



Hamilton

War of 1812 Connections

City of Hamilton Culture Division

Forcible Possession by His Majesty's Troops *Trade, Transshipment and the Depot on Burlington Heights*

By: Michael McAllister, Hamilton Military Museum

By the late 18th century Richard Beasley was squatting on the Burlington bay-shore, at the western end of Lake Ontario, using it as a transshipment point for fur and other commodities. By 1791 the Barton survey shows Beasley in possession of 200 acres on top of Burlington Heights. Once established there, Beasley traded locally with the Six Nations on the Grand River, as well as the Mississauga, who used the Heights alongside Beasley for as much as eight months of the year. By 1799 he was a magistrate, a member of the Legislative Assembly, a Justice of the Peace and a militia officer. He had fenced fields, producing orchards, and stands of valuable hardwood. He had acquired full title to most of the property upon which he had been squatting in Barton Township, and he had embarked on his largest land speculation to date as part of a syndicate which purchased 94,000 acres of Block # 2, Six Nations Reserve.

Through the first decade of the 19th century he sold his mill interest and lands in Ancaster. Though his Block # 2 speculation paid off, he had debts most notably with his cousin Richard Cartwright and his partner Robert Hamilton, who wrote pointed letters and took legal action, to encourage repayment. The mishandling of funds almost led to the sale of his newly constructed brick cottage, barn and sheds to make good. The Heights at the head of the lake were a private conduit through which flowed Beasley's goods and influence.

By the War of 1812, he had shaped the Heights landscape into a picturesque country estate, the centre-piece of which was his Georgian style brick cottage. Beasley had all the appearances of a prosperous country gentleman, but these pursuits were soon sharply interrupted by the arrival of the British Army during the War of 1812.

The Heights had not been fortified prior to June 1st 1813. The idea of a post at the Head of the Lake had been considered by the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe (1791-96). In deciding on where to place his military posts, Simcoe emphasized the need for defensible natural harbours for ship building, as well as access to a road running west from the head of the lake to London and Detroit. Simcoe believed that his best option for the defense of Upper Canada lay in the ability to concentrate his meagre military forces at crisis points by the strategic use of shipping.