



# War of 1812 Connections

City of Hamilton Culture Division

Hamilton

At the head of the lake there was available land, access to the Heights by water and trail, as well as mills and farms to provide flour and meat for the troops. While the land was technically available for a post at the Head of the Lake, Beasley had already occupied much of it. A 1793 map detailing the Governor's travels from Niagara to Detroit includes a 100 acre block of land for a post at the western end of Cootes' Paradise at what is today Dundas and it also shows that all around the proposed post the landscape is dominated by Beasley's improvements. Fenced fields on the Heights, a house and store on the bayshore below the Heights, as well as a mill in Ancaster township. The Governor's route as marked on the map extends from the Niagara river passed Beasley's store on the Burlington bay-shore stretching west past Beasley's mill, as well as the village where his important Mohawk clients lived, on its way to Detroit.

The map also shows that in 1793, the ambitious Beasley occupied more than he owned. Although only officially recognized as having title to a mere 400 acres based on the 1791 survey of Barton township, that did not stop Beasley from occupying and developing 400 acres more that did not belong to him. On paper Beasley may have been squatting, but to someone like Simcoe that was less important than turning a wild patchwork of meadow and forest waste-land into an improved, English style landscape. Regardless of whether he held legal title, Beasley was the one whom Simcoe needed to deal with to establish his depot.

It is not clear how negotiations between Beasley and Simcoe proceeded. An opportunistically minded Beasley may have demanded too high a price for his lands, which convinced Simcoe to look elsewhere. In his defensive plan, Simcoe pinpointed the area as a potential depot, part of a fortified post "wish list" drawn up for southern Upper Canada along with York on Lake Ontario, and Long Point on Lake Erie. All were viewed by the Governor as militarily strategic, but all of these sites were not on the established line of shipment and transshipment controlled by the merchant monopoly of Richard Cartwright and Robert Hamilton.

From the 1790's through the first decade of the nineteenth century, most goods from England landing in Halifax travelled from the ocean along the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario, to Richard Cartwright's prosperous storehouse facilities at Kingston. The rest of the journey via Lake Erie to Detroit and the west was along the Niagara River climbing the massive Niagara escarpment by way of the Queenston Portage which was controlled by Cartwright's partner, Robert Hamilton. Hamilton, like Cartwright, rented out warehouse space; but unlike his partner, Hamilton received a percentage from all freight moving along the Niagara River in exchange for maintaining the portage road up the escarpment around the falls. Storage and transshipment fees guaranteed success in a business where extracting payment from clients was often difficult. In controlling the carrying trade along the lower Great Lakes, Cartwright and Hamilton ensured