

## Promoting a “Unity of Feeling” The Rebellions of 1837/1838 and the Peterborough Region

Dennis Carter-Edwards

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Consequences of Rebellious Acts: The 1837 & 1838 Rebellions

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### Résumé de l'article

Les rébellions de 1837, et les raids menés par la suite par des partisans américains, poussèrent les autorités coloniales à rappeler au service actif les unités de milices locales. Ce danger d'un conflit armé, l'incertitude politique, ravivèrent alors les tensions sociales et culturelles qui existaient déjà dans la société du Haut-Canada, tensions dues aux différences de classe ou d'origine d'ethnique. Dans cet article nous étudions l'impact des rébellions dans la région de Peterborough, particulièrement parmi les habitants d'origine irlandaise, et comment ces tensions se sont reflétées dans les actions menées par le 7th Provisional Bataillon pendant la période où il était stationné à Peterborough.

# PROMOTING A "UNITY OF FEELING"

## The Rebellions of 1837/1838 and the Peterborough Region

By Dennis Carter-Edwards

In May 1840 Captain P. Maguire of Port Hope wrote to his friend and fellow officer of the Durham County Militia, John Houston,

Whatever arrangements have been made at the meeting of officers from the 2nd [Regiment] Durham respecting the distribution and formation of companies, I suppose is in accordance with the narrow mindedness and long cherished bigotry which has existed in the Regiment since its first organization. However, this is not the time to indulge in any unfriendly feelings—rather let each do what he can to promote unity of feeling for the benefit of all and for the ultimate advantage of our Sovereign whom we are bound to serve and obey.<sup>1</sup>

With the continued threat of filibustering raids by American sympathizers, loosely organized under the banner of the Hunters' Lodge, and the danger of Canadian

reprisals sparking an all out war with the United States, Maguire's pleas for unity among the loyal forces would appear unwarranted. Yet, as recent scholarship has shown, the Rebellions and subsequent border attacks by American sympathizers, did more than threaten the political stability of the colony. Under the threat of an attempted *coup d'état* by William Lyon Mackenzie and subsequent murderous raids by American sympathizers, existing tensions within colonial society were brought into sharp focus, often with unexpected results.

Previous studies of the Rebellion era focused on the principal leaders in the conflict, the political discourse that both sides engaged in and military actions. New research by contrast has examined the social dynamics at work within a local

<sup>1</sup> Trent University Archives, John Houston papers, Box #3, 71-006, P. Maguire to J. Houston, 27 May 1840.

## *Abstract*

*The Rebellions of 1837 and subsequent border raids by American sympathizers prompted colonial officials to call out local militia units for extended duty. The threat of armed conflict and political uncertainty heightened the underlying social, class and ethno-cultural tensions that existed in Upper Canadian society. This article examines the impact of the Rebellions in the Peterborough area, particularly among the Irish settlers, and how these tensions were manifested in the actions of the 7th Provisional Battalion during the period they were stationed in Peterborough.*

*Résumé: Les rébellions de 1837, et les raids menés par la suite par des partisans américains, poussèrent les autorités coloniales à rappeler au service actif les unités de milices locales. Ce danger d'un conflit armé, l'incertitude politique, ravivèrent alors les tensions sociales et culturelles qui existaient déjà dans la société du Haut-Canada, tensions dues aux différences de classe ou d'origine ethnique. Dans cet article nous étudions l'impact des rébellions dans la région de Peterborough, particulièrement parmi les habitants d'origine irlandaise, et comment ces tensions se sont reflétées dans les actions menées par le 7th Provisional Bataillon pendant la période où il était stationné à Peterborough.*

or regional context under the crucible of the Rebellion crisis.<sup>2</sup> Katharine McKenna's study of the Western District during the Rebellions, especially the fallout from the Battle of Windsor in December 1838 during which Lt. Colonel John Prince ordered the summary execution of five captured rebel prisoners, best represents this new focus. The incident involving Prince and his accusers highlighted the underlying tensions between the older settled residents of the District and the new British immigrants who were aspir-

ing to positions of influence and authority over them. The debate that raged over Prince's actions had as much to do with resentment by long time leading citizens over the loss of position and authority to the new upstart arrivals (as represented by John Prince) as it did with the rebel threat.<sup>3</sup> Doris Gaspar's study of the Black population in Essex County and efforts to improve their status through service in the militia, illuminates another aspect of the social dynamics at play during this period of crisis.<sup>4</sup> Stuart Manson's study of the mi-

<sup>2</sup> Colin Read and Ronald J. Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada. A Collection of Documents* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1985). This extensive compilation of documents with an extended introduction reflects this approach. Colin Duquemin's study of the Niagara raids and D. Graves engaging study of the Battle of the Windmill at Prescott in November 1838 present the military perspective in a very readable manner. The Law Society of Upper Canada has embarked on an ambitious publication of legal documents together with extensive commentary relating to the capture, trial and punishment of the rebel prisoners, both domestic and foreign. The Ontario Historical Society published an eclectic collection of essays presented at a symposium to mark the 150th anniversary of the Rebellion that dealt with topics such as food, the Orange Order and the role of First Nations and Black militia units.

<sup>3</sup> Katharine McKenna, "The Rebellions of 1837-1838 in the Western District," Manuscript on File, Parks Canada. Ontario Service Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Doris Gaspar, "The Black Militia in Essex County during the Rebellions of 1837," Manuscript on

litia in Glengarry County demonstrates how local and personal issues were played out against the backdrop of the broader military response to the threat of border raids.<sup>5</sup> In one incident a disgruntled militia officer, Colonel Alexander McDonell (Inch) struck Colonel Charles Turner, a regular British officer assigned to Particular Service in the Eastern District, a vicious blow to the head over an alleged slur on his wife's character. The image of two senior military figures brawling on the streets of Cornwall illustrates how norms of behaviour could be sacrificed under the tensions that existed at that time.

Questions were raised about particular segments of Upper Canadian society and how they might react under the threats to established order. Sheriff McLachlan, a senior official in the Western District, was uncertain of the loyalty of the local French population, fearing they might side with the rebel cause promoted by Mackenzie and Papineau.<sup>6</sup> There were similar fears about the First Nations siding with the rebels. Charles Anderson, writing from Rice Lake, informed the Honourable John Macaulay of the "wicked intentions of some persons to seduce the Indians from their allegiance."<sup>7</sup> The Irish population also came under scrutiny. The Rebel leaders in both Upper and Lower Canada drew inspira-

tion as well as constitutional arguments from the Irish Nationalists who were fighting for Home Rule in Ireland. Uncertainty as to where their loyalties might lie perplexed military officials. Nor could colonial officials assume that the Orange Lodge, an ostensibly Loyalist organization of Irish Protestants under the leadership of Ogle Gowan, would eagerly rally to defend the established order.

The Peterborough region, with its extensive settlement of Irish Catholics and Protestants, intermixed with a scattering of the British gentry class and Scots tradesmen, offers a useful window into the social dynamics of this diverse pioneer community during a period of crisis. The interplay of conflicting personalities, class and ethnic tensions combined with the practical difficulties of mobilizing a diverse population for military duty provides a useful environment for assessing the impact of the Rebellion on society.

The District of Newcastle, established by Act of Parliament in 1800 for judicial and administrative purposes, encompassed the territory along the Lake Ontario shore from near Brighton in the East to past Darlington in the West and beyond the Kawartha Lakes to the north. For purposes of parliamentary representation and militia organization, the province

file, Parks Canada. Ontario Service Centre.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Manson, *To Repel the Wicked* (Cornwall: The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Historical Society, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Carter-Edwards, "Defending the Straits' Fort Malden, 1796-1976," Manuscript Report Series #401, Parks Canada 1980, 146-48 discusses the defence of the Detroit River frontier during the Rebellion including attitudes towards the French population.

<sup>7</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG5A1, Upper Canada Sundries, vol. 210, pp. 115, 613, Anderson to Macaulay, 20 Nov 1838.



Figure 1: "Map of the Newcastle District." Taken from Watson Kirkconnell *County of Victoria County Centennial History* (Lindsay: Watchman-Warder Press, 1921).

ships were surveyed in the northern part of the District, those in Durham County generally by government surveyors, while in Northumberland County private citizens bid on the contract keeping nearly five percent of the land as payment.<sup>9</sup>

The Crown obtained legal possession of the territory

was divided into nineteen counties. The counties of Durham and Northumberland were situated within the Newcastle District. Settlement along the "Front" of these two counties proceeded rapidly after the War of 1812. According to J.G. Bethune by 1818 "respectable English, Irish and Scottish families soon made the society of Cobourg equal to any in the province."<sup>8</sup> As settlement increased, new town-

ships were surveyed in the northern section of the District in November 1818 when Chiefs of the six Kawartha Mississauga tribes signed a formal treaty at Port Hope surrendering some two million acres. But even before the surrender, government surveyors had already commenced laying out the lot and concession lines in the new townships.<sup>10</sup> In 1816 Samuel Wilmot commenced surveying the townships of

<sup>8</sup> Edwin. Guillet, *Cobourg 1798—1848* (Cobourg: Historical Committee, 1948), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Carter-Edwards, "Zacheus Burnham: Promoter of the Kawarthas," in A.O.C. & Jean Cole, editors, *Kawartha Heritage* (Gould Graphics: Peterborough, 1981). Burnham got the contract to survey Otonabee, Asphodel, Douro, Dummer and Alnwick townships, although the actual survey work was undertaken by his son-in-law, Richard Bidsall.; Howard Pammatt, *A History of the Township of Emily in the County of Victoria* (Lindsay: J. Deyell Publishing Co., 1974), 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Pammatt *Township of Emily*, 8

Manvers, Cavan and Emily west of Rice Lake, while Richard Birdsall was surveying Smith, Otonabee and Douro to the north.<sup>11</sup> Soon new settlers were moving in, clearing their plots, erecting homes and beginning the arduous task of farming the virgin soil.

The majority of the new arrivals who moved into the townships west of Rice Lake were Protestant Irish from the counties of Armagh, Fermanagh and Cavan.<sup>12</sup> Push and pull factors contributed to the Irish location in these newly opened settlement areas. The “push” came in the form of pressures on land use in Ireland. The rebound of agricultural production after the Napoleonic War in certain counties of Ireland, such as Cavan, Armagh and Fermanagh encouraged more intense cultivation and limited opportunities for new farming families to get established.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Protestant minority in these counties were leaving because the favourable leases they previously enjoyed were being renewed at the same rates as those for Catholics. This had the effect of increasing their isolation amongst a Catholic majority.<sup>14</sup> The “pull” of these Irish immigrants to the Newcastle District was due to the active encouragement given by the British agent

in New York and government officials in Upper Canada.<sup>15</sup>

Initial settlement in the area north of Rice Lake followed a different pattern. Smith Township, surveyed in 1818, received some two-dozen families who formed part of the Cumberland Settlement. This group of farmers and unemployed miners from the depressed area around Alston in northern England were given free passage and free land, subject to a £10 deposit, refundable upon completion of settlement duties. They took up their land grants along the portage route linking Chemong Lake to the Otonabee River.<sup>16</sup> The following year, Otonabee Township was surveyed and opened for settlement. Half pay officers who converted their pensions to large land grants, took up settlement. Men such as Captain Charles Rubidge, Captain Spilsbury and Lieutenant Philip Elmhirst, brought their own resources, organizational skills and social standing to the task of opening up the region. Private emigration societies in England and Scotland sent additional families to these townships, adding to the ethnic and demographic mix of the county.<sup>17</sup> Individual families from Britain, looking to improve their economic and social standing, also took

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8; A.O.C. Cole ed. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Peterborough County 1825-1875*, (Peterborough: Peterborough Historical Atlas Foundation, 1975), passim.

<sup>12</sup> Pammatt, *Township of Emily*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> S. H. Cousens, “The Regional variation in emigration from Ireland between 1821 and 1841,” in *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, No. 37 (December, 1965), 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Pammatt, *Township of Emily*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> A.O.C. Cole, *op.cit.*, 54; J. Graham, “Peterborough County Settlement to 1825,” *Kawartha Heritage*, 139; E. Guillet, *Pioneer Settlements* (The Ontario Publishing Company: Toronto, 1938), 47.

<sup>17</sup> A.O.C. Cole, *op.cit.*, 62.

advantage of the lands opening up for settlement in the Newcastle District. Thomas Stewart and Robert Reid, genteel Irish families, traded their precarious situation in Ireland for the prospects of large land holdings and material comfort in British North America. Using political and familial connections with Lt. Governor P. Maitland, they each obtained 1,200 acre grants provided it was located in hitherto unsurveyed lands. In the fall of 1822, with the help of Richard Birdsall, they selected their grants on the east side of the Otonabee River in what became Douro Township.<sup>18</sup> As settlement spread, families from the “Front” sold their lands and used the profits from the escalation of land values to buy larger lots in the interior. Charles Fathergill, a prominent merchant and mill owner at Port Hope, sold his substantial holdings and moved to the north shore of Rice Lake.<sup>19</sup> These small scale infusions of settlers into the county were dwarfed by the massive Irish emigration scheme led by Peter Robinson in 1825.

The Under Secretary of Colonial Affairs, Wilmot Horton, approached Peter Robinson, son of prominent United Empire Loyalists and brother to John Beverly, Attorney General of Upper Canada, to head up a government-funded emigration scheme. In 1825 the British Parliament approved a grant of £30,000

to assist some 1,500 Irish paupers from southern Ireland to emigrate to Canada. According to notices posted throughout southern Ireland,

To all who may be disposed to emigrate, ...the Government will afford a passage to Canada and will convey them to their lands free of expence—Provisions will be found them, and they will be furnished with medical assistance ...every male emigrant above the age of 18 years and under 45 will receive a location ticket for 70 acres of land; the utensils necessary for a new settler will be furnished them at the public expence and they will receive provisions for one year after they shall have taken possession of their lands.<sup>20</sup>

Robinson was provided with strict criteria to insure only suitable candidates were selected. Prospective emigrants were generally to be under 45, with an agrarian background and of good character. As H. Pammett has demonstrated from his detailed analysis of the ships’ rosters and surviving location tickets, Robinson did not adhere to these criteria. He exceeded the number of emigrants who were to come out, accepted candidates with no agricultural background and allowed some Irish landlords to rid their estates of “troublesome” characters.<sup>21</sup> In all, some 307 families constituting 2,024 individuals were chosen. Nearly half of these came from a small district about 20 miles by 40 miles in part of County Cork north of the Blackwater River,

<sup>18</sup> S. Crosson, “Pilgrim Sisters: Exploring Female Friendship in Upper Canada in the Life of Frances Stewart (1794-1872),” unpublished M.A. Thesis, Trent University (2004), 101.

<sup>19</sup> K.en Dewar, “Charles Fathergill,” in *Kawartha Heritage*, 73-80.

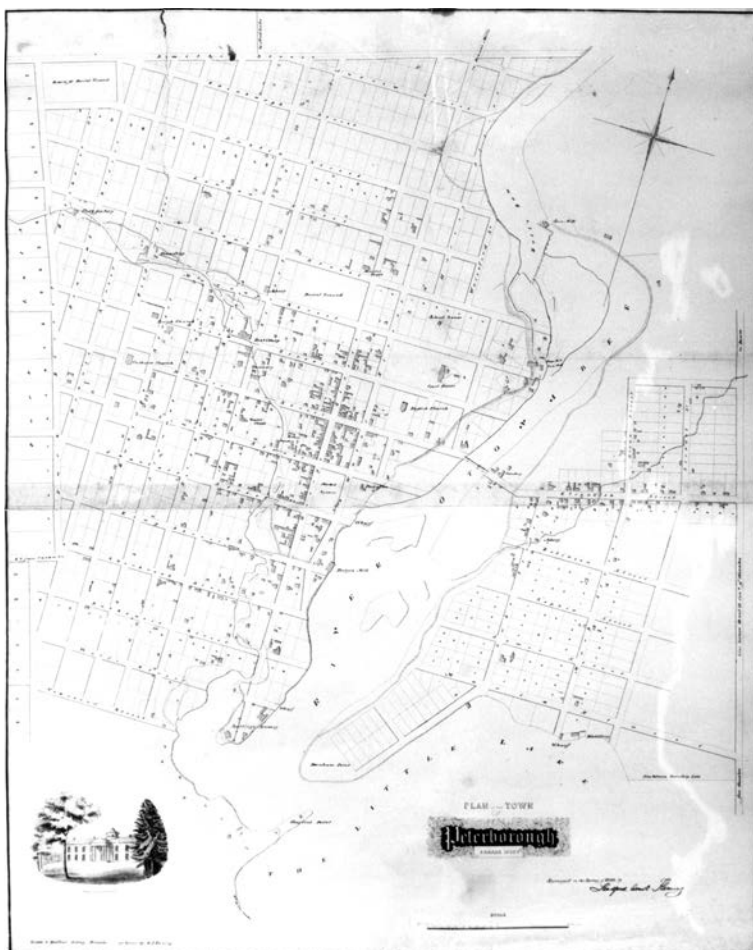
<sup>20</sup> H. Pammett, “Assisted Emigration from Ireland to Upper Canada under Peter Robinson in 1825,” *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records*, Vol. XXXI, 181.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Figure 2: "Plan of the Town of Peterborough, 1846" as sketched by Sandford Fleming, showing the location of the courthouse and reserve, likely the location for the headquarters of the 7th Provisional Battalion. Courtesy of the Trent Valley Archives, image F50 1.067a

while the other half were widely dispersed through Kerry, Clare, Tipperary, Wicklow and Wexford. Pammett concluded the selection was both partial and unjust.<sup>22</sup>

The prospective emigrants set sail on board nine transport ships chartered from the Navy Board and arrived at Quebec in the summer of 1825. From here they were conveyed to Kingston and Prescott while Robinson finalized arrangements for their location on the 100-acre plots laid out in the northern section of the Newcastle District.<sup>23</sup> The settlers chose their lots by random draw and quickly moved with their few possessions to their new homes. The government provided each family with a 20 by 12 foot shanty, tools, seed and rations until November the following year, by which point the settlers were expected to be self sufficient. In February 1826 Lt. Governor P. Maitland, ac-



companied by Robinson, Rubidge and other local dignitaries, visited the settlements. At a formal dinner held in the newly named town of Peterborough, he received a formal written address from these Irish settlers, expressing their gratitude to the Crown and requesting the establishment of a school for their children and the services of a Catholic priest.<sup>24</sup>

The success of the "experiment" drew mixed opinion. Critics of the govern-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 195. The settlers were originally to receive only 70 acres with 30 held in reserve once their settlement duties were completed. Instead, they received the full 100 acres.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.



ment's scheme accused Horton of helping a few Irish landlords with public funds. From a local perspective, Robert Reid argued rather than the "indolent Irish," it would have been preferable to bring out English and Scots settlers, particularly the latter "as they are so steady, industrious and moral ...the Irish, though doing very well, yet from their former indolent habits they have not exerted themselves as much as they might."<sup>25</sup> Horton sent out his own Commissioner to examine the settlement and report on its success. John Richards toured the Irish settlements and reported that they were satisfied with their circumstances and had achieved an independence from the proceeds of their farms. One true test of the experiment would come during the Rebellion crisis when the loyalty of the Irish was tested by their response to the government's call for military service. As Horton later explained, many believed "if a day arrived when either from a rupture with America or a conflict with the French Canadians their loyalty and gratitude would be put to the test, they would be found miserably wanting."<sup>26</sup> The events of 1838 would answer these assumptions.

While the Irish immigration scheme under Robinson was the last government-assisted program before the outbreak of rebellion, it was not the end of a large-scale influx of immigrants to the Peterborough area. In an effort to relieve the swelling parish relief rolls, a group

of fifteen families from Wiltshire were sponsored and emigrated to Dummer Township in 1831. They were soon joined by some one hundred Chelsea pensioners who converted their small pensions for military service to land grants in Dummer. The ethnic mix was broadened with the arrival of Scots settlers sponsored by the Glasgow Emigration Society.<sup>27</sup> During the early 1830s individual families also continued to take the difficult decision to leave their homeland and familiar surroundings for an opportunity to start a new life in the colony. One family of note, the Stricklands of Reydon Hall in Suffolk, brought their considerable literary talents along with hopes of improving the family fortunes to the new land. Samuel together with his sisters Susanna and her husband Dunbar Moodie and Catharine with her husband Thomas Traill, settled in Douro Township bringing a cultured tone to local society, though little practical skill at pioneering.

It was from this diverse population of Irish farmers both Protestant and Catholic, English gentry and Scots emigrants with their varying cultural backgrounds, economic prospects and political outlooks, that the region fashioned a response to the pressing economic and constitutional challenges of Upper Canada in the 1830s. Local officials were all too sanguine of the challenge of welding this polyglot assemblage of residents into a force to oppose the Rebel appeal. To

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 211 quoting from the G.B. Hall's *Travels*, 321.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 213

<sup>27</sup> Jean Murray Cole, *Origins The History of Dummer Township*, (Canada: J.B. McGrath, 1993), 19-31.

provide some guidance and leadership to the task, thirty eight of the leading citizens of the Newcastle District, after a sumptuous meal and numerous loyal toasts, formed the Peterborough General Society, to “promote improvement and welfare of the neighbouring townships, by improving roads, encouraging agriculture, attracting immigration and supporting morality and good conduct.”<sup>28</sup> The need to encourage appropriate behaviour was amply demonstrated the following year at a political rally organized to protest petitions circulating around the province critical of the government. W.L. Mackenzie attended the meeting and reported on the gathering.

I counted six or seven flags borne by Irish settlers from Cavan and Peterborough, the colours being orange and orange and blue striped, with inscriptions chiefly in praise of Sir John Colborne’s administration ...There were no Roman Catholic party colours of any kind ...The Sheriff ...seized hold of a pair of colours and endeavoured to wrest them from the bearers and meeting much resistance, threatened to dissolve the meeting.<sup>29</sup>

The situation quickly deteriorated as one of the magistrates was violently attacked and Alexander McDonell, member of the legislature from Northumberland, was shouted down despite efforts of the Sheriff to quell the crowd. Mackenzie drew the obvious conclusion for his readers that a group of pro-government supporters led by the Tory members for the district,

G.S. Bolton and John Brown, backed by “Irish bully boys” had staged the meeting and prevented Reformers from speaking. He warned that before long the portion of the Irish population of the Newcastle District unduly influenced by the Tories would switch allegiances and “act as the artillery for the public good in concert with the old settlers.”<sup>30</sup> Mackenzie felt confident the obstinacy and self serving proclivities of the Family Compact would eventually push the Irish residents of the District into the reform camp.

One of the key organizational vehicles for Irish influence in provincial politics was the Orange Lodge. Established in Upper Canada in the 1820s, it made its first tentative steps into the political arena by supporting William Lyon Mackenzie.<sup>31</sup> This support was based less on ideological opposition to the established government and more on the resistance of the Family Compact and its regional manifestations to share patronage and influence. Failing to outdo the Tories in their professions of loyalty and thereby garner a share of the prestige and benefits of holding public office, the Irish leaders were looking to the reform movement as a lever to pry open the path to preferment with the colonial administration. It did not mean the Irish adopted the Reform platform espoused by Mackenzie. The reference to the orange flags carried by Irish settlers from Cavan and Peterbor-

<sup>28</sup> Cole, *Historical Atlas*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> *The Colonial Advocate*, 1 March 1832.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Heward Senior, “Ogle Gowan, Orangeism, and the Immigrant Question 1830-1833,” *Ontario History*, 66:4, 194.

ough suggests that, at least in the Newcastle District, the Irish supported the Tory led faction. The strong anti Catholic bias in the Orange lodge was muted by the pragmatic reality of a majority of Irish Catholics resident in the area. In the early 1830s leaders of the movement sought an accommodation with the Irish Catholics through a “reconstructed Orangeism” and proposed switching the name from Orange to Union lodges and allowing Catholics to join.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Irish emigrants, both those who came out before 1825 and those under Robinson, were still grateful to the government for their improved situation and thus unwilling to criticize the administration. They may also have been too preoccupied with the demanding task of establishing their farms to take a critical stance against the government. John Beverly Robinson, in a letter to the Wilmot Horton acknowledged as much, stating “whatever may be the vices and errors of the Irish peasantry, hatred of their Sovereign and ingratitude to their government are not among the number.”<sup>33</sup>

Tangible evidence of this gratitude was demonstrated in the provincial elections of 1830 and again in 1834 when Alexander McDonell, a Roman Catholic Scot and nephew of Bishop McDonell won election for the Northumberland

riding. McDonell had served as the local emigration agent for the Robinson migration and thus had a personal connection with his co-religionists as well as being a supporter of the administration at York. The other representative from the riding Dr. John Gilchrist, also a Scot but a Reformer in politics was an active entrepreneur owning grist and saw mills, a distillery and general store at Keene in Otonabee Township.<sup>34</sup> Gilchrist was able to draw on a more settled constituency along the “Front” that had more time to nurture grievances against the government and articulate them at the polls. As chair of the legislature’s standing committee on canals and internal improvements, Gilchrist played a key role in securing passage of bills authorizing the survey of a potential canal route from Trenton to Lake Simcoe. The survey under Nicol Hugh Baird, an experienced Scot engineer who worked in Britain and later on the Rideau Canal, was followed by a series of measures authorizing construction of locks and dams to open the area for settlement.<sup>35</sup> McDonell served as one of the commissioners responsible for supervising disbursement of government funds for these public works. Thus, despite political differences, both men cooperated on projects that promoted the economic develop of the region.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>33</sup> H. Pammett *Emigration from Ireland*, 213. Pammett observed that the effort of the Newcastle Orange leaders to incorporate the loyal Irish Roman Catholics brought a reaction from hard line Orange supporters. *Ibid.*, 205

<sup>34</sup> Jim Angus, *A Respectable Ditch*, (Kingston: Queen’s McGill Press, 1988), 41

<sup>35</sup> J. Witham, “Nicol Hugh Baird,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. XVII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

Support for these government projects crossed class and ethnic lines. For the Moodies, Trails, Stricklands and other genteel English families, the prospect of rising land values offered the prospect of a profitable return on their extensive land holdings. For the humble Irish settlers, the potential for contract work as navvies excavating the canal cuts and building the dams meant the possibility of ready cash to augment the limited income from their farms. Local merchants of every stripe would profit from the new settlers flooding into the region and the easier access to markets at Montreal and beyond. These collective hopes were dashed by the late 1830s as the economic recession and resulting tight credit reduced migration to British North America while business failures overwhelmed the residents in the Peterborough area and throughout the province. Economic hardship was compounded by crop failure, rising prices and the political turmoil that gripped the colonial administration. In May 1836 Lt. Governor Sir Francis Bond Head dissolved the Assembly and called for new elections. This time the electors of Northumberland County responded to the loyalty cry and returned two conservative candidates, Alexander McDonnell and James G. Bethune.

The triumph of Toryism and the return of two staunch members of the Family Compact, did not necessarily indicate an absence of Reform sentiment in the region. In the winter of 1836 Mac-

kenzie traveled to Cobourg to organize a public meeting to protest actions of the oligarchy at York. His efforts at rallying the Reform forces in the region came to naught when pro-government supporters traveled by sleigh from Peterborough via Cavan and succeeded in surrounding the courthouse, preventing Mackenzie from entering. When the fiery Scot tried to address his followers outside the building, a member of the Tory faction hauled out his bugle and played "the rogue's march and other tunes ...appropriate for the occasion." Mackenzie finally gave up the attempt and took refuge with friends until he could effect a safe retreat from town.<sup>36</sup>

Following the annual militia muster in June 1837, when eligible men were put through a rudimentary drill and had their names entered on the county muster rolls, several of the men adjourned to Mrs. Patterson's tavern in Keene. When John Blizzard, one of the pre-Robinson emigrants shouted a huzzah for the Queen and governor, he was met with a hurrah for Mackenzie and Papineau by the Nelson brothers. A brawl soon followed, with Blizzard receiving the worst of the beating. When the incident came to trial in Peterborough, Nelson's recollections were vague as he had been drinking a quantity of beer but he woke up the next day with a black eye and disfigured face. James Keefe, who had witnessed the affray but had consumed a half gallon of whiskey at Dr. Gilchrist's still and

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Poole, *The Early Settlement of Peterborough County*, (Peterborough: Peterborough Printing Co., 1967) reprint of the 1941 edition, 30.

was unclear about what precipitated the scuffle, stated that the Nelsons attacked and beat Blizzard. The Court found the Nelsons guilty and ordered them to pay a fine and costs.<sup>37</sup>

The threat of violence in this highly charged political climate cast a pall over the military preparedness of the loyalist forces in this region when the political storm broke over the colony in December 1838. In response to the outbreak of the Rebellion in Lower Canada, Sir Francis Bond Head had deployed the few British regulars left in Upper Canada to help quell the revolt among the French Canadians. This left the unprotected supply of arms and ammunition in storage at York vulnerable to attack. The county militia units were in various states of organization and training, not to mention generally inadequately supplied with weapons, and thus of uncertain support in the event of a crisis. When rumours of a Rebel assault on York reached the capital during the evening of 4 December, the Lt. Governor sent out an urgent appeal to the colonels of militia to “make such arrangements ...for enabling their respective Corps to act with promptness and effect, should any emergency render their services necessary.”<sup>38</sup> The response in the Newcastle District was prompt and unwavering. The orders arrived by express

Tuesday night, 5 December, and by early Thursday morning Colonel Z. Burnham of the 1st Northumberland had assembled three companies. Two days later, Major Alexander McDonell, commanding the 2nd Regiment Northumberland Militia, assembled a large contingent of volunteers from Peterborough and the surrounding townships and marched his men down to Cobourg in anticipation of a trip to defend the capital.<sup>39</sup> Assembling a large body of men at this time of year, was no simple task. Many of the settlers had not yet completed preparations for the winter ahead. Leaving the families short of fuel and food represented a real hardship for these men and is indicative of the loyalty they felt and expressed in such a tangible way.<sup>40</sup> The trip was particularly arduous as the route was knee deep in mud while rations consisted of pork, potatoes and whisky.<sup>41</sup> When word was received that the plot had been foiled and the rebels disbursed, most of the men were permitted to return home while a contingent continued on to York and there enlisted for service on the Niagara frontier to drive Mackenzie’s forces from Navy Island.

This display of military ardour by the residents of the Peterborough area was matched by an outpouring of literary patriotism. Susanna Moodie, whose

<sup>37</sup> D. Gayle Nelson, *Forest to Farm Early Days in Otonabee*, (Kingston: Brown & Martin, 1975), 189, quoting from an unsourced document in the Ontario Archives.

<sup>38</sup> Archives of Ontario Archives (AO), Mu 2107 (F775) #3 Militia General Order, 4 December 1837.

<sup>39</sup> *Cobourg Star* 13 December 1837.

<sup>40</sup> Poole, *Settlement*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Cole, *Dummer Township*, quoting from an eyewitness account published by the *Peterborough Examiner*, 7 December 1896

husband had rushed to York and joined the embodied militia unit dispatched to the Niagara frontier, was determined to “serve the good cause with my pen ...as I could not aid in subduing the enemies of my beloved country with my arm.”<sup>42</sup> Her “Address to the Freeman of Canada” was a clarion call to resist the traitorous actions of the rebel leaders.

Canadians will you see the flag,  
Beneath whose folds your fathers bled  
Supplanted by the vilest rag  
That ever host to rapine led.<sup>43</sup>

While her poems may have been of limited value as recruiting slogans, they did help launch her on her literary career as a regular contributor to John Lovell’s *Literary Garland*.

For some of the residents living in the back settlements, reliable information was scarce, with rumours filling the void. In a letter to his eldest brother living in Manchester, John Langton remarked, “the insurrection was suppressed and tranquility restored before we heard of its interruption.”<sup>44</sup> When rumours circulated in the middle of December that Mackenzie might be attempting an escape to Lower Canada along an Indian portage route by the Kawartha Lakes, some two dozen militia volunteers were hastily assembled to prevent his escape. The men

were bivouacked in the woods in -12°F weather. Luckily word was received that Mackenzie had escaped to the United States and Langton was spared having to take his turn on patrol. Instead, he continued with his Christmas holiday preparations relieved that “there was an end to our soldiering for the present.”<sup>45</sup>

The rush to enroll militia units for active service overwhelmed the limited resources of the Adjutant General’s office at York. With the large number of militia units actively engaged suppressing armed incursions along the border, the government was hard pressed to equip and pay stationary units in the back townships. Not that this discouraged patriotic citizens from offering their services to raise a corps of volunteers. Some forty leading citizens of Peterborough petitioned the Lieutenant Governor to authorize a company of infantry drawn from the region and to equip them with uniforms, accoutrements and weapons. In return, they pledged to “attend immediately to drilling ...and hold themselves in readiness ...to support Her Majesty’s Government.”<sup>46</sup> Major McDonell, 2nd Northumberland Militia informed Colonel R. Bullock, Adjutant General that the English, Scots and Irish Settlers in the Neighborhood of Peterborough who so readily

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<sup>42</sup> Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush*, (McClelland & Stewart: Toronto, 1962), 210; C. Ballstadt, “Secure in Conscious Worth: Susanna Moodie and the Rebellion of 1837,” [www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/vol18/ballstadt](http://www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/vol18/ballstadt)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Barbara Williams (ed.), *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada The Journals, Letters and Art of Anne Langton*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 164.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> LAC, RG9, 1B1, vol.29, Petition to His Excellency Sir Francis Bond Head.

turned out in early December 1837, were willing to serve again. He offered to raise a corps of five hundred strong, assuring Bullock he could do so “without materially interfering with the required labouring portion of the population.” To bolster his case, McDonell assured Bullock he would have the services of a professionally trained officer, Captain J. Cowell, late of the 71st now serving in the 2nd Northumberland.<sup>47</sup>

This sudden military activity was not without its humorous side. John Langton, writing from Fenelon Falls, observed,

The military mania has not reached us, though on the front everybody is mad. In the streets of Toronto, every third man is a soldier, and at least every fifth an officer. Captains and colonels are as thick as blackberries, and the cavalry (lancers no less) are galloping about to the imminent risk of the lives of passers by—and their own. Military tailors not being plentiful here, the variety in the uniforms is amusing and their cut as absurd as that of their wearers.<sup>48</sup>

The military ardour that swept through the province was rooted partly in genuine patriotic zeal to defend the colony and partly in pragmatic self-interest. A military commission and authority to raise a battalion was a very tangible symbol of official preferment and an opportunity to solidify one’s social and economic position within local society.

The colonel of a regiment was responsible for submitting nominations for subordinate commissions, authorizing the purchases of a wide range of military sup-

plies and exercising leadership and control within the community. In exercising this authority, he could extend his influence and support to a wide range of individuals or clients. The patron-client relationship that characterized aspects of Upper Canadian society at the community level, can be viewed as a local manifestation of the Family Compact centered at the provincial capital. The mutually self-supporting cadre of politicians and government officials, which garnered the antipathy of the Reform movement for their monopoly over the distribution of patronage and the perks of public office, was built in part on a network of “clients” whose relationship with a “patron” brought advantages in terms of minor offices or other tangible benefits. For the patrons to sustain their position of influence, they had to extend their network of supporters and deliver those tangible benefits sought by their clients. The outbreak of the Rebellion increased opportunities for the client network to operate. Ironically, the rebel aim of dislodging the influence of the Family Compact, actually resulted in increasing the oligarchy’s authority, albeit for a limited period until Lord Durham’s report set forth a new political agenda for the colonies.

The highly charged climate of the Rebellion period also tested the hierarchical divisions within society. Sergeant Gustavus Dundas wrote to the Adjutant General complaining that his senior officer had been in a state of intoxication,

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, RG91B1, vol.29, McDonell to Lt. Col. Strachan, 8 March 1838.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *A Gentlewoman*, 173, J. Langton to W. Langton, December 1837.

used language disrespectful of Sir Francis Bond Head and abused him personally in a very ungentlemanly manner. In bringing these charges, Dundas claimed not to have any prejudice against Captain Clay but did so only because he wanted to see “British subjects treated in a manner in which they ought [sic] to be treated.”<sup>49</sup> The letter was duly referred to Clay for his comments. He vigorously rejected the charges, noting that Dundas “and a few others in the same rank of society” had attacked his character when he failed to march to York in December 1837 due to ill health. He was prepared to call on A. McDonnell and others to attest to his character. As to Dundas, “I mean to treat him with the utmost contempt as I consider him beneath my station in life to have any things to say to him.”<sup>50</sup> Despite the political turmoil and military uncertainty, the boundaries of social class were to be steadfastly upheld.

In late March 1838 Sir George Arthur, the newly appointed Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada arrived at York after an eight-week ocean voyage with a stop over in New York to confer with Governor William Marcy and General Winfield Scott. They discussed the recent border incursions by the Canadian rebels and their American sympathizers operating with impunity from within the U.S. border cities. Arthur concluded that, while American officials were not

actively abetting the rebels, they were doing little to discourage them. However, with the anticipated arrival of British regulars to Upper Canada, Arthur was convinced tranquility would be restored and he could dispense with the militia units. He elaborated on this approach in a letter to Governor General and Commander in Chief, Sir John Colborne. “I should wish at once to proceed to reduce such of the Militia as can be got rid of ...Numbers are most anxious to get back to their homes, and if we do not get the seed into the ground we shall have no harvest.” Besides, Arthur was convinced a “Military life will have a bad moral effect upon the Yeomanry if too long continued.”<sup>51</sup> By April 1838 the number of British regulars in Upper Canada had risen from a low of eighty-four just four months previously to over a thousand stationed at refurbished border posts.<sup>52</sup> That month, Arthur issued a Militia General Order disbanding many of the volunteer units that had been embodied the previous December.

The relative calm during the summer and early fall of 1838 convinced colonial officials that the crisis had passed. In August Arthur visited Peterborough to lay the cornerstone of the new courthouse and jail. Such symbols of progress combined with the number of fine residences and bustling mills evident throughout the town seemed to dispel the fears of further

<sup>49</sup> LAC, RG91B1, vol.29, Dundas to Bullock, 19 July 1838.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, Clay to Bullock, 25 August 1838.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Anderson, ed. *The Arthur Papers*, vol. I, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), 70-73, Arthur to Colborne, 5 April 1838.

<sup>52</sup> LAC, MG13, W.O. 17, vol. 1542, Troop returns for period January to April 1838.



discord, economic hardship and military threat from south of the border. In reality, the Patriot movement had entered a new and more dangerous phase. Rather than the very public organizing and extensive newspaper coverage which had characterized earlier efforts, the Patriot organization went underground forming a secret society of "Hunters" dedicated to the overthrow of the government in Upper and Lower Canada. The formation of a secret society based on locally raised and managed chapters or lodges meant the organization was more difficult to track and infiltrate.

By late fall, the rumours of renewed rebel activity intensified. From his travels around the province, Arthur became alarmed that the threat posed by the Hunters was of a more serious nature than had previously been assumed. He received confidential reports from various sources that upwards of 40,000 men organized into secret lodges were assembling along the northern U.S. border. These lodges were stated to be well armed, well financed and preparing for an invasion of the province during the late fall or winter. Colborne had earlier dismissed such reports as mere idle gossip by self-serving merchants who valued the hard currency paid by the military for necessities required to support the troops. In a note to Arthur written in early October, he remarked, "I suspect that the whole tribe of contractors, on both sides . . . are

desirous of turning alarm to their own account," but reluctantly admitted, "I cannot with this persuasion permit any risk to be incurred"<sup>53</sup> Arthur responded to this precarious situation by issuing a General Order authorizing a massive call up of the militia. "It being deemed expedient to occupy the Country with a view to its tranquility, His Excellency . . . is pleased to direct that volunteers from the Sedentary Militia Force for a term of six months be immediately called into active service."<sup>54</sup> The terms for enlistment into these special Provisional Battalions included clothing, pay and allowances similar to that offered to British regular soldiers.

Command of the 7th Provisional Battalion was given to Alexander McDonnell. His status as former agent for the Peter Robinson settlement, member of the Legislature and officer commanding the 2nd Northumberland were key factors in his choice. Solid credentials however were no guarantee of appointment. Having a champion to lobby officials for consideration was certainly helpful. McDonnell had such an influential patron in his uncle, Bishop Alexander McDonell, the Catholic prelate who sat on the Legislative Council and had the ear of the Lieutenant Governor. In a letter to the bishop, Arthur remarked, "Your recommendation of your friend Colonel McDonnell [sic] I attended to as soon as I received it, and if he can only meet with a

<sup>53</sup> *Arthur Papers*, vol.2, Colborne to Arthur, 1 October 1838.

<sup>54</sup> Militia General Orders were printed in the local press, posted through the province and later consolidated in the RG8 I collection of Militia General Orders. Militia General Order 31 October 1838.

Figure 3: Portrait of George Baker Hall, officer in the 7th Provisional Battalion. Courtesy of the Trent Valley Archives, image F50 1.033

body of Brigands the field of glory will be open to him.”<sup>55</sup>

In late December 1838, a District General Order gave official notice of the formation of the 7th Provisional Battalion under command of Lt. Colonel Alexander McDonell, Peterborough.<sup>56</sup> McDonell had been busy recruiting his unit up to full strength through November and into the winter. In choosing his commissioned officers, McDonell endeavored to select men from a suitable social background with the character and experience to command. The reputation of the battalion as well as his own standing with government officials at York depended on the performance of his unit both in any future conflicts that might occur, as well as their service as a resident military force in Peterborough. His choice of J. Cowell, a half pay officer from the British regular army, as his second in command brought sound military training to the task of bringing raw recruits up to standard. The six captains, each of whom commanded a company, were also prominent men in the community and persons McDonell would have felt comfortable dealing with. S.F. Kirkpatrick, an Irish Protestant lawyer originally from Dublin, who recently moved from Kingston to Peterborough, was the



senior Captain even though his fellow officers had longer service in Northumberland. Other Captains such as J.R. Benson were prominent businessmen or leading figures in the community. The junior officers, including the lieutenants and ensigns, also reads like a who's who of the area. Thomas Need, Samuel Strickland, George B. Hall and George Caddy were all leaders in their communities.<sup>57</sup> Even the regimental surgeon, John Hutchison was a prominent and respected community leader.<sup>58</sup> Invariably, there were some

<sup>55</sup> *Arthur Papers*, vol.II, 419-420, Arthur to Bishop McDonell, 6 December 1838.

<sup>56</sup> LAC, RG8, vol. 613, p. 305, District General Order, 29 December 1838.

<sup>57</sup> LAC, RG91B1, vol.26, Return of Officers for the 7th Provisional Battalion

<sup>58</sup> Jean. M. Cole, *Hutchison House*, Occasional Paper #2, Peterborough Historical Society (1981).

disappointed candidates. Robert Nicholls had applied for the position of paymaster but was turned down by McDonell allegedly because he was a merchant. Nicholls pointed out to the Adjutant General's office that the successful candidate, W. Wrighton, was also a merchant and enclosed one of his advertisements to prove his claim. McDonell's reason for choosing one candidate over another is not recorded but he would have required a competent, loyal and trusted individual to handle the funds for the regiment.

To bring his battalion up to strength, McDonell carried out a vigorous recruiting campaign in the Peterborough region. The surviving paylists for 285 privates permit some preliminary analysis on the men who volunteered for service. One of the groups that responded to the appeal were the Irish Catholics who came over in the Assisted Emigration Scheme in 1825. The paylist for the battalion can be compared

with the ship's rosters for the nine Navy Board transport vessels that brought over the Robinson Irish settlers. Doing a simple

comparison of first and surnames, at least 20 percent of the 7th Provisional Battalion was drawn from this one specific group.<sup>59</sup> In some cases, brothers from the same family joined together. The strong response from the Irish Catholics justified Wilmot Horton's contention that these settlers would prove their loyalty in a crisis. There may also have been a pragmatic consideration as the winter months were a slow period in an agricultural setting, freeing up the young men to join. A

simple averaging of known ages of the recruits suggests they were about 24 years of age.

Once enlisted, the men would be equipped with a uniform, accoutrements and a smooth bore muzzle loading musket.<sup>60</sup> The new recruits were drilled in a simplified version of the standard Brit-



*Figure 4: Standard uniform of the Upper Canadian Militia during the Rebellion period. Courtesy of Parks Canada, PD 733*

<sup>59</sup> A full roster of the Robinson immigrants has been compiled by the Trent Valley Archives. A simple match by names with the March paylist for the Battalion suggests at least one in five of the recruits was from the 1825 immigration scheme. The actual numbers are likely much higher as common surnames such as Sheehan, Murphy and Condon as well as identical first names prohibited a reasonable link with the battalion. In instances where a father and son had the same name, the assumption was the younger family member joined the battalion. For monthly rosters LAC, WO.13, vol. 3705, pp. 236-40

<sup>60</sup> The terms of enlistment were set out in General Orders issued 24 October 1838.

ish drill manual.<sup>61</sup> Details are sketchy, but it appears that a barrack compound, guard house and officers quarters were either built or rented near the center of town, likely on the reserve lands set aside for the new District Courthouse. As the winter months dragged on and the threat of invasion receded, the strict discipline required of the troops suffered and relations between the civilian authorities and the military personnel were strained. The situation reached a crisis on 17 March 1839 when a near riot involving the troops resulted in the local Justices of the Peace laying formal charges against military personnel and making a formal request to officials in York urging the battalion be disbanded.

This serious clash between the civilian and military authorities has received little attention by scholars. F. Poole in his history, *The Early Settlement of Peterborough County*, merely noted that “among those holding subordinate authority, were several whose zeal and officiousness outran their discretion.”<sup>62</sup> The details of the affair are drawn from the affidavits submitted by the local Justices of the Peace and correspondence by the principals involved, including Colonel McDonell. The circumstances which prompted the

incident are unclear but there is a suggestion of religious and racial overtones to the whole fracas. According to the deposition of Hugh Given, shoemaker, the regimental band was out on the morning of 17 March, St Patrick’s Day. As the band passed by Cluxton’s store, Given claimed an unidentified person berated Lt. Ferguson for allegedly pulling down some green ribbons, most likely put up by the local Catholic Irish to celebrate their patron saint. The accusation prompted a group of outraged soldiers to vent their anger by attacking the premises of two local merchants, smashing the windows of J. Henthorn’s tavern and M. Chamber’s residence allegedly calling out “to burn every protestant house.”<sup>63</sup> The attack on the property of two prominent individuals may not have been as spontaneous as stated. James Boundy, a private in the battalion who was in the tavern when it was attacked stated, “About half an hour before Henthorn’s House was attacked James Fief (soldier) told Deponent some Irish word which was a pass word & that he supposed the mob were bent on some mischief & he Fief had left them.”<sup>64</sup> What prompted this outburst of violence is not recorded but there appears to have been a build up of tension within

<sup>61</sup> A new militia version of the manual was promulgated in the early 1830s with orders that every office acquire a copy and familiarize himself with the various movements.

<sup>62</sup> Poole, *The Early Settlement*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> LAC, RG9 1B1, vol.34, Folio 7 the Provisional Battalion; sworn affidavit of Hugh Given. Wm Chambers was accused by the Justices of the Quarter Sessions of keeping an unlicensed tavern, which they regarded as a house of “general bad character”; to counter the actions of the magistrates, Chambers had J. Armour, Adjutant of the 7th Provisional draw up a petition on his behalf. RG5, Upper Canada Sundries, 119696-119697. Report by the Magistrates of Peterborough to Lt. Governor Sir George Arthur, undated which was signed by both Darcus and Bird.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Affidavit by James Boundy.

the Irish members of the battalion. The magistrates were sufficiently alarmed when a building used as a Roman Catholic Church in town was destroyed by fire a week later allegedly by arson that they ordered an immediate investigation. They determined the cause was not the work of an incendiary but an accident caused by a faulty stovepipe. However, as they stated in a letter to the Lieutenant Governor, the “transgressions” perpetrated by men from the battalion had created such a “strong party feeling” they suggested “the propriety of having the regiment removed as they felt confident that the party spirit excited was beyond their power to control while an armed military force was mixed up with it.”<sup>65</sup>

When word reached the regimental officers of the attempt to impugn the honour of the battalion, they determined to embarrass the magistrates by playing a hoax on them. They circulated a rumour that two officers were to have a duel. The magistrates immediately issued recognizances for the principals and seconds to keep the peace and ordered them to post sureties for good behaviour. The officers concerned included Ensign George B. Hall, Lt. Samuel Strickland, Captain Benson and Captain Murphy. As the officers gathered in the magistrates’ office, they defied the request of Justice of the Peace, John Darcus to post bail and joked about having to miss their mess dinner.

When Darcus ordered Constable Lane to take them in charge the situation quickly deteriorated.<sup>66</sup> As Lane tried to seize hold of one of the officers and prevent him from leaving, a scuffle ensued whereupon Darcus grabbed a pistol and snapped it at the officer. This prompted a fellow officer to draw his sword but before any further damage was done, the officers withdrew giving three cheers for the regiment and three groans for the magistrates. According to Darcus, this action on the part of the officers was intended solely “for the purpose of insulting the bench & placing the military power above the civil authorities.” The officers were not finished with magistrate Darcus. On the 27 March a procession marched down the main street headed to Dixon’s tavern with a person dressed like Darcus (who was stated to be Lieutenant Caddy) riding an ass led by a person dressed like Dr. Bird, (who was stated to be Ensign Hall) one of the other magistrates. The procession consisted of soldiers of the battalion with officers watching and laughing at the spectacle. The situation deteriorated even further with soldiers offering insults to Magistrate Darcus, calling him “Dark ass” and taunting him to “touch us if you dare.”<sup>67</sup> A caricature of the two magistrates was “openly exhibited on the wall of the orderly room calculated to wound the feelings of & hold up to ridicule,” the two members of the Bench. Thus

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Magistrates of Peterborough to Lt. Gov Sir G. Arthur, 2 April 1839.

<sup>66</sup> Trent University Archives, Howard Pammatt collection, miscellaneous notes contains reference to comments by Mossom Boyd of Bobcaygeon that he knew Darcus back in Ireland and he was a reckless, wild young fellow.

<sup>67</sup> LAC, RG9 1B1, Affidavit by John Darcus 2 April 1839.



convenience which may arise from any delay” in proclaiming the new district.<sup>70</sup> John Darcus who got up a petition to oppose the establishment of a new district may well have caused the delay. According to him, “the idea has originated in a few ambitious & greedy place hunters & is in decided opposition to the general wish of the district as the accompanying petition got up in less than two days will show.”<sup>71</sup> Although Darcus was unsuccessful in getting establishment of the new district cancelled, his veiled comments about McDonell and his supporters indicate the underlying tensions highlighted during the Rebellion, persisted after the crisis had passed.

The fall out from the mustering and deployment of the militia in the Newcastle District persisted even after the troops had been disbanded. Captain John Huston, who raised a company for special service from the Cavan area in late fall 1838, found such patriotic gestures came at a cost. After the men from his company had been dismissed, Huston was presented with a hefty bill “on account of Damages and Deficiencies of Arms, Accoutrements, Great Coats and other Stores,” by the soldiers under his command. Huston vigorously protested the charges, suggesting that Major Elliott was responsible and demanded a formal Court of Inquiry

into the incident.<sup>72</sup> Following a lengthy correspondence with colonial officials, Huston paid the bill but the fractured relations and the ill will resulting from his allegations against Major Elliott continued long after the incident was settled.

New political alignments after the Act of Union in 1841 and a resurgent economy, due to the boom in the lumber industry, changed the economic and social dynamics of the district. The tensions highlighted between the officer cadre and the local magistrates faded as new social and business leaders emerged to direct local economic and political developments. The Irish population also experienced a transformation after the Rebellion crisis as the original settlers passed away, land ownership patterns changed and occupational diversification modified the predominantly agrarian community.

These changes mark a departure from the period 1837 to 1839 when, under the stress of the Rebellion crisis, underlying tensions and patterns of behaviour were brought into sharp focus. The persistent loyalty of the Irish, overlaid an undercurrent of conflict between Protestants and Catholics as witnessed by the St. Patrick’s Day incident, while the conflict between the magistrates and officer cadre highlighted social conflict among the social elite in the region.

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retary, n.d.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 249, pp.135431-135,432, Governor Sydenham to Sir George Arthur, 10 Nov 1840.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 220, pp.121096-12197, John Darcus unaddressed, 3 May 1839.<sup>72</sup> Trent University, J. Huston papers, Box 3, folio #71-006. There is extensive correspondence from Huston regarding this incident, although his formal Memorial setting out the circumstances is not included with the correspondence, nor was it found in the military correspondence in the RG8 collection.