

# *Contemporary Portraits of Isaac Brock: An Analysis*

by LUDWIG KOSCHE

One of the more intriguing facts in Canadian military and art history is that we lack an authenticated portrait of Major General Sir Isaac Brock, K.B. (1769-1812). Indeed, it is puzzling why later generations should have come to accept various undocumented works as genuine portraits of the man who was the dominant figure in the opening stage of the War of 1812. The primary intent of this article is to come to grips with this anomaly by examining the existing contemporary portraits and establishing if any may be considered authentic. A secondary aim is to present for the first time reproductions of all these portraits within the confines of one article.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the sitter in these works not being reliably identified, all the portraits investigated, save one, lack dates and signatures. For this reason the responsibility for identifying these paintings is primarily that of the historian concerned with military costumes and artifacts and only secondarily that of the art historian. It is the former who can more effectively exploit the evidence in these works as well as the existing documentary basis spotty though it is. Just as important is an elementary reservation which cannot be emphasized too strongly. The process of identification of the sitter is undertaken on the assumption that the work of a portrait artist is essentially faithful to the original subject. To choose a simple example, an epaulet must look like an epaulet; accurate identification cannot be made if room is provided for "artistic licence." No meaningful work is possible without adherence to this principle.

Indispensable information about Brock's appearance comes from participants in the War of 1812 and his nephew and biographer Ferdinand Brock Tupper (1795-1875?). Two American officers saw Brock at Detroit on 16 August 1812. Colonel William

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