

## Recovering New Brunswick's Military Past

David Facey-Crowther

Volume 36, Number 1, Autumn 2006

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36\\_1re02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36_1re02)

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Facey-Crowther, D. (2006). Recovering New Brunswick's Military Past. *Acadiensis*, 36(1), 123–129.

## Recovering New Brunswick's Military Past

THE FIRST TWO VOLUMES of the New Brunswick Military Heritage Series – Roger Sarty and Doug Knight's *Saint John Fortifications 1630-1956* and Robert L. Dallison's *Hope Restored: The American Revolution and the Founding of New Brunswick* (jointly published by Goose Lane Editions and the New Brunswick Military Heritage Project in 2003) marks the beginning of a welcome initiative that will increase public awareness of New Brunswick's rich military heritage while encouraging further work in the field. The series is directed towards the general reader and therefore wisely avoids lengthy citation of sources and extensive bibliographies while still adhering to the rigours of academic scholarship. The directors of the series have also wisely chosen to address major gaps in the literature and to do so chronologically. These two volumes deal with major omissions in the province's military history: the defence of Saint John, covering a period of over 300 years, and the relocation and settlement of the disbanded Loyalist regiments and their impact on the early history of New Brunswick.

Roger Sarty is one of Canada's leading military historians, with extensive publications in the field including several important works on the history of the Royal Canadian Navy coupled with lengthy experience as an historian with the Directorate of History at National Defence Headquarters and as deputy director of the Canadian War Museum. His recent study on the military history of Sydney and Cape Breton Island, which he co-authored with Brian Tennyson, has many parallels with this short history of Saint John's fortifications. His co-author, Knight, is a retired Canadian Army engineering officer with an interest in the history of Canadian military equipment and fortifications. Like Sarty he has links with the Canadian War Museum, but this is his first historical publication.

Saint John not only controlled access to a vast hinterland; it was also an important seaport with an excellent harbour. When French explorers "discovered" the St. John River, they quickly recognized the potential of its rich fur and timber resources. Later, following the establishment of the province in 1784, shipbuilding and the export of timber became major industries in Saint John. At the same time, the St. John River system and its overland routes to the St. Lawrence were key links in the defence of British North America. Railways reduced the importance of the latter in the post-Confederation period, but they heightened the value of Saint John as a port. By the late-19th century Saint John had already become one of Canada's premier ports and a source of great wealth to the province, a position it continues to enjoy up to the present time. As a result, from the earliest period of settlement in the 17th century until well into the 20th century, the defence of Saint John was a matter of continuous concern. *Saint John Fortifications* is the story of one of the oldest fortified sites in Canada, a story that begins with the erection of Fort La Tour in 1632 and ends with the removal of the last military structures from Partridge Island in 1956. It is also the story of how changing technology affected the efficacy of fortified places over time, with the advent of modern weapons systems ultimately reducing their significance.

Saint John's defence construction went through four distinct periods: the frontier forts (1632-1783); the early fortress systems (1793-1850); the second fortress system

(1850-1914) and the 20th-century fortress (1914-1956). Saint John's first fortifications, erected by the French and English as a way of securing their competing imperial claims, were modest structures. A true fortress system did not appear until after the province was settled in 1783. The first structure was built by Charles de La Tour, lieutenant-general in Acadia, in 1632 on Portland Point and he used it as a base for exploiting the rich fur trade in the interior. During its 22-year history it was attacked no less than five times and fell on three occasions to Scottish, French and then English assailants. For a brief period, during King William's War (1688-1698), the French moved their strong point up the St. John River first to Fort Jemseg and then to Fort St. Joseph in present-day Fredericton; but it soon became evident that France needed to dominate the mouth of the river if it was to control access to the interior. Hence the construction of Fort St. Jean in 1698, opposite Portland Point. Fort St. Jean was the first defence work whose principal function was the protection of the river mouth. By the turn of the 18th century, however, French interest had shifted to Port-Royal and for the next 42 years the entrance to the St. John River remained unprotected.

It was at the end of the French period that Saint John and the St. John River began to take on a new significance as a link between Quebec and Louisbourg through the Temiscouata portage. For that reason the French built a new fort on the ruins of Fort St. Jean and called it Fort Managouèche, which subsequently became a victim of the Seven Years War. On its ruins the English built the first of their forts – opening the way to their first settlement in what became Saint John. The American Revolution exposed Saint John and the interior settlements to predatory raids that only came to an end with the reinforcement of the garrison and the construction of Fort Howe in 1777. What was significant in these events, according to Sarty and Knight, was that the construction of Fort Howe marked the end of the frontier fort whose sole purpose was to protect a single location. In the period that followed, a more elaborate fortress system evolved based on a number of defence works and outlying batteries.

War with Revolutionary France in 1793 raised the spectre of a naval attack on Britain's North American territories possibly in league with the new United States. Nelson's victory at Trafalgar ended the naval threat from France, but the War of 1812 with the Americans seemed even more threatening. It was during this 20-year period that much of the work on fortifying Saint John was undertaken beginning with the Lower Cover and Partridge Island batteries in 1793, work that continued until the outbreak of war with the United States in 1812. By then the military infrastructure of Saint John included an armoury, barracks for 64 gunners, a hospital and some storehouses. During the war Saint John's fortifications were strengthened, including the erection of the Carleton Martello tower based on similar structures built in Britain to meet a possible French invasion. By the end of the War of 1812, as the authors point out, "a solid early nineteenth-century coastal fortress system had been established". Unfortunately, in the long peace that followed, little was done to maintain these defence structures.

The second fortress system dominated from 1850 until 1914, during which weapons technology changed rapidly with the advent of rifles and quick-firing guns. The result was that efforts to keep up with the changing technology over the long term proved useless. By the late 1870s Saint John was Canada's largest and most active port and its defence a matter of recurring concern, yet every effort to protect it from

attack seemed destined to failure. Most serious in the decades before the First World War were improvements in the range and accuracy of naval guns. The installation of modern, quick-firing guns during the summers of 1902 and 1903 and the training of both permanent force and militia gunners in their use rectified the situation, but only in the short term. Three years later, the imperial garrison was withdrawn from Halifax and from Esquimalt. The creation of a Canadian navy in 1910 and its assumption of responsibility for the former imperial dockyards effectively spelled the end of a fortress system for Saint John until the outbreak of war in 1914.

The war with imperial Germany in 1914 marked the beginning of a major expansion and modernization of Saint John's fortifications that reached its peak during the Second World War. In both wars precautions against surface raiders gave way quickly to concerns about submarine activity off the coast. In the latter conflict this led to the addition of searchlights and powerful coastal batteries and an integrated defence plan that included naval patrols and air reconnaissance. For the first time Saint John had a modern and sophisticated fortress system. And yet, as early as 1943, it was evident that as a defence structure it no longer served a major purpose. In fact, Saint John's extensive fortress system was never tested by war and was quickly abandoned with the coming of peace. In the post-war era, the rise of the modern submarine threat and the development of long-range missiles sounded the death knell of the fortress system. In 1956 the militia coast artillery unit at Saint John was disbanded and the defence works at Partridge Island dismantled. All that now remains are rusting metal structures and concrete ruins below which rest the relics of an even earlier period in Saint John's long history as a fortified centre.

Sarty and Knight have managed to compress a great deal of history into this small volume. The defence of Saint John mattered, especially in time of war, because of its value as a seaport and also because of its increasing importance as a commercial centre for the province and later for Canada. What the authors have also demonstrated are the shortcomings of defence planning – especially when compromised by financial retrenchment or overtaken by rapidly changing technology. The two wars of the 20th century are a perfect example of both. And even though Saint John came under attack only during the French period and briefly during the American Revolution, this does not negate the soundness of efforts to secure its defence in time of war. After all, a strong defence is also a sound deterrent (to which the German submariners in the Second World War would readily attest). This is a well-written study based on a firm knowledge of both local history and the military and naval history of the region.

There is a certain overlap between these two volumes in that Robert Dallison's *Hope Restored: The American Revolution and the Founding of New Brunswick* also deals with the early military history of Saint John. The thrust of his study, however, is concerned with the military settlement of the province that accompanied the Loyalist migration to New Brunswick. This was not the first nor the last time that disbanded soldiers would be settled on North American soil, but the scale of the settlement and the fact that it took place in a new and sparsely settled territory is what makes it so unusual. The New Brunswick example therefore offers a unique opportunity for examining the impact of a hierarchical, disciplined and integrated community on a brand new political and social order. Loyalist historians such as W.O. Raymond, Esther Clark Wright, David Bell and Ann Condon have all made

important contributions to the field of settlement history. W.O. Raymond, who wrote widely on New Brunswick's Loyalist heritage, was the first historian to recognize the contribution of the disbanded Loyalist regiments to the settlement of New Brunswick. Raymond was especially interested in the life and contribution of Edward Winslow, the muster-master general of the provincial corps. Raymond's access to the Winslow papers provided him with a rich resource on the history of the provincial corps that settled New Brunswick. Esther Clark Wright and others, including Dallison, have used the same sources to flesh out details on the province's early settlement.

Dallison's book represents an important extension of these earlier studies. He begins by showing how the future New Brunswick was immediately affected by events taking place in the former Thirteen Colonies. Predatory raids by the Americans sought to secure that part of Nova Scotia for the rebellion. Eventually the British were forced to strengthen the defences of Fort Cumberland and to secure the mouth of the St. John River with the construction of Fort Howe. Provincial regiments garrisoned both until the end of the war. At war's end thousands of Loyalists, soldiers as well as civilians, were resettled on British lands. New Brunswick was an ideal location as the St. John River thrust deep into the interior, offering easy access and adjacent lands for settlement. Fifteen of the provincial corps, comprising some 384 soldiers and 146 women and children, took up plots assigned to each regiment. The idea, as Dallison points out, was that this military settlement could be mobilized quickly in time of war. Not all, however, would remain in these regimental settlements.

Dallison's chapter on the Loyalist regiments that settled New Brunswick illustrates his extensive knowledge of their origins and wartime contribution – the outcome of years of research into their history. For a number of years, Dallison was also director of Kings Landing Historical Settlement, a historic site rich in memorabilia and artifacts from the Loyalist period. Men of substance and reputation were issued warrants by the British government to raise regiments among loyal Americans across the former Thirteen Colonies as well as in Nova Scotia, Quebec and even as far away as Newfoundland. Recruiting was both challenging and dangerous as the rebels went to great lengths to prevent their compatriots from joining the Loyalist cause. Over the course of the war, approximately 21,000 men saw service in the provincial corps, a number that compares favourably with that of Washington's Continental Army. The British, though, were tardy in realizing the value of the provincial corps. Finally, in 1779, serious steps were taken to improve the conditions of service and increase efficiency. By war's end five of these regiments had been elevated to regular army status while the Royal Highland Emigrants was added to the British military establishment as a regiment of the line.

Although much more work remains to be done on the wartime role of these regiments, Dallison argues convincingly that their contribution to the British effort was significant. As he points out in his chapter on the history of each of the regiments that settled New Brunswick, their accomplishments were several-fold: they garrisoned New York, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Newfoundland and the West Indies; they participated in some of the hardest fighting of the war, especially in the south, where they made up a third of the British force; and they distinguished themselves in a number of instances as disciplined and capable fighters. Because of the prominent wartime role of these regiments, few who served in them felt able to return to their American homes. Consequently, many chose to relocate with their regiments on land

grants in what became New Brunswick. These soldier-settlers brought with them a brotherhood forged in war. Those wartime relationships, as Dallison states, lasted long after these regiments were disbanded and had a significant impact on the early settlement of New Brunswick.

Dallison devotes an entire chapter to the legacy of the military Loyalists. These soldier-settlers faced enormous difficulties in the beginning. In spite of generous assistance from the British government only one in ten actually took up his claim. Furthermore, the concept of settling the provincial corps in regimental blocks came undone quickly as not all the lots were suitable for farming and some were much too remote. Nor were all of the military settlers treated the same, and Dallison cites the example of the Black pioneers who were attached to many of the provincial corps. Nevertheless, wartime friendships and family ties were a factor in where individuals eventually settled. And, as he points out: “the Provincials and their values strongly influenced the evolution of New Brunswick”. The most sought-after appointments in Thomas Carleton’s administration, for instance, were filled by prominent Loyalists, many of whom had served in the Loyalist corps. When a militia was established, it was officered largely by former officers and non-commissioned officers from the provincial corps. The same occurred when the British government raised a new provincial corps, the King’s New Brunswick Regiment, to defend the colony when war broke out with revolutionary France in 1793. Dallison may be overstating the case when he says that “the Loyalists brought a deep understanding of the basic need for political, religious, and racial tolerance”, but he certainly is correct in arguing that the legacy of the military Loyalists is both significant and important. This short piece has been a worthwhile undertaking and may inspire others to undertake a more comprehensive study on the impact and legacy of these regiments on the early life of New Brunswick.

If this series is to awaken interest in the province’s military past it needs to consider those areas where further work needs to be done. Much has been written about New Brunswick’s military history, more than is perhaps realized, but there are still major gaps. We know very little, for example, about the impact of the British garrison on New Brunswick. British regulars were here before the province was created and remained until 1866. They not only defended the province, manning its fortifications and outposts and providing local garrisons in major centres, but they impacted on the social and economic life of the community. David Bell, in his 1983 *Early Loyalist Saint John*, describes how the garrison in Saint John was used to maintain domestic peace and order, a prelude to one of its major tasks in the pre-Confederation period – providing aid to the civil power. This took many forms, including riot control, election policing, assisting local fire-fighting efforts and dealing with unexpected emergencies.<sup>1</sup> We have no knowledge of that role in the case of the New Brunswick garrisons. Alfred G. Bailey’s edited collection *The Letters of James and Ellen Robb*, James K. Chapman’s *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon, First Lord Stanmore: 1829-1912*, and Juliana Horatio Ewing’s Fredericton letters

<sup>1</sup> David G. Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origins of New Brunswick Politics, 1783-1786* (Fredericton, 1983).

suggest a strong social interaction between the garrison and Fredericton society.<sup>2</sup> The garrison, with its round of social functions, commemorations, entertainment in the form of plays and musical performances, and contributions to local sporting events, enlivened an otherwise dull colonial scene. The garrison was also an important source of revenue to the community whether through its infrastructure, its local procurement of supplies or from the spending by soldiers and their families within the community. At the present time we have no measure of how much the garrison contributed to the local economy. We are better informed on the role of the garrison in the defence of the province, but much of that work is now sadly outdated.

The provincial militia is better represented in the literature, especially for the pre-Confederation period. Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Gubbins's *New Brunswick Journals of 1811 and 1813* convey in remarkable detail the best critical account we have of the early provincial militia during the War of 1812.<sup>3</sup> Later 19th-century writers, such as William T. Baird, John Baxter and Edward T. Sturdee, were more interested in the provincial militia both before and after Confederation. Baird was the son of a British soldier and an active member of the Carleton County Militia. His published autobiography and private papers contain a wealth of information on the activities of the pre-Confederation militia in the border town of Woodstock. Baxter and Sturdee were both officers in provincial militia units at the time of Confederation – Baxter in the New Brunswick Regiment of Artillery and Sturdee in the Saint John Fusiliers, which later became the 62nd Saint John Fusiliers when the latter was incorporated into the Dominion militia establishment. All three writers published within a decade of one another (1888-1896) at a time when the military enjoyed considerable popular support.<sup>4</sup> These accounts, while important sources on New Brunswick's militia in the 19th century, present an uncritical and romanticized notion of that institution's history in the colonial and early-Dominion period. My own work on the subject covered the period from the creation of a militia force in the 1787 until its integration into the Dominion militia in 1868. It showed how a colonial institution had been shaped and transformed over time by the demands of imperial defence policy and by the vagaries of local politics.<sup>5</sup> At the end of its history as an independent institution, New Brunswick's volunteer militia structure was reputed to be the best in the new Dominion of Canada. What is missing from these studies of the pre-Confederation militia is an assessment of its social impact. Who were the men who officered the colonial militia? Did militia rank confer status on the individual or was it in itself a reflection of an individual's social, economic and political status in the community?

2 Aldred G. Bailey, *The Letters of James and Ellen Robb: Portrait of a Fredericton Family in Early Victorian Times* (Fredericton, 1983); James K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon, First Lord Stanmore: 1829-1912* (Toronto, 1964); Juliana Horatia Ewing, *Canada Home: Juliana Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869*, ed. and introduction Margaret Howard Blom and Thomas E. Blom (Vancouver, 1983).

3 Joseph Gubbins, *New Brunswick Journals of 1811 and 1813*, ed. with introduction and notes by Howard Temperley (Fredericton, 1980).

4 William T. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life: Autobiographical Sketches* (Saint John, 1890); John B.M. Baxter, *Historical Records of the New Brunswick Regiment, Canadian Artillery* (Saint John, 1896); Edward T. Sturdee, *Historical Records of the 62nd St. John Fusiliers* (Saint John, 1888).

5 See, for instance, David Facey-Crowther, *The New Brunswick Militia, 1787-1867* (Fredericton, 1990).

## Recovering New Brunswick's Military Past 129

Studies on the Quebec militia show important connections between militia rank and a family's social standing. Is this the same for New Brunswick? While my own work intimates that this might be the case, as do several entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* on senior militia officers such as William Teel Baird, George Shore and George Joseph Maunsell, a proper assessment of this aspect of the connection between civil society and military rank needs to be done.

There is also no single study on the post-Confederation militia nor a single study on the 20th-century New Brunswick militia for that matter. Instead, information is scattered in several sources. George Joseph Maunsell was the last provincial adjutant general before Confederation, after which he became deputy-adjutant general of Canadian Military District No. 8, which included New Brunswick. Maunsell faced all the challenges of integrating New Brunswick's volunteer militia into a federal structure. When the federal government decided in 1883 to form instructional schools across the country as the basis for a permanent military force, Maunsell took command of the company established in Fredericton. He later commanded the Royal Regiment of Canadian Infantry, with companies in Fredericton, Saint-Jean, London and Toronto and has been called the father of the New Brunswick militia. He wrote a brief article for *The New Brunswick Magazine* in 1899 on the New Brunswick militia that recounted some of his experiences. Further detail exists in the work of regimental historians. Journalist and author Douglas How wrote a history of the 8th Canadian Hussars in 1964 that contains some early history of the militia unit, whose origins can be traced to the pre-Confederation New Brunswick Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry.<sup>6</sup> R.D. Crook's and J.K. Marteinson's 1973 *A Pictorial History of the 8th Canadian Hussars (Princess Louise's)* is replete with photographs and regimental memorabilia.<sup>7</sup> This history goes a long way to filling a major gap in the history of one of the province's militia units in the post-Confederation period. Will R. Bird's *North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment*, published in 1963, contains some background history on the old Northumberland and Restigouche county militias that preceded the formation of the 73rd Northumberland Battalion in 1870 that was part of the Canadian Corps in the First World War.<sup>8</sup> While these various studies offer important glimpses into the organization and role of the militia in the period up to the First World War, there is still need for a single comprehensive study that tells us more about the history of this important institution in the post-Confederation period.

A final suggestion for further work has to do with the province's role in the wars of the 20th century. Here again, the regimental histories, including Robert Tooley's 1989 *Invicta: The Carleton and York Regiment in the Second World War*, say much about the role the individual units.<sup>9</sup> But, as Sarty and Knight's book makes clear, there is much more that can be said about the province's role in wartime, including home defence and the war on the domestic front.

DAVID FACEY-CROWTHER

6 Douglas How, *The 8th Hussars: A History of the Regiment* (Sussex, 1964).

7 R.D. Crook and J.K. Marteinson, eds., *A Pictorial History of the 8th Canadian Hussars (Princess Louise's)* (Sussex, 1973).

8 Will R. Bird, *North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment* (n.p., 1963).

9 Robert W. Tooley, *Invicta: The Carleton and York Regiment in the Second World War* (Fredericton, 1989).