# His Majesty's Indian Allies: Native Peoples, the British Crown and the War of 1812

WAR ON THE GREAT LAKES
Canada and the United States in the War of 1812

by
Robert S. Allen

The appointment of William Johnson in 1755 as His Britannic Majesty's "Sole Agent for and Superintendent of the Affairs of our faithful subjects and allies, the six united Nations of Indians and their Confederates in the Northern Parts of North America," created a formal, imperial and centralized Indian Department to direct the affairs of Native peoples on behalf of the British Crown.[1] Prior to the pivotal influence of the regime of Sir William Johnson (1755-74), Indian affairs in colonial America had been marked by a long, vexing and generally rudderless period of imperial "salutary neglect." Inter-colonial land rivalries and wrangling disunity had only further complicated British-Indian relations which fluctuated between the benign and the intolerable. But by the 1750s, the looming and final conflict with France for paramountcy in North America turned British vacillation into resolve. The appointment by royal commission of a single Crown official for the administration and management of Indian Affairs was therefore a sensible and long overdue imperial initiative. Finally, after one hundred and fifty years of permanent British settlement along the eastern shores of the "new world" a formal and centralized policy for the indigenous or Native peoples had emanated from Britain. The cohesive vehicle for implementing the policy directives was the British Indian Department, the forerunner of the present Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Until the end of the War of 1812, the fundamental and motivating tenet of the policy was to court

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[1] Royal Commission of Sir William Johnson, Court of St. James', 11 March 1761, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York,* eds. E.B. O'Callaghan and B. Fernow, 15 vols. (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1856-87) 7: 458-9. The official titles varied slightly in wording from April 1755. The 1761 version is the most complete in descriptive detail.

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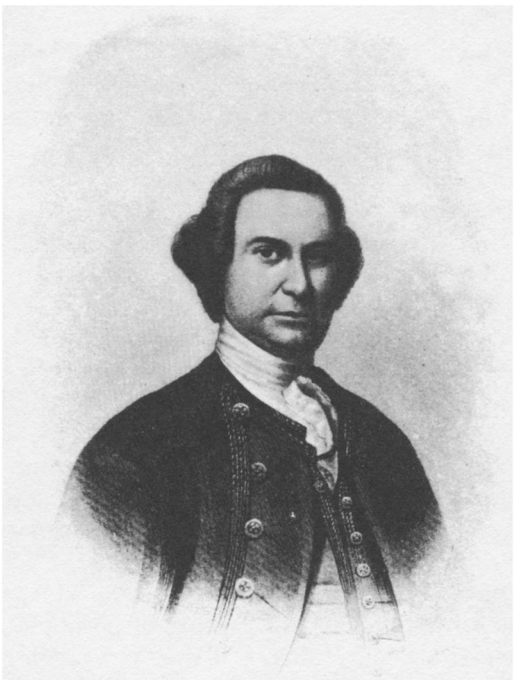

Courtesy, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

Portrait of Sir William Johnson from Augustus C. Buell, *Sir William Johnson* (New York, 1903).

and maintain the allegiance of the Native peoples to the royal cause. As a result, and especially in the post-1774 years against the common enemy (the Americans), an enduring and symbiotic relationship evolved between the Native peoples and the British Crown which was rooted in the mutual need and desire for "protection and survival."[2] British Indian policy from 1774 to 1815 was thus geared to ensure the preservation and defense of Canada through the military use and assistance of "His Majesty's Indian Allies."[3]

The Native peoples were not duped by this British scheme, and demonstrated an equal shrewdness in manipulating Crown officials in order to preserve traditional tribal lands and culture. Yet the fundamental and significant difference was that the British manipulated successfully. Perhaps the Indians faced a hopeless task in attempting to stem the tide of the frontier. Nonetheless, the results were conclusive, for while the Iroquois lost their ancient castles along the Finger Lakes of Upper New York, and later the tribes of the Ohio Valley were foresaken, the British, by securing invaluable Indian assistance, defeated the French and then, more particularly, defended successfully the Crown's interest in British North America from the American invaders of 1812.

The success of British Indian policy during the pre-War of 1812 years can be demonstrated by detailing a few examples. Throughout the Seven Years' War, for instance, Johnson managed to retain the loyalty of the Mohawk and others of the Six Nations Confederacy of Iroquois in the conflict between Britain and France for imperial supremacy in North America. His nominal victory at the battle of Lake George in September 1755 against the French regulars of Baron Dieskau, held the wavering Iroquois neutral for nearly three years, in spite of subsequent French successes at Fort Bull and Oswego in 1756, Fort William Henry in 1757, and Ticonderoga in 1758. But a British resurgence, exemplified by a smashing victory of Johnson's loyal Iroquois at the battle of La Belle Famille near

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[2] This theme to the Royal Proclamation of 1763 is detailed in Jack Stagg, "Protection and Survival: Anglo-Indian Relations 1748-1763 — Britain and the Northern Colonies" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cantab., 1984).

[3] This theme is developed by Robert S. Allen, "His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774-1815" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wales, forthcoming).

Fort Niagara in July 1759 against a French relief column, coupled with the fall of Quebec two months later, ended French imperial ambitions in North America.[4]

In April 1775, less than a year after the death of Sir William Johnson, the 'shots heard round the world' at Lexington and Concord initiated a cruel and bitter civil war and rebellion in colonial America. Once again, the military support of Native peoples was vital to the Crown's vested interest in America. British Indian policy was successful during these years in large measure because of the several tribes that had long opposed the intrusion into their lands of their hereditary foe, the American backwoodsman. Native peoples were thus thrown into a natural military alliance with the British Crown, and against the common enemy.

Yet at the peace negotiations of 1783, British plenipotentiaries "sold the Indians to Congress" and transferred sovereignty of all Indian—held lands south of the Great Lakes and west of the Mississippi River, to the new United States — the first abandonment.[5] The warriors were "thunderstruck."[6] They had not lost their war nor their land. Indeed in June and August 1782, the Indians had won two successive and decisive victories at Sandusky and Blue Licks against the Americans. In the latter engagement, the legendary Daniel Boone of Kentucky was among the routed.[7] Following some hasty rethinking, prompted by the fear of Indian reprisals, the British decided to retain the eastern posts; and the warriors, now encouraged and supplied by His Majesty's government, continued the struggle to preserve and defend aboriginal lands. After years of conflict, tribal resistance in the Ohio Valley

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[4] For La Belle Famille, see Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Siege — 1759: The Campaign Against Niagara* (Youngstown, N.Y.: Old Fort Niagara Association, 1986), 69-80; and for a general account of the French and Indian War which combines history and literature, Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe* (1884; reprint, New York: Collier, 1962).

[5] See, National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), Ottawa, Haldimand papers, MG21, B100: 157.

[6] Haldimand to Thomas Townshend (later Lord Sydney), 23 October 1782, ibid., MG21, B55:233. For an assessment of the critical 1782-83 period on the American frontier, Colin G. Calloway, "Suspicion and Self-Interest: British-Indian Relations and the Peace of Paris," *The Historian* 48 (1985): 41-60.

[7] Milo M. Quaife, "The Ohio Campaigns of 1782," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Now *Journal of American History*) 18 (1931):

finally collapsed at the battle of Fallen Timbers in August 1794. At this critical moment, the British at nearby Fort Miami, despite the most avowed promises to the contrary, slammed shut the gates of the fort, and assumed a lofty position of splendid isolation.[8] The formalization of the Jay Treaty with the American republic soon after stipulated in part the removal of the British from the western post by June 1796. Joseph Brant, the Mohawk chief and Loyalist, tersely summarized the situation by stating that "this is the second time the poor Indians have been left in the lurch."[9]

British Indian policy between 1775 and 1796 had been effective and coldly calculating. The new Loyalist settlements north of the lakes and rivers at Amherstburg, Sandwich, Newark, Quinte and along the upper St. Lawrence, protected as they had been for thirteen years by a convenient Indian barrier, prospered and gained a measure of security, while to the south, warriors fought and died, not to preserve and defend British Canada, but in a vain attempt to retain ancient tribal lands.[10]

Between 1796 and 1807 the influence and prestige of the British Indian Department waned to insignificance as the Indians were no longer needed as military allies. During these quiet years, expenditures were drastically reduced, and the department was re-organized. In a "Plan for the Future Government of the Indian Department" in June 1796, the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs was established for each of the replacement forts in Upper Canada.[11] As a result,

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[8] Maj. William Campbell to Lt. Col. R.G. England, Fort Miami, 20 August 1794, *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents relating to his administration of the government of Upper Canada,* ed., E.A. Cruikshank, 5 vols. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923-31), 2: 396.

[9] Joseph Brant to Joseph Chew, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections* 20 vols. (Lansing, MI: Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 1892), 434-35, (hereafter *MPHC*).

[10] For Loyalist settlement in Canada, see *The Loyal Americans: The Military Role of the Loyalist Provincial Corps and Their Settlement in British North America, 1775-1784,* ed. Robert S. Allen (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983).

[11] For a general account of the British Indian Department, see Robert S. Allen, "The British Indian Department and the Frontier in North America, 1755-1830," Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History 14 (1975); hereafter "British Indian Department." For a specific account of a senior Indian Department official, see Reginald Horsman,

for instance, Matthew Elliott was appointed superintendent for the new British post at Amherstburg. Although the traditional military role of the department had reached a nadir at this time, the superintendents were nonetheless instructed to "use the utmost diligence to preserve and promote friendship between the troops and Indians . . . and to maintain harmony at the King's (new) posts."[12] The wisdom of attempting to maintain the chain of friendship alliance proved prophetic. The "Chesapeake Affair" of June 1807 and the bellicose reaction by an aroused American public for a redemption of national honor produced a fear of invasion in the weakly defended settlement of the Canadas. In particular, the position of Upper Canada was precarious because the defensive strategy devised by the British, already heavily burdened with the Napoleonic war, was to preserve the fortress of Quebec and subordinate all other considerations. Once again, the future security, and even survival, of Upper Canada was to be largely dependent on the allegiance and fighting qualities of His Majesty's Indian Allies. As a result, the British Indian Department was quickly restored to a respectful position of prominence as it was to play an integral role in combating this new danger.

During the winter of 1807-08, Sir James Craig, the captain general and governor-in-chief of British North America, developed a policy for the frontier which was to guide the conduct of the British Indian Department for the next three hectic years. Craig reasoned that in the event of a war, the Indians would not be idle, and if the British did not use them, they undoubtedly would be "employed against us."[13] Therefore, the Indians must be conciliated, but their chiefs must be persuaded not to engage in a premature attack on the Americans. Thus, cautioned Craig, the officers of the Indian Department should avoid making any commitment with them at least in public. In a dispatch to a worried Francis Gore, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, Craig noted the "long lasting ties" between the King and the tribes, and suggested

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*Matthew Elliott: British Indian Agent* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1964).

[12] Alexander McKee to Lord Dorchester, Detroit, 7 June 1796, PAC, RG8 (Military), C Series, 249.

[13] Craig to Gore, Quebec, 6 December 1807, NAC, Report on Canadian Archives for 1896 (Ottawa, 1897): 31, note B.

that provisions be supplied to the Indians to enable them to protect themselves against the Americans who "obviously desired to take their country."[14] Craig ordered that "the officers of the Indian Department must be diligent and active, the communications must be constant, these topics must be held up to them not merely in Great Councils and public assemblies, they should be privately urged to some of their leading men, with whom endeavours should be used to lead them to a confidence with us."[15]

The dual Indian policy of Craig, one public and one private, was very reminiscent of the immediate post-1783 efforts. As before, the British Indian Department was to renew the old courtship rituals, and secure Indian loyalty to the King, and thus preserve British imperial and territorial jurisdiction in Upper Canada by confounding the expansionist ambitions of the United States. Gore was enthusiastic about the plan and sent William Claus, the deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, to the British post at Amherstburg, the key Indian center in the province, where he was to assemble the chiefs, "consult privately" with them and remind them of the "Artful and Clandestine manner, in which the Americans have obtained possession of their lands, and of their obvious intention of ultimately possessing themselves of the whole and driving the Indians out of the Country."[16] However, the officers of the department were reminded to dissuade the tribes from any warlike action until or unless Britian should be at war with the United States.

In the spring of 1808 several Indian bands began to assemble at Amherstburg to hear the British speak in council. For the officers of the Indian Department, the implementation of Craig's policy required delicate and intricate negotiations, particularly since "the Indian Nations owing to the long continuance of Peace have been neglected by us, and from the considerable curtailments made in the Presents to those People it appears, that the retaining of their attachment to the King's

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[14] Craig to Gore, Quebec, 28 December 1807, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 232-3.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Gore to Claus, York, 29 January 1808, enclosing "Secret Instructions," NAC, RG10 (Indian Affairs), 11. For a brief account of British intrigue among the tribes, see Reginald Horsman, "British Indian Policy in the Northwest, 1807-1812," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (1958): 51-66.

(Courtesy the McCord Museum of Canadian History, McGill University, Montreal.)

**Fort McKay, painting by Peter Rindisbacher, circa 1821.**

Interests has not of late years been thought an object worthy of serious consideration."[17] As a consequence, William Claus, Matthew Elliott and others, worked diligently to regain the affections of the Indians. In one council, a Shawnee contingent under Captain Johnny, Blackbeard, and the Buffalo, was told that the King was trying to maintain peace with the Americans, but if he failed, the Indians could expect to hear from the British and together they would regain the country taken from them by the Americans. Heartened by this news, Indian warriors and chiefs, including the influential Shawnee leader Tecumseh who, like Pontiac and Joseph Brant before him, dreamed of a united Indian confederacy, gathered in increasing numbers at Amherstburg to meet with the British. Although the innocuous public councils were conducted with great decorum, formality, and military pomp, the private communications with select chiefs (the backroom politics of the day) were where the real strategy was formulated and entrenched. Yet, in spite of the different Indian Nations collecting on the Wabash to preserve their country from any encroachments, the tribes remained somewhat wary of promised British support. In fact, Major-General Isaac Brock noted that "before we can expect an active co-operation on the part of the Indians the reduction of Detroit and Michilimackinac must convince that people, who conceive themselves to have been sacrificed in 1794, to our policy, that we are earnestly engaged in the war."[18] In spite of these justifiable Indian concerns, the efforts of the British Indian Department in renewing the chain of friendship at Amherstburg was an unqualified success.

For the next two years tribal delegates constantly visited the British at Amherstburg to pledge their support to the King and to receive gifts and provisions in return. The department, receiving no instructions to the contrary, continued to win and maintain the allegiance of the various tribes. By the summer of 1810, Indian frustration and anger at American encroachments on their lands and British Indian Department inspiration, combined to make the Indian appetite for war increasingly

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[17] Craig to Gore, Quebec, 10 March 1808, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 239-40.

[18] Brock to Sir George Prevost, Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of British North America, York, 2 December 1811, *The Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, K.B.,* ed. F.B. Tupper (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1847), 123-30.

difficult to control. In July, a Sauk and Fox delegation arrived at Amherstburg and requested clothing, kettles, muskets, shot, and powder. In council, Elliott urged the Indians to "keep your eyes fixed on me; my tomahawk is now up; be you ready, but do not strike until I give the signal."[19] This speech exhilarated the tribes who were now most enthusiastic about the prospects of a new British-Indian alliance against the common enemy. In November, 2,000 Shawnee, Sauk, Winnebago, Ottawa, and Potawatomi gathered at Amherstburg for a grand council. Tecumseh acted as spokesman for the tribes and informed the British that "we are now determined to defend it [their land] ourselves, and after raising you on your feet leave you behind but expecting you will push forward towards us what may be necessary to supply our wants."[20]

The officers of the British Indian Department were astounded by these words. Elliott wrote Claus stating that "our Neighbours are on the eve of an Indian War, and I have no doubt that the Confederacy is almost general."[21] The November council had placed the British in a difficult and embarrassing position. The policy of 1808 had been too successful. Now the great problem for the department was to prevent the over-zealous Indians from attacking the Americans before the official declaration of war between Great Britain and the United States. In a desperate attempt to reverse policy, the department was instructed to dissuade the tribes from their projected plan of hostility. The chiefs were to understand clearly that they "must not expect any assistance" from the British.[22] By the summer of 1811 the officers of the Indian Department were striving frantically to stall the Indian war by attempting to convince various influential chiefs that the time was not ripe. But the Indians' desire for war was unshakable and sporadic raids commenced against the American settlements along the Wabash River. The Americans deduced that British intrigue

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[19] Elliott to Claus, Amherstburg, 9 July 1810, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 269-70.

[20] Speech of Tecumseh to Major Taylor, Fort Malden (Amherstburg), 15 November 1810, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 275-7. For an account of Tecumseh's motivation, see Charles H. Goltz, "Tecumseh and the Northwest Indian Confederacy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Western Ontario, 1973).

[21] Elliott to Claus, Amherstburg, 16 November 1810, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 277-8.

[22] Craig to Gore, Quebec, 2 February 1811, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 280-1.

and instigation was behind the revival of Indian resistance and Indian-American and Anglo-American relations rapidly deteriorated. Following the battle of Tippecanoe on 7 November 1811 in which "British muskets were found on the battlefield," the Americans charged that "the whole of the Indians on this frontier have been completely armed and equipped out of the king's stores" at Amherstburg.[23] A war between the Indians, Americans and British now appeared certain.

For several months, prior to Tippecanoe, the British Indian Department had made genuine efforts to prevent an Indian war, but the vacillation of policy and the long delays in communicating often different instructions had hampered the effectiveness of the department and confused the visiting chiefs. The only alternative was the renewal of the traditional friendship and military alliance as revived in 1808. Therefore, throughout the spring of 1812, following the latest instructions of using "your utmost endeavours to promote His Majesty's Indian Interest in general," the British Indian Department secretly prepared the tribes for war.[24] By June of 1812 when the United States finally declared war on Great Britain and proceeded to invade Upper Canada, the British Indian Department, probably relieved at receiving the news, was waiting at Amherstburg with an impatient host of Indian warriors for the commencement of military action.

Nowhere was the success of the long-standing and evolving British Indian policy better demonstrated than during the War of 1812. From the moment hostilities commenced, the fighting efforts of His Majesty's Indian Allies were generally successful, particularly during the first few critical summer months of 1812, as evidenced by a series of Indian inspired victories at such places as Michilimackinac and along the Detroit River at Brownston, Maguaga (Monguagon) and Detroit.[25] The Native leaders came from many tribes and regions of the Great Lakes.

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[23] From the *Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, Ohio), 27 November 1811, and the *Western Intelligencer* (Worthington, Ohio), 25 December 1811.

[24] "Instructions for the Good Government of the Indian Department," received by Sir George Prevost, Quebec, 1 May 1812, *MPHC* 25 (1894): 295-304.

[25] General details of these events can be gleaned from George F.G. Stanley, *The War of 1812: Land Operations* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983), 83-117 and Pierre Breton, *The Invasion of Canada, 1812-1813* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 101-88. Personal accounts of these

Roundhead, Walk-in-the-Water and Split Log were Wyandot, formerly known as the Huron of Detroit; Main Poc was a Potawatomi; Neywash, an Ottawa; Tomah, a Menonomee; Black Hawk, a Sauk from the upper Mississippi; and there were many others. Yet Tecumseh, a Shawnee, emerged as the individual of dominant authority and influence among the tribes.[26] Subsequently glamorized in poetry and prose by non-native writers, especially Canadian, Tecumseh possessed no particular love nor loyalty to Canada.[27] His sole interest was to establish a strong pan-Indian movement and resist the Americans who were coveting the traditional lands of the Native peoples. Thus during the War of 1812, the warriors used the necessary convenience of a formal military alliance with the British, flung themselves against the common enemy, and in the process fought magnificently, if unwittingly, in the defense of the British Crown in Canada. In January 1813, Roundhead, with Wyandot and others of His Majesty's Indian Allies, spearheaded a smashing and bloody British-Indian victory over the Americans at the River Raisin (Frenchtown), now Monroe, Michigan.[28] The killing of some Americans wounded after the battle by warriors, an event neither unique nor rare for both sides in the annals of frontier warfare in America, merely heightened the intensity and determination of the combatants. Near Fort Meigs along the Maumee River in May, Tecumseh caught a reinforcement of Kentucky volunteers in the woods, and virtually slaughtered them. Yet, at Fort Stephenson along the Sandusky River in August, the warriors decided to assume the role of spectators, and watched British regulars destroy

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events can be read in *Richardson's War of 1812,* ed. Alexander C. Casselman (Toronto: Historical Publishing Co., 1902) and *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer,* ed. Milo M. Quaife (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1940).

[26] A recent biography is R. David Edmunds, *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984).

[27] Some Canadian examples include John Richardson (1828), Charles Mair (1886) and Bliss Carman (1918). An American version is provided by R. David Edmunds, "The Thin Red Line: Tecumseh, the Prophet, and Shawnee Resistance," *Timeline* 4 (December 1987/January 1988): 2-19.

[28] For full details, see Dennis M. Au, *War on the Raisin: A Narrative Account of the War of 1812 in the River Raisin Settlement, Michigan Territory* (Monroe, MI: Monroe Country Historical Commission, 1981).

themselves in futile charges against the formidable enemy defenses.[29]

But with the American naval victory at Put-in-Bay on Lake Erie in September 1813, the British position at Fort Malden (Amherstburg) became untenable. The tactical decision to withdraw from the region, owing to the fact that the Americans now controlled Lake Erie and could play havoc with British logistics, especially provisioning, was vehemently opposed by the chiefs and warriors, who remembered 1783 and 1794. To the Native peoples, the British departure was also a symbolic abandonment of Indian territorial interests, and thus represented a third betrayal. A few days later on 5 October 1813, at Moravian Town on the Thames River, representatives of many tribes — Shawnee, Ottawa, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Wyandot (those who hadn't defected), Delaware, Sauk, Fox, Winnebago and even some Creek from the south, stood grimly with Tecumseh; and possibly feeling that courage and defiance were their only remaining true allies, faced for a final time the ever advancing ancient enemy. The battle was brief and furious. The 41st Regiment of Foot (later the Welch Regiment), physically exhausted after fourteen months of almost continuous and arduous campaigning against much superior forces, at least in numbers, uncharacteristically broke ranks after firing two ragged volleys, and surrendered or dispersed.[30] His Majesty's Indian Allies, positioned in the swamps and woods to the right of the British position, continued to contest the battle for a time, before stubbornly, but in good order, giving way. Tecumseh was slain; and with him ended the dream of a united Indian resistance against the territorial ambitions of the United States in the lower Great Lakes region.[31]

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[29] These events can be followed in *Richardson's War of 1812,* 148-88; Stanley, *The War of 1812,* 148-61; and Pierre Berton, *Flames Across the Border 1813-1814* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1981), 101-47.

[30] Two personal accounts of the 41st Regiment of Foot (later the Welch Regiment) during the War of 1812 are "The War in Canada," by an unidentified officer, property of The Welch Regiment Museum (Cardiff), handwritten and unpublished, n.d.; and "A Common Soldier's Account (Shadrach Byfield)," *Recollections of the War of 1812* (1828-1854; reprint Toronto: Baxter Publishing Company, 1964), 1-107.

[31] See John Sugden, *Tecumseh's Last Stand* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

Although His Majesty's Indian Allies faded from the scene along the Detroit front, following the Battle of the Thames, what ended in one area, had just begun in another. This second front — the Northwest — merits some considerable attention, for important events took place there which are too little known, and which could have altered dramatically the future geographic boundaries of Canada and the United States. Again, His Majesty's Indian Allies were prominent.

British paramountcy in the upper Mississippi and the Northwest depended on the military allegiance of the Indian tribes of that vast region. The British and Indian capture of Michilimackinac; and the Potawatomi massacre of Fort Dearborn (Chicago) in the summer of 1812 had "opened the northern hive" of Indians against the Americans.[32] Equally important, the zealous activities of the officers of the British Indian Department and several prominent Canadian fur traders in courting and maintaining the alliance with the tribes had resulted in a "British" domination in the Northwest which remained unchallenged until the late spring of 1814.[33]

In May of that year, an American force from St. Louis under General William Clark, governor of Missouri Territory, ascended the Mississippi and, meeting only token resistance from the Sauk and Fox, took possession of Prairie du Chien. After constructing a stockade which he named Fort Shelby and content with his success, Clark returned to St. Louis. He left a small garrison of about seventy men under Lieutenant Joseph Perkins of the Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry to guard the village and the new post. The news of the American presence in the upper Mississippi stung the British commandant at Michilimackinac, Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDouall. He reacted immediately by dispatching a force "to dislodge the

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[32] See "John Kinzie's Narrative of the Fort Dearborn Massacre," ed. Mentor L. Williams, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 46 (Winter 1953): 343-62.

[33] The portion of this article dealing with the War of 1812 in the Northwest has been largely excerpted from Robert S. Allen, "Canadians on the Upper Mississippi: The Capture and Occupation of Prairie du Chien during the War of 1812," *Military Collector and Historian* (Fall 1979): 118-23; for general accounts see, Alex R. Gilpin, *The War of 1812 in the Old Northwest* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1958) and G.F.G. Stanley, "British Operations in the American Northwest, 1812-15," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 22 (1943): 91-106.

American General from his new conquest, and make him relinquish the immense tract of country he had seized upon in consequence and which brought him into the very heart of that occupied by our friendly Indians." Although his own position was weak, McDouall was fully cognizant of the critical threat posed by the Americans at Prairie du Chien to British military hegemony and Canadian fur trade interests in the Northwest. If the enemy was not removed from the area "there was an end to our connection with the Indians . . . tribe after tribe would be graned [sic] over or subdued, and thus would be destroyed the only barrier which protects the Great trading establishments of the North West and the Hudson's Bay Company."[34]

In late June, an expedition under Lt. Col. William McKay was dispatched to Prairie du Chien. They were joined en route by voyageurs, Green Bay militia, and a horde of Indians. McKay was singularly unimpressed with the tribal allies and commented upon his arrival in front of Fort Shelby that his contingent had swelled to 650 men, of whom 120 were Canadian Volunteers, Michigan Fencibles, and officers of the Indian Department, the remainder Indians who proved to be "perfectly useless."[35] The small American fort containing two blockhouses and six pieces of cannon was situated on a hill overlooking the village. A large gunboat, the *Governor Clark,* was anchored in the middle of the Mississippi River. This floating blockhouse, immune from the effects of musket fire, mounted fourteen cannon and had a crew of eighty men. It was constructed so that the men on board could row swiftly in any direction. The unexpected appearance of McKay and his mixed force on Sunday, 17 July, caught the Americans by surprise. It was a pleasant day and the officers were preparing to take a pleasure ride and enjoy an outing in the country. After a dramatic exchange of notes, Perkins concluded by stating that he preferred to defend to the last man rather than surrender. This produced a three hour barrage against the fort and gunboat. The Americans returned the fire. The *Governor Clark,* leaking and taking casualties, withdrew down river. For the next two days McKay con-

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[34] McDouall to Lt. Gen. Gordon Drummond, Michilimackinac, 16 July 1814, *MPHC* 15 (1890): 611.

[35] McKay to McDouall, Prairie du Chien, Fort McKay, 27 July 1814, *MPHC* 15 (1890): 623.

ducted siege operations. Two breastworks were constructed, and "a constant but perfectly useless" musket fire was maintained against the fort. Some of the Indians "behaved in a most villanous manner" and plundered the inhabitants in the village. On 19 July, McKay "resolved to accomplish something more decisive," and marched his troops into the recently completed works and prepared red hot shot for the cannon. The Americans, seeing "that a severe assault of some kind was about to be made, raised the white flag." By the terms of the capitulation, McKay took possession of the fort, several pieces of cannon, military and camp equipment, and a large quantity of ammunition and foodstuffs. The surrendered garrison was permitted to retire unmolested in boats down river to St. Louis. McKay was pleased with the Michigan Fencibles who "behaved with great courage, coolness and regularity," and "tho in the midst of a hot fire not a man was even wounded." Indeed, purred McKay, "all acted with that courage and activity so becoming Canadian Militia or Volunteers."[36]

Two days after the success at Fort Shelby, the Indians, whose military prowess had been so recently maligned by McKay, won a crushing victory over the Americans at Rock Island rapids, a few miles south of Prairie du Chien. This American force of about 120 regulars and rangers under the command of Major John Campbell, and unaware of the recent developments, was arriving in six keelboats to reinforce the garrison at Fort Shelby. Near the Indian villages scattered along the banks of the Rock River, about 400 Sauk, Fox and Kickapoo attacked and severely mauled the relief column. The Indians fought with a fierce intensity and, desperate to protect their villages and property, "the women even jumped on board with hoes and some breaking heads, others breaking casks, some trying to cut holes in her bottom to sink her, and others setting fire to her decks."[37] About fifty Americans were killed and wounded in the engagement. Joined by the timely arrival of the *Governor Clark,* Campbell and his remnant made a precipitate retreat to St. Louis. A jubilant McKay reported that "this is perhaps one of the most brilliant actions fought by Indians only since the commencement of the war."[38]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] McKay Report, Supplement, 29 July 1814, ibid.

[38] Ibid.

The twin victories at Prairie du Chien and the Rock Island Rapids in July, coupled with the successful defense of Michilimackinac in August, reasserted and confirmed British superiority in the Northwest. In the Upper Mississippi, McKay crowned his success in a symbolic sense by modestly renaming Fort Shelby, Fort McKay. He then promptly retired to his quarters for he had developed "a swelling on the right side of the head" and "a violent fever." In fact he was suffering from a severe case of the mumps. He soon recovered and departed for Michilimackinac.

His successor at Fort McKay was Captain Thomas Gummersall (Tige) Anderson, the commander of the Mississippi Volunteers. As post commandant, Anderson strengthened Fort McKay and built a northeast blockhouse. He worried about the poor harvest that year, and because of the want of provisions, he ordered the Mississippi Volunteers to help the local farmers in getting in the grain. The troops were also kept occupied performing daily garrison duties. There were few diversions, except for excessive rum drinking and watching the occasional exciting spectacle of inter-tribal lacrosse in which several participants usually "got sore wounds from the ball and the hurl stick."[39]

In late summer a second and larger American expedition of 350 men and eight gunboats under the command of Major Zachary Taylor, future president of the United States, was launched against the Indian villages along the Rock River. About 1,200 Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, Winnebago, and Sioux under the leadership of Black Hawk, the Sauk and "zealous partisan of the British cause," assembled to meet the American threat. Fully aware of these events, Anderson dispatched Duncan Graham of the Indian Department and thirty men, and James Keating of the Royal Artillery with two swivel-guns and a 3 pounder to bolster Indian courage. In the early morning of 5 September, the Indians and Canadians attacked Taylor's flotilla at Rock Island. The accuracy of the guns under Keating which was "base enough to knock the Splinters into the men's faces" in the gunboats, and the confidence of the Indians who "raised a yell and commenced firing on us in every direction," convinced Taylor of the futility of attempting to destroy the Indian

[39] Captain Thomas G. Anderson, "Anderson's Journal at Fort McKay, 1814," *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 9 (1882): 207-61.

villages and corn fields, and of pushing north to Prairie du Chien.[40] With the Indians in pursuit for nearly three miles, the Americans retreated down river. They had suffered about fifteen killed and wounded. Indian casualties were considered negligible. At the entrance of the Des Moines River, Taylor built Fort Johnson. In October, this last vestige of an American presence in the upper Mississippi was burned, and the garrison retired to St. Louis. No further military efforts were made against Rock Island or Prairie du Chien.

By the late autumn at Fort McKay, rations were becoming scarce. To alleviate the food shortage, Anderson discharged the Green Bay militia and sent them home. The remaining troops received corn one day, flour and pork the next. Of greater concern was the increasing number of Indian families who were camping around Prairie du Chien awaiting the arrival of the annual supplies from the Indian Department. These problems remained unsolved when Anderson was finally relieved of his temporary command on 30 November 1814. His dedication and abilities were proven, and he remained at Fort McKay in local command of the Michigan Fencibles. Andrew Bulger, a Newfoundlander, took command of Fort McKay on this last day of November, his twenty-fifth birthday.[41] The situation was both dangerous and delicate as the new commandant had inherited the twin problems of garrison discontent and tribal irritation at the scarcity of provisions. The troops were bored and insolent. They were now existing mainly on a scanty allowance of bread and a ration of "wild meat" when available. Determined to preserve order, Bulger began to instill a sense of pride and discipline in his men. This goal was achieved in early January 1815, when he quickly suppressed a near mutiny among the Michigan Fencibles and flogged the three worst offenders. Thereafter the corps assumed a more steadfast military bearing.[42]

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[40] The battle at Rock Island is described in Milo M. Quaife, "An Artilleryman of Old Fort Mackinac," *Burton Historical Collection Leaflet* No. 6 (1928): 39-40.

[41] Andrew Bulger, *An Autobiographical sketch of the services of the late Captain Andrew Bulger of the Royal Newfoundland Fencible Regiment* (Bangalore, India: Regimental Press, 2nd Bt., 10th Regiment, 1865).

[42] Brian Leigh Dunnigan "The Michigan Fencibles," *Michigan History* 57 (Winter 1973): 277-95.

In addition, Bulger was instructed to "cultivate a good understanding" with the Indian tribes and maintain their allegiance to the British. Throughout the winter of 1814-15, his duties were "as unceasing as they were arduous," and he succeeded in gaining the continued affection of the Indians by visiting several of their villages.[43] Unfortunately he also became embroiled in a bitter feud with Robert Dickson, Agent and Superintendent to the Western Indians, over the control and feeding of the Indian allies. Dickson had been prominent in the fur trade for thirty years before the war, and he was the senior officer of the British Indian Department in the Northwest. He was married to a Sioux woman and was genuinely concerned at the destitute condition of the Indians, apart from their military value. Relations between the two men became increasingly strained over specific areas of responsibility. Dickson insisted that supplies to the Indians must be increased and he showed a bias in feeding the Sioux bands. Bulger endeavored "to promote a fair, equal and judicious distribution" of provisions and gifts to the Indian families, and he refused to allow the Indian Department to usurp his authority or that of the British army.[44] He reported to McDouall that the conduct of Dickson had placed the garrison and other western Indian allies in danger of further starvation. The feud became petty and degenerated into name-calling. McDouall fully supported Bulger, and in one letter he referred to Dickson as that "insidious, intriguing, dangerous, yet despicable character."[45] This nastiness was terminated when McDouall finally ordered that "the Indian Department on the Mississippi is subject to and entirely under the orders of Captain Bulger."[46] In April 1815 Dickson was ordered to Michilimackinac. This whole episode, coupled with the boredom and isolation of Prairie du Chien, so disgusted Duncan Graham that "was there not favourable appearances to the termination of this drudgery," he reckoned that "he would throw up instantly." The disconsolate Graham proved prophetic when he wrote:

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[43] McDouall to Bulger, Instructions, Michilimackinac, 29 October 1814, NAC, MG19, E5 (Bulger Papers), 1.

[44] Ibid.

[45] McDouall to Bulger, Michilimackinac, 20 February 1815, ibid.

[46] Ibid.

> Here we are posted since last fall, without news from any quarter, and destitute of provisions, sociability, harmony or good understanding. Not even a glass of grog, nor a pipe of tobacco, to pass away the time, and if a brief period don't bring a change for the better, I much dread the united Irishmen's wish will befall this place which god forbid it should — a bad Winter, a worse Spring, a bloody Summer, and no King.[47]

In fact official news of peace reached Prairie du Chien in the late spring of 1815. Strong war-parties to threaten St. Louis, and "keep the Americans at home to defend that place" had already been dispatched. In these raids the Indians "took more scalps within the last six weeks than they did during the whole of the preceding spring and summer upon this frontier."[48] Bulger immediately recalled the warriors. As the basis of the peace treaty was status quo ante bellum, the "mutual restoration of all forts" became a priority. At Michilimackinac, McDouall was "penetrated with grief at the restoration of this fine Island, a fortress built by Nature for herself." He was "equally mortified at giving up Fort McKay to the Americans," but there was no alternative but compliance. The crestfallen McDouall concluded by observing that "our negotiators as usual, have been egregiously duped . . . they have shown themselves profoundly ignorant of the concerns of this part of the Empire."[49] At Fort McKay on 23 May, Bulger assembled the chiefs for a grand council and explained the terms of the peace. Black Hawk, that "whole hearted man and unflinching warrior, cried like a child saying our Great Mother [Great Britain] has thus concluded, and further talk is useless." Two days later, after distributing presents to the tribes and leaving them "above want," His Majesty's troops gathered their possessions, burned the fort and departed the upper Mississippi forever. Of particular note during this period of the so-called 'British' occu-

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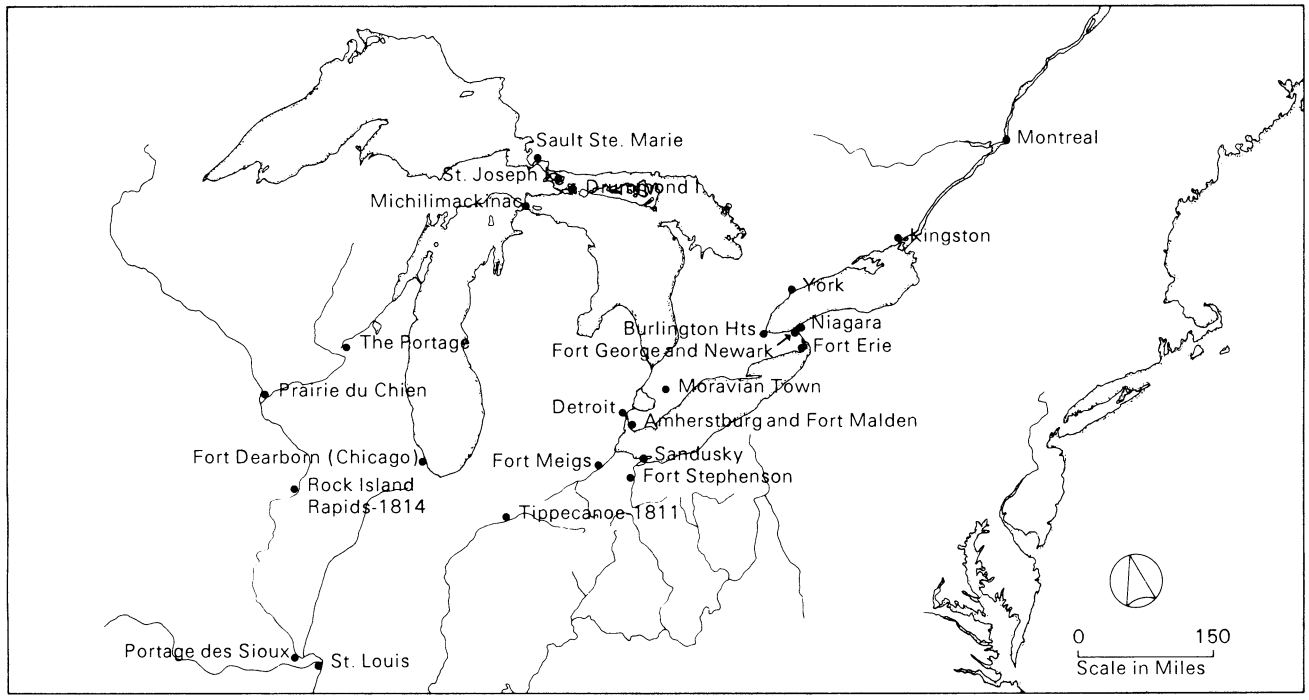
[47] Graham to John Lawe, Prairie du Chien, 14 March 1815, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* 10 (1883-85): 131.

[48] Andrew Bulger, *An Autobiographical sketch,* 21; *Kingston Gazette* (Kingston, Upper Canada), 29 April 1815.

[49] McDouall to Bulger, Michilimackinac, 5 May 1815, NAC, RG8 (Military), C Series, 688.




**Western Upper Canada and the Northwest, 1796-1818.**

From, Robert S. Allen, *"The British Indian Department and the Frontier in North America, 1755 - 1830,"* Canadian Historic Sites/Lieux historiques canadiens No. 14. Used with permission.

pation of Prairie du Chien, was that all three post commanders and most of the garrison, were Canadians.[50]

In the Northwest, the War of 1812 was a very different matter than the one played out along the Detroit. When the United States went to war in June 1812 to redress national honor and capture Canada, an early territorial ambition which anticipated the American vision of manifest destiny for the continent, the key consideration for Upper Canada was defense. The concept of 'Manifest Destiny,' replete with spiritual and religious connotations, was used by the United States to justify that westward sweeping movement in which successive Indian frontiers were conquered and pacified. It was God's will, apparently, that Americans must dominate and control North America. The suggestion that the United States usurped a large part of the continent by purchase, war and theft, is too harsh. But, an argument could be made that the zealous young republic dispossessed tribe after tribe during the long epic years of 'Westward Ho;' and it did so by taking thousands upon thousands of hectares or acres of unceded Indian lands, to which no consideration, recognition nor acknowledgement was given that these indigenous peoples might have at least the benefit of the right of prior occupancy or aboriginal title, as they had enjoyed the use and occupancy of their lands since time immemorial.

Manifest Destiny proved most successful for the expansionist ambitions of the United States, except, of course, in the case of Canada during the War of 1812. The failure to take Canada was a rare exception through these many years in which American destiny did not manifest. Yet Americans were mollified, for they did win the Indian war in the War of 1812, as Tecumseh's Confederacy was irretrievably crushed and the Great Lakes Indian frontier secured. But the War of 1812 also provided the prospects for a little Canadian manifest destiny. In the Northwest, a number of prominent Canadian fur traders, supported by the Indian tribes of the upper Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley, also viewed, in their way, the War of 1812 as an opportunity to grasp and consolidate territory. For these two groups, the war became a common struggle to achieve a possible permanent British hegemony in that hinterland and thus preserve the fur trade and the traditional Indian way of life against American

[50] Allen, "Canadians on the Upper Mississippi," 118.

expansion and settlement. His Majesty's Indian Allies and the Canadians won their war but lost the peace, and with it, a chance to grab at destiny; for at Ghent, British negotiators sacrificed Indian and Canadian ambitions in the Northwest for a renewed Anglo-American cordiality.

The post-1815 years indeed produced an "Era of Good Feelings" between Britain, Canada and America, and a number of councils took place at Fort McKay, Amherstburg, Drummond Island and other Indian Department posts in which British officials "distinctly and explicitly" informed the assembled warriors that His Majesty's government would no longer assist nor countenance the tribes in any hostile actions against the United States. Further, the warriors were counseled to bury the hatchet, plant corn and be content. "I rubbed my eyes and cleared my ears, before I could believe what I saw or heard" commented the die-hard Black Hawk.[51] His response typified the reaction of Native peoples throughout the Northwest. Certainly, a dramatic and permanent shift in British Indian policy was unfolding. Indeed, the old glorious days of military "pomp and ceremony" were irretrievably lost. In a few years new strategy would evolve to civilize and Christianize the Native peoples residing in Canada, by "collecting them in villages (reserves)," and inducing them to cultivate the land. As well, education and religious instruction would be provided for the Indian children, along with general medical expenses.[52] Thus was born in Canada the paternal reserve system, and the once proud and defiant warriors were reduced to "Wards" of the state — from "Warriors to Wards." For the Native peoples, hoes, seeds, and bibles had replaced shot, powder, and muskets.

Throughout the long period of British-Indian military alliances, the Native peoples had been caught in the grip of two forces, an empire and a frontier, neither of which was particularly distinguished for mercy, and both of which were eventually destined to resolve their differences by other methods than costly Indian wars. Repeatedly during these critical years for the tribes inhabiting the Great Lakes region, the warriors at-

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[51] Black Hawk Speech, Indian Council, Drummond Island, 7 July 1818, NAC, MG19, F29 (William McKay).

[52] This theme is developed by John F. Leslie, "Commissions of Inquiry into Indian affairs in the Canadas, 1828-1858: Evolving a corporate memory for the Indian Department," (M.A. dissertation, Carleton, 1984).

tached themselves to the British in each fight against the Americans, as the Native peoples tried to salvage some remnants of their traditional lands and cultural values, as the original people. In the War of 1812, the warriors lashed out in one final desperate defense of the old order. But, from the beginning of contact, Native peoples in America and Canada could only delay or retard, but not stem, the tide of these technologically dominant and ever intruding newcomers. The Indian struggle was made even more difficult by rampant tribal factionalism which (then as now) broke the spirit of Indian unity and harmony; and made the pretense of the existence of an Indian state or homeland, the merest of fictions. A final deathblow for Indian interests was that in the grand theater of international diplomacy, Native peoples were considered expendable. By the end of the War of 1812, His Majesty's Indian Allies were no longer needed nor desired by the British in Canada. Nonetheless, Native peoples retained an affection and loyalty to the British Crown. This continued attachment stemmed in part from periodic bouts of British fairness and justice toward them, as best evidenced by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 in which the crown established a formal procedure for purchasing the Indian interest in their traditional lands; and to the fact that the warriors and British soldiers had fought side by side over many years, as friends and comrades-in-arms. Yet, during a lengthy summer council in 1818, a sage old chief rose and addressed the assembled. He knew full well that all was lost for his generation, and concluded the speech to British Crown officials with a simple truth:

You are very kind when you want us to fight for you but when that Service is performed, "the Store door be shut against us."[53]

His observation reflected the "End of an Era."[54]

This essay was originally presented at the symposium, *War on the Great Lakes: Canada and the United States in the War of 1812,* at Monroe County Community College, January 1987.

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[53] Ocaita (Ottawa Chief) to William McKay (Deputy Superintendent and Agent of the British Indian Department) 7 July 1818, NAC, MG19, F29 (William McKay)

[54] Allen, "British Indian Department," chapter entitled "The End of an Era," 86-93.