt among Indian tribes to New Orleans and the Pacific Ocean, vast tracts of Country look to it, for protection and supplies.

The Indians continued confidence in the British cause was essential for the successful defence and commercial development of the Canadian northwest. Moreover the Indians were an effective buffer restricting American expansionist plans into the northwest and a buffer which could not be dislodged without a major American military commitment.

The active cooperation of the Indian people was also necessary for the continued operation of both the North West Company and the Hudson Bay Company. Both Companies relied heavily on the Indians for trapping the fur bearing animals and company employees could not extract the fur without their goodwill. In the face of Indian hostility the fur companies would have been helpless.

With so much dependent on the retention of Michilimackinac in British hands, its only supply route must assume added significance. The Nancy was on the Nottawasaga because the river was the supply route to Michilimackinac. Unfortunately this simple and straightforward reason for the, Nancy's presence on the Nottawasaga River has been overlooked because historians and custodians of the Nancy's hull have chosen to exaggerate the heroic defence of the ship. Consequently interest in the Nottawasaga River has often begun and ended with the story of the Nancy.

Therefore the history of the supply route has not been studied with the care that it warrants.

In postwar years the Nottawasaga River route continued to play an important role because the animosities between Britain and the United States of America had not been resolved by the War of 1812, and so the strategic necessity for the transportation route remained. Even though the island of Michilimackinac was returned to the Americans, its place in the British defensive system was assumed by the fort on Drummond Island and the Nottawasaga now provided the supply route.

As long as American military and expansionist endeavors threatened British interests in this region an internal route such as the Nottawasaga invulnerable to American forces was essential to British strategic planning. Captain William Owen stressed this point of view in 1816 when he stated that the choice of routes to the northwest should not be made on economic grounds. In both his view and that of military planners the Great Lakes route to the northwest was too vulnerable to American interference. Only when the political and military situation had been stabilized could the abandonment of the Nottawasaga route be contemplated. The Rush-Bagot Treaty in 1817 was the first step on the road to resolving Canadian American differences in the region. This process, however, was hastened more by British desires to reduce military expenditure in North America than by a deliberate plan to protect Canadian interests an inherent danger of colonial rule.

Military and civilian activities on the Nottawasaga River during these years revealed that the Indian people were using the Nottawasaga route between Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron in the same way as their ancestors had more than 200 years before. Their presence on the river would probable have never been adequately recorded except for the fact that the British soldiers and Canadian voyageurs found it necessary to use their waterway for these years.

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