

Daring Raid

In 1814, Presqu'île resident, George Gibson was building a second schooner at Calf Pasture to be supplied to the British Navy.

'A stout, well built vessel' on which 14 guns would have been mounted was only 10 days away from being launched before it fell victim to a raid at Presqu'île. The British hidden jewel on Lake Ontario, that had been the perfect hiding place for much of their supplies, had been found. An American naval captain, Chauncey, relates his role on what happened.

'I received information that the enemy was building a large schooner at Presqu'île. I determined upon her destruction but deferred the execution until she should be nearly ready for launching ...

On the 26th of June, I directed Lieutenant Gregory to take with him sailing masters Vaughan and Dixon, and proceed with the two largest gigs to Nicholson island. He was to conceal his boats and wait for some transports which I had information were expected there to take provisions and materials of war which had been sent up the Bay of Quinte for the troops at York and Fort George.

If these transports did not make their appearance in three or four days he was then to proceed to Presqu' Isle and burn the vessel in the stocks with positive orders not to injure any private property.'

Although the transport vessels did appear, the bateaux were warned of the attempted ambush by another British vessel, and sailed for safety.



American Sailors raided Presqu'île and burned a ship in 1814

After concealing themselves on Nicholson Island for a time, and kidnapping a guide to aid them, Lt. Gregory and his men arrived near Salt Point and burned the schooner to the ground.

Lieutenant Gregory told the local people he met that he would return later to destroy other supplies at Carrying Place, but his capture a short while later meant he was unable to follow through with this threat. This would prove to be the most dramatic, as well as final, incident of the war for the Presqu'île area.

If you have the time, wander down to Calf Pasture and look out onto Salt Point and imagine how devastating that fire must have looked. And when next you look out over the big lake, remember Lake Ontario, as well as Presqu'île, while peaceful now has known the thunder of war.