
An Account of the Erection of the Tablets to commemorate the repulse of Montgomery and Arnold at Quebec on the 31st of December, 1775

All true Canadians will be glad to learn that a great and long-standing national reproach has now been fittingly removed. During no less than one hundred and twenty seven years—from 1775 to 1902—nothing had been done to mark the spot where Canada stood at bay against the combined assault of Montgomery and Arnold on Quebec. Yet this assault was the turning point in the most momentous crisis which our country has ever been called upon to face. The American invaders had overrun the whole colony. They had taken every post along the frontier. Montreal, Sorel, Three Rivers, and the long line of the St. Lawrence were all at their mercy. Quebec alone was left—the last hope of British arms, the last stronghold of British power in those troublous times, and the one sure promise of any British Dominion remaining in the Western World. On Quebec hung the fate of half a continent, as well as the distinctively Canadian name and fame of many million people in the future. One false move by Carleton, one successful act of treachery in the beleaguered town, one moment of weakness among the little garrison, one battle lost against Montgomery, and all would have been over. But Quebec stood fast, and Canada was saved.

Four generations after this field of honour had been fought and won the first practical proposal was made to commemorate our victorious defenders. At a meeting of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, on the 19th of March, 1902, it was resolved by motion of Fred. C. Wurtele, Esq., seconded by Major W. Wood: "That the time has come for the erection of historic tablets at Près-de-Ville and the Sault-au-Matelot, in the

Lower Town of Quebec, relating to the events of 31st December, 1775, which were so important to the destiny of Canada; and, as it is within the province of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec to erect such memorials, a committee is hereby appointed, composed of the following gentlemen:—Sir James LeMoine, James Morgan, W. Wood, J. T. Ross, Siméon Lesage, Cyrille Tessier, Fred. C. Wurtele, Alex. Robertson, John Hamilton, Walter J. Ray, Lt.-Col. Turnbull, Archibald Campbell and George Lampson—who shall have full power to raise the necessary funds, and to do everything required to bring the project to a successful issue.”

On organizing the committee, Mr. Wurtele was elected chairman, and Major Wood secretary.

As such memorials would be battlefield monuments the Federal Government was petitioned by the Society for means to erect suitable historic tablets at these places. The request was graciously responded to, and splendid memorials in statuary bronze have been erected, one on the rock where Montgomery was defeated and killed, and the other on the St. James Street gable of the Molsons' Bank, as near as possible to the site of the Sault-au-Matelot barricade, where Arnold was defeated, and over 400 of his men made prisoners. Both Tablets were placed in position on the 29th of December, 1904, just two days before the 129th anniversary of the assault.

The complete history of this American invasion has never been written; and so students on both sides of the line will be interested in the news that the Literary and Historical Society intend to work out the whole subject in the most exhaustive manner possible. Every original document still remaining in manuscript, as well as those documents which have not yet appeared in perfectly exact versions, will be published word for word. Then, after all authentic sources of information shall have been thoroughly explored, the Society will try to give the “plain unvarnished tale” of the whole campaign without either fear or favour.

In the present connection all that is necessary is such a brief general sketch of the operations at Quebec as will give the reader some idea of the reasons for the erection of the tablets and for the special wording of the two inscriptions.



When the American Congress had decided on an invasion of Canada, a force under Montgomery was sent by Lake Champlain to attack Montreal. Meanwhile another, under Arnold, marched from Cambridge in Massachusetts by the Voyageur trail up the Kennebec river and across the height of land to the head waters of the Chaudière, whose banks it followed to St. Marie. From here it followed the road to Levis, where it arrived in full view of Quebec on the 8th of November, after its long and arduous march. Having crossed the St. Lawrence in whatever canoes could be found, it appeared on the present Cove Fields, on the 14th, was fired on, and at once retired up to Pointe aux Trembles, where the arrival of Montgomery from Montreal was awaited. The Kennebec route was not an unknown one; for in 1760 Captain Montrésor passed over it with despatches from Murray to Amherst, and made a good map, of which Arnold obtained a copy fifteen years later.

Montgomery carried all before him, taking Sorel, Montreal and Three Rivers. General Carleton, who was in Montreal, knowing the importance of Quebec, and that for divers reasons Montreal could not then be defended, destroyed the Government stores, and started with several schooners to descend the St. Lawrence. Having run into a dead calm, he took a canoe, and, being paddled by Bouchette in the dead of night past the enemy's batteries at Sorel, arrived on the 19th November at Quebec, where Colonel MacLean, who had preceded him, was actively preparing for defence.

Carleton at once issued orders that—"the suspected and all who are unwilling to take up arms in its defence must leave the town within four days." This

cleared the place of foreigners and traitors. On the 30th November there were only 127 British regulars in garrison. But these—together with the crews of two small men-of-war, the *Lizard* and *Hunter*, and of several merchantmen that happened to be in port, as well as 230 Royal Emigrants and the loyal inhabitants, who willingly enrolled themselves—raised the force at his disposal to 1800 men. The defences were strengthened, and barricades erected and armed in the Lower Town in Sault-au-Matelot Street and the present Sous-le-Cap; also at Près-de-Ville, just beneath the centre of the Citadel cliff.

Montgomery arrived on the 1st of December with his army, which raised the attacking force to 2,000 men. The enemy then proceeded to take possession of St. Roch's, and erected batteries on the high ground commanding St. John's and St. Louis' Gates. The town was well provisioned for the winter; so Carleton, profiting by Murray's experience, would run no risk. The Siege began with a considerable amount of daily bombardment and shooting at our sentries. But Montgomery, finding his guns did little harm, resolved to storm the town by night. This decision was reported to Carleton by a prisoner who escaped from the besiegers, so the garrison kept continually on the alert for the expected attack.

To frighten the inhabitants, but without avail, Montgomery's general orders of the 15th of December were sent into the town. A copy is now to be found in the Dominion Archives at Ottawa (Q. 12. Page 30.):—

HEADQUARTERS, HOLLAND HOUSE

Near Quebec.

15th December, 1775.

Parole—Connecticut.

Countersign—Adams.

The General having in vain offered the most favorable terms of accommodation to the Governor and

having taken every possible step to prevail on the inhabitants to desist from seconding him in his wild scheme of defence, nothing remains but to pursue vigorous measures for the speedy reduction of the only hold possessed by the Ministerial troops in the Province. The troops, flushed with continual success, confident of the justice of their cause, and relying on that Providence which has uniformly protected them, will advance to the attack of works incapable of being defended by the wretched garrison posted behind them, consisting of sailors unacquainted with the use of arms, of citizens incapable of the soldier's duty, and a few miserable emigrants. The General is confident a vigorous and spirited attack must be attended with success. The troops shall have the effects of the Governor, garrison, and of such as have been acting in misleading the inhabitants and distressing the friends of liberty, to be equally divided among them, each to have the one hundredth share out of the whole, which shall be at the disposal of the General and given to such soldiers as distinguished themselves by their activity and bravery, and sold at public auction. The whole to be conducted as soon as the city is in our hands and the inhabitants disarmed.

The General at Headquarters,

FERD. WEISENFELS,

Major of Brigade.

The division which was to attack Près-de-Ville assembled at 2 o'clock a.m. of the 31st December, at the enemy's headquarters, Holland House, (now the property of Frank Ross, Esq.), and, headed by Montgomery, marched across the Plains of Abraham, and descended into the beach path, now Champlain Street. Those who were to make the attack by the suburbs of St. Roch's, headed by Arnold, were about 800 strong. Another party, under Livingstone, was sent to make a feint against the walls south of St. John's Gate, and try to force the entrance; but these soon withdrew. The plan was that Montgomery and Arnold were to meet at the foot of Mountain Hill and storm the Upper Town.

A heavy northeast snow storm was raging at 4 o'clock that dark morning when Montgomery descended the cliff and advanced along the narrow ledge which was flanked to the left by the perpendicular crags of Cape Diamond and to the right by a short descent at whose base flowed the tide of the St. Lawrence.

The Près-de-Ville barricade, with the blockhouse at the narrowest part of the road, was defended by Captain Chabot, Lieut. Picard, 30 Canadian militiamen, Captain Barnesfare and 15 seamen, Sergeant Hugh McQuarters, of the Royal Artillery, with several small guns, and Mr. Coffin; 50 in all. This post was on the alert, and saw the head of the column approach and halt some fifty yards from the barricade. A man then came forward to reconnoitre; and on his return the column continued its advance, when it was received by cannon and musketry. The first discharge killed Montgomery, his aides, Macpherson and Cheeseman, and ten men. Thereupon the rest of his 700 men turned and fled, pursued by the bullets of the Canadians till there was nothing more to fire at. The story of carpenters sawing the pickets, which Montgomery then tore down with his own hands, took shape in the imagination of a Major Meigs, who was one of Arnold's party. No one behind the leading sections knew what had happened; and the slain, left as they fell, were buried by the drifting snow, whence their frozen bodies were dug out later in the day.

Arnold's column penetrated the barricade across Sous-le-Cap street, situated beneath the Half-Moon battery; but was stopped by the second barricade, at the end of that narrow lane, quite close to where Molson's Bank is now. This second barricade was defended by Major Nairne, Dambourges and others, who held the enemy in check, until Captain Laws, coming from Palace Gate with a strong party, took them in rear and caused the surrender of 427 in all. This completed the victory of the British arms. Arnold was put out of action early in the fight by a ball from the ramparts near Palace Gate, and was carried to the General Hospital.

General Wooster took command, and the besiegers

were reinforced to over their original strength; but no further assaults were made. Batteries were erected at Levis, but did little damage. A fire-ship was sent against the shipping in the Cul-de-Sac, the site of the Champlain market, but without effect. The blockade lasted until the arrival of the British man-of-war *Surprise* on the 6th of May, 1776, when the garrison, thus reinforced, at once made a sortie, only to find that the Americans had already decamped in the utmost confusion, leaving their dinners, artillery, ammunition and baggage behind. On the arrival of more vessels and troops Carleton advanced to Three Rivers, beat the enemy there, and then continued his march without a check to Montreal. In a few more days the last of the invaders had been driven off the soil of Canada for good and all.



Both inscriptions were composed by Major William Wood, President of the Society in 1904, and were approved by the Historical Tablets Committee and by the Society's Patron, the then Governor General, the Earl of Minto, who took the keenest personal interest in the whole undertaking, from first to last.

The tablets, in shield form, are of statuary bronze, with the lettering cast in relief. As works of art they reflect very great credit on the makers, Messrs. Walker and Campbell, of Montreal.

The large one, on the rock under Cape Diamond, measures six feet three inches by five feet nine inches, and weighs about 1,000 pounds. It is thus inscribed:

HERE STOOD
THE UNDAUNTED FIFTY
SAFEGUARDING
CANADA
DEFEATING MONTGOMERY
AT THE PRES-DE-VILLE BARRICADE
ON THE LAST DAY OF
1775
GUY CARLETON
COMMANDING AT
QUEBEC

The wording is designed to bring out the notable fact that there were only fifty men on the British side, defending this barricade against Montgomery, who had a force at least ten times as strong. These fifty are described as “undaunted” because, apart from their gallantry in repelling the assault, they had been long exposed to the invaders’ threat of treating them with the utmost rigour of war, if they persisted in their allegiance. They are also said to have been “safeguarding Canada,” because, although they could not have foreknown so great a destiny, they were then the real, and the only safeguard of the Dominion we live in now.

The tablet on the Molsons’ Bank measures two feet ten inches by two feet six inches, and weighs about 200 pounds. Its inscription is as follows:

HERE STOOD
HER OLD AND NEW DEFENDERS
UNITING GUARDING SAVING
CANADA
DEFEATING ARNOLD
AT THE SAULT-AU-MATELOT BARRICADE
ON THE LAST DAY OF
1775
GUY CARLETON
COMMANDING AT
QUEBEC

The men of the Sault-au-Matelot barricade are called “Her old and new defenders” because the different racial elements of both the old and new régimes were here “uniting” for the first time in history, and thus “guarding” and “saving” the Canada of their own day and of ours. Among them were Frenchmen, French-Canadians, Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotchmen, Welshmen, Channel Islanders, Newfoundlanders, and those “Royal Emigrants” who were the forerunners of the U. E. Loyalists. And on this sacred spot each and all of these widely different ancestors of the present



SAULT-AU-MATELOT TABLET



SWORD OF MAJOR GENL. RICHARD MONTGOMERY.

NOTE ON MONTGOMERY'S SWORD

The following description of Montgomery's sword is taken from Hawkin's Picture of Quebec and the Thompson manuscript in the archives of the Literary and Historical Society.

James Thompson writes:—"Holding the situation of overseer of works in the Royal Engineer Department at Quebec, I had the superintendence of the defences to be erected throughout the place, which brought to my notice almost every incident connected with the military operations of the blockade of 1775; and from the part I had performed in the affair generally, I considered that I had some right to withhold the General's sword, particularly as it had been obtained on the battle ground."

"On its having been ascertained that Montgomery's division had withdrawn, a party went out to view the effects of the shot, when the only part of the body that appeared above the level of the snow was that of the General himself, whose hand and part of the left arm was in an erect position, but the body itself much distorted, the knees being drawn up towards the head; the other bodies that were found at the moment, were those of his aides-de-camps Cheeseman and McPherson, and one sergeant; the whole hard frozen. Montgomery's sword was close by his side, and as soon as it was discovered, which was first by a drummer boy, who made a snatch at it on the spur of the moment, and no doubt considered it as his lawful prize, but I immediately made him deliver it up to me, and some time after I made him a present of seven shillings and six pence by way of prize money."

"The sword has been in my possession to the present day (16 August 1828). It has a head at top of the hilt somewhat resembling a lion's or bull dog's, with cropt

ears, the edges indented, with a ring passing through the chin or underjaw, from which is suspended a double silver chain communicating with the front tip of the guard by a second ring; at the lower end of the handle there is, on each side, the figure of a spread eagle. The whole of the metal part of the hilt is of silver. About half an inch of the back part of the guard was broken off while in my possession. The handle itself is of ivory, and undulated obliquely from top to bottom. The blade, which is twenty-two inches long, and fluted near the back, is single edged with a slight curve towards the point, about six inches of which, however, is sharp on both edges, and the word "Harvey" is imprinted on it, five and a half inches from the top, in Roman capitals, in a direction upwards. The whole length of the blade is two feet four inches; when found it had no scabbard or sheath, but I soon had the present one made and mounted in silver to correspond."

Mr. James Thompson was present at the siege of Louisbourg and came to Quebec with his regiment, the 78th Highlanders, and took part in the battle of the Plains of Abraham. Subsequently he was appointed Deputy Overseer of Public Works in the Royal Engineer Department. He died in Quebec on the 30th August, 1830, at the age of 98 years. He bequeathed the sword to his son, James Thompson, Deputy Commissary General, who, at his death, in December, 1869, willed it to his nephew, James Thompson Harrower, now residing at Levis.

The sword was valued at \$500; and Mr. Harrower kindly allowed it to remain on exhibition in the rooms of the Literary and Historical Society until it should have been sold. In 1878 the Marquess of Lorne succeeded in obtaining it at the exceedingly low price of \$150. Mr. Harrower only accepted this because he thought the representative of the British Crown would be a worthy owner of such a famous relic. To his great indignation, however, Lord Lorne handed the sword over to the representatives of the Livingstone family, Montgomery's nearest American relations, who now keep it in the vaults of Messrs. Tiffany and Co., in New York.