

An Account of the Battle of Chateauguay eBook

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PREFACE.

On October 26th, 1888, the Chateauguay Literary and Historical Society was organized at Ormstown, Quebec, to foster Canadian patriotism by encouraging the study of Canadian history and Canadian literature. The Society began its labours at home, taking as its subject the battle whence it derives its name. Mr. W.D. Lighthall, M.A., B.C.L., an honorary member, was asked to prepare an account of that victory, and kindly responded by his lecture, which he delivered before the Society on March 8th, 1889. Pleasure is now felt in offering this lecture, in the interests of the Society, to the Canadian world, no apology being required at a time when patriotic literature is in great demand. Mr. Lighthall's researches have been discussed by the members, and the belief is prevalent that his work touching this important item of history, in so far as accuracy is concerned, stands unrivalled, the previous authorities having been carefully compared and their testimony put together.

In the Appendix will be found a number of notes having a bearing on the battle and its times. The portrait frontispiece is from a line engraving kindly lent by Gerald E. Hart, Esq., President of the Society for Historical Studies. The drawing of the map, after the design of the author, is due to J.A.U. Beaudry, Esq., C.E., Curator of the Antiquarian Society of Montreal.

The first part of the account is partly based upon R. Christie's History of Lower Canada; but William James' Military Occurrences of the War of 1812, was found the most accurate in statistical details, and is, therefore, frequently followed. Other authorities are referred to in their places.

The battle of Chateauguay, in view of the important results that followed it, is an event which all Canadians will appreciate, and to which posterity will have reason to point the finger of admiration. All nationalities concerned in building up this country, when united by a common danger, bore in it an honorable part, as they fought side by side in defence of their homes and those that were dear to them, from the wanton aggression of an ungenerous foe.

The Society hopes to continue its work and to offer other pamphlets in the near future, so that this effort on its part may be regarded as the first of a series. Another of its immediate objects is the erection of a monument on the battlefield, to accomplish which pecuniary assistance is required. The belief is held that no opportunity should be lost to educate the rising generation to form a true conception of the grandeur of the heritage that is ours,

W.P.

*Ormstown,
October 29th, 1889.*

THE BATTLE OF CHATEAUGUAY.

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The War of 1812 has been called by an able historian “the afterclap of the Revolution.” The Revolution was, indeed, true thunder—a courageous and, in the main, high-principled struggle. Its afterclap of 1812 displayed little but empty bombast and greed. In the one, brave leaders risked their lives in that defence of rights which has made their enterprise an epoch in man’s history; in the other, a mean and braggart spirit actuated its promoters to strike in the back that nation which almost alone was carrying on, in the best spirit of the Revolution, the struggle for the liberties of Europe against the designs of Napoleon. The brave spirits of the War of Freedom led the affairs of the United States no longer. All the contemptible elements, all the boasters, all those who had done least in the real fighting, had long come out of their shells and united to establish the mighty rhetorical school of the Spread Eagle! It was the legions of Spread Eagleism who wore to have the glory to be got in taking advantage of harassed England. The Battle of Chateaugay was one of the answers to that illusion.

The War was introduced by a Declaration, in which President Madison, in smooth and elaborate terms, pretended that his nation found cause for it in the tyrannical exercise by British warships of what was called *The Right of Search*—that is to say, a claim of ships of war to stop the ships of other nations and search them for deserters and contraband goods. That this was not, however, the true cause, was shown by the facts and cries of the war.

Firstly, the right was one belonging to all nations by international law; secondly, though it was at once relinquished by Britain in a conciliatory spirit, the Americans persisted in their campaign; thirdly, at the close of the war they did not insist at all on the abrogation of the Right of Search, in the treaty of peace.

It would be much easier to show what the real causes were:-(1), hatred of England, lasting over from the Revolution; (2), envy of her commerce and prestige; and especially (3) the scheme for the conquest of Canada.

The course of the negotiations exhibit a thoroughly ungenerous course on the part of the American authorities, contrasted with a desire not to offend on the part of Britain. President Madison’s Declaration of War was made on the 18th of June, 1812, and the British Government, after using every honorable overture for friendship, only issued theirs in October, couching it, besides, in terms of regret and reproach at the unfairness in which Madison’s party persisted. Owing to that unfairness and other causes the enterprise also was by no means unanimously popular in the States. A convention of delegates from the counties of New York, held in the capitol at Albany, on the 17th and 18th of September, and called the New York Convention, condemned Madison’s party for declaring the war, on account of its injustice, and “as having been undertaken,” they said, “from motives entirely distinct from those which have been hitherto avowed.” The New England States treated it coldly. Maryland disapproved through her Legislature. Many persons everywhere looked on it as a mere political scheme, and when drafted for service in frequent cases bought themselves substitutes.

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It was soon found that a mistake had been made in attacking Canada. That happened which might be expected where bodies of men with inflated ideas of glory and no experience attack men fighting desperately for their homes, and officers and veterans who had seen such service as the Napoleonic wars. The British, with an astuteness which is oftener the character credited to their opponents, managed to get earliest word of the Declaration sent to their own forts on the Lakes, and promptly captured the American fort Michilimackinac. They then followed with the daring capture of the stronghold of Detroit, amply equipped and garrisoned, by a little handful of men under the heroic General Brock, who simply went before it and demanded its surrender, whereupon it was given up, together with the whole Territory of Michigan. The presence of such trained British officers as Brock and of army veterans in the ranks was a very great advantage. Poor Brock soon afterwards died in his memorable charge at the victory of Queenston Heights.

That year—the first of the War—is known as a succession of fiascos for the Americans. The other conspicuous aspect of it is that the attacked points were, with the exception of a little skirmishing at St. Regis and Lacolle, all in the Province of Upper Canada.

It was only towards the close of the campaign of the next year—1813—that Lower Canada was gravely threatened.

The Americans, emboldened by several successes, and having put a great many men into the field, believed that the struggle might easily be terminated by capturing Montreal. The advance upon Lower Canada took place under General James Wilkinson in chief command, with 8,826 men and 58 guns and howitzers.[1] He had intended to attack Kingston. “At Montreal, however,” wrote the Secretary of War, Armstrong, in phrases colored by the prevailing school of rhetoric, “you find the weaker place and the smallest force to encounter.... You hold a position which completely severs the enemy’s line of operations, and which, while it restrains all below, withers and perishes all above itself.” This great position—for it is so—Colonel Coffin[2] compares it to Vicksburg for natural strength—was to be approached by two routes: by Wilkinson himself in boats down the St Lawrence, and by Major-General Wade Hampton, his almost independent subordinate, from the Champlain border; and it was planned that the two armies should meet at the foot of Isle Perrot,[3] thence to strike together across the Lake to Lachine, and on to the city, which seems to have had not over, if as many as, a thousand regulars to defend it.

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Wade Hampton, with over 5,000 men (an effective regular force of 4,053 rank and file, about 1,500 militia and ten cannon[4]), was at first on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain at Burlington[5]. He crossed to the New York side, directing his march for Caughnawaga on the St. Lawrence. His army[6], except the militia, was the same which, with a certain General Dearborn at its head, paraded irregularly across the lines and returned to Pittsburgh in the autumn of 1812. During the year since elapsed the men had been drilled by Major-General Izard, who had served in the French Army. They were all in uniform, well clothed and equipped—in short, Hampton commanded, if not the most numerous, certainly the most effective, regular army which the United States were able to send into the field during the War. Crossing the border on the 20th of September, 1813, he surprised a small picket of British at Odelltown, a Loyalist settlement afterwards celebrated for a battle in the Rebellion of 1837. He soon found himself met with what seemed to him great difficulties, for the army was plunged into an extensive swampy wood, the only road through which was rendered impracticable by fallen trees and barricades, behind which and in the gloomy forests surrounding were every here and there to be seen Indians and infantry crawling and flitting about, who fired upon them from unexpected ambushes. Hampton's men were not of a kind to face this. "The perfect rawness of the troops," writes he, "with the exception of not a single platoon, has been a source of much solicitude to the best-informed among us." [7] They were ignorant, insubordinate, and forever "falling off." [8]

Urging on the scattered defenders was, no doubt, to be seen from time to time a stout-built, vigorous officer with stripes across the breast of his dark gray uniform, dashing about from point to point giving fierce orders. This was De Salaberry.

Not reflecting—for he seems to have had the information—that the wood was only fifteen miles or so in depth, the Canadians few in number, and that a short press forward would have brought him into the open country of L'Acadie leading towards Montreal, the American General in two days withdrew along the border towards Chateaugay Four Corners, alleging the great drought of that year as a reason for wishing to descend by the River Chateaugay. At the Corners he rested his army for many days.

Wade Hampton was a type of the large slaveholders of the South. Nearly sixty years of age, self-important, fiery and over-indulgent in drink, of large, imposing figure, of some reputed service in the Revolution, and with a record as Congressman and Presidential elector, he was one whose chief virtues were not patience and humility. In 1809 he had been made a brigadier-general and stationed at New Orleans; but in consequence of continual disagreements with his subordinates, was superseded in 1812 by Wilkinson, whom he consequently hated. In the spring of 1813 he received his Major-General's commission. He had acquired his large fortune by land speculations, and at his death some time later was supposed to be the wealthiest planter in the United States, owning 3,000 slaves. He is said to have ably administered his estate. [9]

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Hampton had another slave-holding South Carolinian by his side, young Brigadier-General George Izard, son and descendant of aristocrats and statesmen, well-educated in the soldier's profession, college-bred, travelled, and who had served in the French Army. Izard led the main column at the battle shortly to ensue.[10]

Another officer of the circle—who seems to have been the ablest—was Colonel James Purdy, on whom the brunt of the American work and fighting were to fall, and who seems to have done his best in a struggle against natural difficulties and against the incompetency of both his commander and men.

When Hampton moved to Four Corners, Lieut-Colonel De Salaberry, with the Canadian Voltigeurs, moved in like manner westward to the region of the Chateauguay and English Rivers. The Voltigeur troops were French-Canadians with a small sprinkling of British. Their organization was as follows:—Sir George Prevost, on the approach of war, May 28th, 1812, ordered the levy of four French volunteer battalions, to be made up of unmarried men from 18 to 25 years old. They were to be choice troops, and trained like regulars. Charles Michel d'Irumberry De Salaberry, then high in the regard of his people as a military hero, was chosen to rally the recruits, issued a stirring poster calling the French-Canadians to arms, and acted with such extraordinary energy that the troops were in hand in two days.

De Salaberry was a perfect type of the old French-Canadian military gentry, a stock of men of whom very little remains, a breed of leaders of, on the whole, more vigorous forms, more active temperaments, than the average—descendants inheriting the qualities of the bravest and most adventurous individuals of former times. They were the natural result of the feudal *regime*, with which they have passed away. Though a gentry, they were a poor one, possessed of little else than quantities of forest lands. The officers of the Voltigeurs were selected out of the same class, united with a number of English of similar stamp. De Salaberry himself was born in the little cottage manor-house of Beauport, near Quebec, on the 19th of Nov., 1778.[11] Taking to soldiering like a duck to water when very young, he enrolled as volunteer in the 44th. At sixteen, the Duke of Kent, who was then in Canada, and delighted in friendly acts towards the seigneurs, got him a commission in the 60th, with which regiment he left at once for the West Indian Isle of Dominica. There he saw terrible service, for all the men of his battalion except three were killed or wounded during the siege of Fort Matilda. Nevertheless, the young fellow kept gay. "Our uniforms," he wrote to his father, "cost very dear; but I have received L40, and with that I am going to give myself what will make a fine figure." "This fine large boy of sixteen years," says Benjamin Sulte in his History of the French-Canadians, "strong as a Hercules ... with smiling face ... made a furore at parties.... As he was never sick, they employed him everywhere. Fevers reduced his battalion to 200 men, but touched not him." Though so young, he was charged with covering the evacuation of Fort Matilda.[12]

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The Duke of Kent, who was commanding at Halifax, kept a friendly eye upon him, and gave him much personal advice, on one occasion dissuading him from an inadvisable marriage. He now took him into his own regiment. De Salaberry still saw rough service, was shipwrecked, served in the West Indies again, and then fought in Europe and the disastrous expedition to Walcheren, where he was placed in the most advanced posts. [13] Returning to his 60th, he was made captain in 1799. "I have often heard say," narrates De Gaspe, "that his company and that of Captain Chandler were the best drilled in the regiment." In the West Indies he was drawn into a duel which caused him sorrow until his dying day, for in it he was forced by the "code of honor" to kill a German fellow-officer, and bore a scar of the affair ever after on his forehead. It is related that by his great strength he cut the German in two.

"The prodigious force with which he was endowed," says Sulte, "had made of him an exceptional being in the eyes of the soldiers," and when he returned to Canada after West Indian service of eleven years[14] a little before the war of 1812, he was already the hero of the French-Canadians. That the stories of his strength and vigor are true is corroborated by every circumstance which has been perpetuated about him. His ruddy, energetic face is preserved in portraits among his family, and his walking-stick, said to be an enormous article, is kept at Quebec in the collection of the Literary and Historical Society.

De Salaberry's Voltigeurs were organized at a peculiar juncture. "The discords between French and English in Quebec had emboldened the United States," says Garneau, "and the English Governors harassed the French. An opposite conduct might bring back calm to men's spirits. The Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir George Prevost, a former officer, of Swiss origin, offered all the conditions desirable.... Arriving at Quebec, Sir George Prevost strove to introduce peace and to remove animosity. He showed the completest confidence in the fidelity of the French-Canadians, and studied how to prove at every opportunity that the accusations of treason which had been brought against them had left no trace in the soul of England nor in his own.... Soon the liveliest sympathy arose between Sir George Prevost and the people." [15] It was in pursuance of this policy that the order to raise the Voltigeur force was given by him.

While Hampton was at Four Corners, Sir George, thus now Commander-in-Chief of all the forces in Canada, was at the camp which had just been formed at La Fourche, and of which a description is given by Mr. Sellar in his history of the district. Sir George was a man quite devoid of the decisiveness necessary to a soldier, and though, as we have seen, he was useful in reconciling the French, his errors in military matters several times brought disgrace on the British forces, and gave rise to storms of rage and disgust

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among them.[16] De Salaberry was now ordered by him on the Quixotic errand of attacking, with about 200 Voltigeurs and some Indians, the large camp of Hampton at Four Corners. De Salaberry promptly obeyed these impracticable orders, and it is probably at this juncture that a little anecdote comes in which I have heard as told by one of his men. De Salaberry was down the river dining at a tavern, when a despatch was brought to him.

“D—— it!” he exclaimed, jumping up from his seat, “Hampton is at Four Corners, and I must go and fight him!” and mounting his fine white charger, he dashed away from the door.

On the 1st of October he crept up with his force to the edge of the American camp. There they saw the assemblage spread out in all the array of war, with its host of tents, stacked guns, flags, moving men and sentries, and he prepared to strike it as ordered. One of his Indians indiscreetly discharged his musket. The camp was in alarm in an instant. De Salaberry, finding his approach discovered, immediately collected about fifty of his Voltigeurs, with whom and the Indians he pushed into the enemy’s advanced camp, consisting of about 800 men, and, catching them in their confusion, drove them for a considerable distance, until, seeing the main body manoeuvring to cut off his little handful, he fell back and took up his position at the skirt of the woods. Once again he sallied out and charged, but with all the army now thoroughly aroused it was useless, and the Indians having retreated, most of his own men ran off, leaving him and Captains Chevalier Duchesnay and Gaucher, officers much like himself in stamp, with a few trusty Voltigeurs to skirmish with the enemy as long as daylight permitted it.[17] He then withdrew to Chateauguay, taking the precaution of breaking up the forest road in his rear, in pursuance of the general policy of the campaign, which was to destroy and obstruct as much as possible in the path of the enemy. Acquainting himself also with the ground over which Hampton was expected to make his way into the Province, he finally stopped, selected and took up the position where the battle afterwards took place, in a thick wood on the left bank of the Chateauguay River at the distance of two or three leagues above its *Fork* with English River, where he threw up his works of defence, with the approval of General De Watteville. The plan of the British commanders, owing to the smallness and inefficiency of their forces, was the stern one of burning and destroying all houses and property, and retreating slowly to the St. Lawrence, harassing the enemy in his advance.[18] The position chosen was as strong as the nature of that flat and wooded country and the route of the American march would allow. Here his experience and quick eye came in.[19]

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Now as to the measures of fortification taken by De Salaberry. In his rear there was a small rapid where the river was fordable in two spots close to one another. He commanded this with a strong breastwork and a guard. There were four ravines which issued from the very thick woods, crossing the road, and distant from each other two hundred yards or so. On their banks he made his men fell trees and build them into breastworks—"a kind of parapet extending into the woods some distance." To prevent the American cannon from bearing on these breastworks, he felled trees and bush, covering a large stretch of ground with obstructions in the front. The breastwork on the front-line formed an obtuse angle at the right of the road, and extended along the curves of the ravine. The Colonel then sent forward to a spot some distance in advance of the front-line a party of Beauharnois' axemen, well accustomed to felling trees, who destroyed the bridges and obstructed the road with their fragments and fallen trees and brush. Lieut. Guy, with twenty Voltigeurs, guarded them in front, and Lieut. Johnson, with about the same number, in rear. Working incessantly, these axemen made a formidable series of such obstructions in front of the first line, extending from the river three or four acres into the woods, where they joined an almost impracticable marsh. On the opposite bank of the river De Salaberry also placed a picket of sixty Beauharnois militia under Captain Bruyere, so as to check any advance on the ford, which was his weak point in the rear.

Part of De Salaberry's line at the abattis, was a small blockhouse on the river-bank (which, however, is not that which has since been reputed to be the one concerned), and the works there blocked the commencement of the wood and looked out on a broadening plain or level of clearings, across which the enemy would have to pass.

The Glengarry men now came down, under McDonell of Ogdensburg, famous for his adventurous capture of that place, and whose exploit the Salaberry was about to match. Lieut.-Colonel McDonell—"Red George"—was at Prescott drilling a new force of Canadian Fencibles, made up, some say, chiefly of Scotch and loyalists,[20] others chiefly of French boatmen, when Sir George Prevost asked him how soon he could have his men ready to go down to Chateauguay. "As soon as they have done their dinner!" he responded. Within a few hours he had provided them with *batteaux*, and they were off down the rapids. When Sir George himself, who was on the way, got there, he, to his great surprise found McDonell before him. "Where are your men?" said he. "There," said the Highland Colonel, pointing to his force resting on the ground—"not a man absent." [21]

For nearly three weeks the parties of Canadian workers worked continually upon the plan of De Salaberry, while Hampton was considering, preparing, reviewing his troops, and arranging for a communication with Wilkinson so soon as the latter should have passed Ogdensburg on his way down the St. Lawrence.

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On the 21st of October the advance down the Chateauguay commenced. The first move was a rapid march by General Izard with the light-equipped troops and a regiment of the line, who surprised a party of about ten[22] Indians sitting late in the afternoon at their evening meal at the junction of the Outarde and Chateauguay Rivers, and killed one of them. There Izard encamped and proceeded to establish a road of communication with Hampton. Word was soon brought to Major Henry, of the Beauharnois' Militia, commanding on the English River. Henry sent word to General De Watteville at La Fourche, and had Captains Levesque and Debartzch advance immediately with the flank companies of the 5th Battalion of embodied militia and about 200 men of the Beauharnois' division. This was the preliminary move towards the battle.

They advanced about six miles that night up the Chateauguay from La Fourche, when they came to a wood which it would not have been prudent to enter in the dark. Next morning early they were joined by De Salaberry with his Voltigeurs and the light company of Captain Ferguson, an officer who took a front place in the affair. De Salaberry brought all these companies about a league up the bank to the place he had fortified, and there stopped. An American patrol party being observed in front, General De Watteville came over himself, visited the outposts, approved of them, and the work proceeded.[23] That evening the main body of the Americans encamped at Sear's, about twenty-five miles above the Chateauguay's mouth. The engineers had cut a road for the ten cannon, and with great labor and difficulty had dragged them thus far.[24]

Within two days more Hampton's men had opened and completed a large and practicable road, which is still traceable, from his position at Four Corners twenty-four miles through the woods and morasses, and brought up his guns and stores to his new position, about seven miles from De Salaberry's. (About Dewittville?)

[Illustration: *Sketch of the battle of Chateauguay—Oct 26, 1813*]

From this point he despatched Colonel Purdy with about 1,500 men, composed of a light brigade (the 1st Brigade of the American Army[25]) and a strong body of the infantry of the line, at an early hour in the night of the 25th, across the Chateauguay and down its right bank[26] at a bend adjoining what is now known as the Cross Farm, with orders to gain the ford and fall on the rear of Lieut.-Colonel De Salaberry's position, while the main body, under General Izard, were to commence the attack in front. Purdy's brigade crossed not far above De Salaberry, and proceeded into the woods of the opposite side. A cedar swamp, an unexpected stream in which they floundered, and the ignorance of their guides misled and bewildered them. This was the fault of Hampton, and due to his headstrongness, for the guides had protested that they did not know that side of the Chateauguay;

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but he had ordered them to proceed. Purdy's command became scattered, were forced to halt in confusion, and had to sleep in the open woods, cold, wet, exhausted, and apprehensive.[27] General Hampton, however, in the morning, fully expected to hear them attacking the ford, advanced, and at ten o'clock his troops appeared in sight of the party of busy woodchoppers, about 3,500 men, with three squadrons of cavalry, marching in column along the high road, commanded by General Izard. Lieut. Guy's picket fired, the workmen dropped work and ran, Guy retired upon Johnson, and both Lieutenants retreated with their men to the completed abattis, where they formed up again and began to fire smartly.

De Salaberry, on hearing the firing, promptly advanced with the light company of the Canadian Fencibles, commanded by Captain Ferguson, "flanked by twenty-two Indians on the right and centre,"[28] and two companies of his Voltigeurs, commanded by Captains Chevalier and Louis Juchereau Duchesnay. Ferguson's companies he posted on the right, in front of the abattis, in extended order, its right skirting on the adjoining woods and abattis, among which were distributed a few Abenakis Indians. The three officers, Ferguson and the two Duchesnays, executed the movements required of them with the coolness of a day of parade. The Voltigeur company of the oldest of the Duchesnays, known as "the Chevalier," occupied, in extended order, the ground from the left of Ferguson's Company to the Chateauguay, and the company under Captain Louis Juchereau Duchesnay, with about thirty-five[29] Sedentary Militia under Captain Longtin, were thrown back along the margin of the river, hidden among the trees and bushes, so as to flank Colonel Purdy's men, or prevent him from flanking the Canadian position. Between the abattis and the front line were a company of Voltigeurs, Captain Lecuyer commanding, and beyond them on the right a light company (that of the 5th Battalion) of embodied militia with their side pickets, under Captain Debartzch; then, to the right of them, in the woods, the Indians under Captain La Mothe. There were thus in the front only about 240 Canadians. The positions, however, occupied about a mile along the river, and the rest of the troops—some 600—were distributed among the other breastworks, under command of McDonnell.[30]

The battle was now on the point of commencing. In the centre of the front stood De Salaberry watching the enemy, whose characteristics he had noted twice before. All waited in suspense. A touching scene was taking place among the Beauharnois Militia further back, where Captain Longtin caused his men to kneel, went through a short prayer with them, and then rising, said: "that now they had fulfilled their duty to their God, they would fulfil that to their King."[31]

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Meanwhile, the enemy kept steadily moving along the road in column. A tall mounted American officer rode forward and began a harangue to the Canadians in French. "Brave Canadians," said he, "give yourselves over; we do not wish to do you any harm!"[32] De Salaberry, seeing that his moment was come, sprang upon a stump,[33] discharged his musket as a signal to begin, and brought the American officer off his horse by the shot. The enemy at the time were exposed to being taken on both front and side. The bugles blared, the front companies immediately opened fire, and the battle was begun. Izard's force were in the open plain, while their foes were hidden in a thick wood. The squadrons of cavalry and four cannon which they had brought thus far were found to be useless there. They, however, commenced a spirited[34] fire in battalion volley; but, from the position of the line, it was almost totally thrown to the right of the Canadians, and of no effect whatever. They soon faced to the right, and filing up with speed, changed their front parallel with the lines of breastworks, when the engagement became general, and their fire compelled the retreat, behind the front edge of the breastwork[35] of a few skirmishers near the left, who had been rather advanced in the centre of the line. This retreat being mistaken by the enemy for a flight, a universal shout ensued, which was re-echoed, to their surprise, by the Canadians and the Glengarry men in reserve under Lieut.-Colonel McDonell. Now was the supreme moment of the battle. De Salaberry ordered his bugleman to sound the advance. "This was heard by Lieut.-Colonel McDonell, who, thinking the Colonel was in want of support, caused his own bugles to answer, and immediately advanced with two of his companies from the third and fourth lines to the first and second." [36] "All these movements were executed with great rapidity." De Salaberry, at the same time, as a *ruse de guerre*, ordered "ten or twelve buglemen into the adjoining woods with orders to separate and blow with all their might." [37] The enemy, as De Salaberry calculated, suspected that the Canadians were advancing in great numbers to circumvent them. The Colonel, while giving these orders, is said to have done so facing his men, with his back against a tree.[38] The noise of the engagement towards its end brought on Colonel Purdy's division on the opposite side of the river, which, having driven in the picquet of sixty Beauharnois Sedentary Militia under Captain Bruyere, were pressing on for the ford, whereupon De Salaberry ordered Lieut.-Colonel McDonell, who had returned to his position to check the enemy there, and Captain Daly was chosen, with the light company of the 3rd Battalion Embodied Militia, numbering seventy men,[39] to cross and take up the ground abandoned by the picket.

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De Salaberry, then seeing that the action was about to become serious on the right, left his position in the centre of the front and placed himself on the left with the troops along the bank, where, standing on a stump.[40] he could see, through his field-glass, Captain Daly with his men crossing the ford. The latter took with him such of the Beauharnois men as had rallied[41] up, and led by him, they advanced along the river-bank and made, in the words of Purdy afterwards, “a furious assault” upon the advanced guard of the Americans, whom they drove back upon themselves. “The bravery of Captain Daly,” wrote the Temoin Oculaire—whose account, it is to be remembered, was published a few days afterwards—“who literally led his company into the midst of the enemy, could not be surpassed.”

Purdy's main body finally recovered, and charged forward, however, emerging in great force from the wood.

Captain Daly's men, as they had been taught by Lieut.-Colonel McDonell, knelt and fired a volley kneeling. The return volley was fired by tenfold numbers, and but for that precaution would have destroyed nearly the whole of Captain Daly's command. As it was, he received a severe wound, and with his men, several of whom were wounded and himself a second time, was compelled to retreat, which the men did in very good order under Lieut. Benjamin Schiller. The latter distinguished himself greatly. He bore off his wounded captain to a safe place, and returning, took command at request of the men. At one juncture he was engaged, hand to hand, with a very formidable adversary, whose head he cut off with a single blow of his sabre.[42]

Purdy's force eventually were moving on in overwhelming numbers, and for a moment their shouts of victory were heard by the little force lying in suspense behind the barricades on the opposite bank. In coming out of the wood they swarmed down along the bank of the river. Now was the time for Captains Louis Duchesnay and Longtin's companies concealed in the river-side bushes opposite. De Salaberry instantly appears upon the scene, gives the word of command, and the bushes flame out with a hidden and destructive fire. The American shouts of victory turn into cries of confusion. In the utmost disorder they make a tumultuous and precipitate retreat into the woods. Thus, at 2.30 p.m., came the failure of Purdy's flanking movement.

As one may easily imagine, this series of incidents took several hours.

In the front, General Hampton for about an hour kept his soldiers ready in momentary expectation of attack by De Salaberry, and of hearing of Purdy's success. When he heard that the latter had failed, however, he sent him word to withdraw his column to a shoal four or five miles above and cross over, and ordered General Izard to retire his brigade to a position about three miles in the rear, to which place the baggage had been ordered forward. Hampton thus retired, leaving De Salaberry master of the field, with scarcely 300 men in actual action, and no British guns anywhere within seven miles.[43]

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Sir George Prevost, with Major-General De Watteville, arrived on the ground at the close of the engagement and overlooked De Salaberry's arrangements, thanked him with great praise, and then immediately wrote an inaccurate despatch to England, in which he claimed the principal credit for *himself*.^[44] That evening De Salaberry wrote to his father; "I have won a victory mounted on a wooden horse!"^[45]

After the battle was over the American firing did not cease, for no sooner did darkness come on than Purdy's scattered command, moving up the right bank, commenced a most destructive fire on each other, mistaking them for the British, and they continued it the greater part of the night. The final incident took place just as day dawned on the 27th, when about twenty Americans, mistaking some of the Canadian militia on the left bank for their own people, were compelled by them to surrender.

That day at dawn McDonell came up in command of Captain Rouville's Company of Voltigeurs, Captain Levesque's Company of Grenadiers (of the 5th Battalion Incorporated Militia), and sixty men of the Beauharnois Division. De Salaberry turned over to McDonell the defence of the abatis or obstructions in front, and the hero of Ogdensburgh pushed on to two miles further than before. The day passed in expectation of a second attack, but no enemy appeared.

Meanwhile, the straggling order which the nature of the swamp and forest imposed on Purdy's retreat exposed him to rear attacks from the Indians, which were repeated after dark and caused him loss.^[46]

A large quantity of muskets, drums, knapsacks, provisions and arms were found on Purdy's shore, especially indicating the confusion just previous to their retreat. Upwards of ninety bodies and graves were found on that bank,^[47] among them two or three officers of distinction. On Hampton's field were two dead horses, and the enemy were there seen carrying off several of the wounded in carts.

The Canadian loss was only two killed, sixteen wounded, and four missing. Three missing were by mistake at first included among the killed in the returns.^[48]

Time now wore on, another night was passed, and the morning of the 28th arrived, when Captain La Mothe, with about 150 Indians, reconnoitred the enemy, who, according to the report of Captain Hughes, of the Engineers, had abandoned his camp the day before.

A party of the Beauharnois Militia, supported by Captain Debartzch, burnt and destroyed the newly-erected bridges within a mile of the enemy's camp, which was now about one and a half leagues from Piper's Road, *i.e.*, about two leagues from his former position. On the same evening the Indians, under Captain La Mothe,^[49] proceeded through the woods and came up with the enemy's rear-guard. Here a slight skirmish ensued, in which the Americans lost one killed and seven wounded.

Hampton, having re-occupied his late position, called a council of war, where it was determined to fall back and occupy the former position at Four Corners, to secure their communication with the United States; from thence either to retire to winter quarters or be ready to re-enter Lower Canada.

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"On that day or the day previous Captain Debartzch, of the Militia, was sent to the American headquarters with a flag. When he stated the number and description of troops by which General Hampton had been opposed, the latter, scarcely able to keep his temper, insisted that the British force amounted to 7,000 men. On being assured of the contrary, he asked: 'What, then, made the woods ring so with bugles?' Captain Debartzch explained this; but it was apparently to no purpose." [50]

The Americans retired on the 29th. "On the 30th a party of Indian Chasseurs, under Captain Ducharme, reported that the enemy had abandoned his camp at Piper's Road in the greatest disorder, and was on the road to Four Corners." The Canadians followed up and hung upon the rear and embarrassed the retreat. Canada was saved!

General Wilkinson was very severe on his fellow-general. "On the 4th of November," he complains, "the British garrison of Montreal consisted solely of 400 marines and 200 soldiers. What a golden, glorious opportunity has been lost by the caprice of Major-General Hampton!" [51] Poor man, he was to have pretty much the same luck himself just afterwards! Wilkinson's army proceeded on its own course down the river, but was almost as ignominiously defeated at Chrysler's Farm on the 10th of November, where his 3,000 or 4,000 men were matched, partly in open field and partly with the assistance of a ruse as at Chateaugay, against 800 British and thirty Indians, under Colonel Morison, a man equally brave and able with McDonell and De Salaberry.

Mr. Dion, of Chambly, to whom the erection of a fine bronze statue of De Salaberry is due, has related to me a number of particulars from De Salaberry's letters held by his relatives. The hero complains bitterly of Prevost and De Watteville—"those two Swiss"—and that on account of his religion he could get no higher than a Lieut.-Colonel. From the same letters it appears that the "Temoins Oculaires" were a young lawyer named O'Sullivan, later, Judge O'Sullivan, a man partly of Irish family, in person large and handsome, and a great friend of De Salaberry, who ever remained grateful to him for preserving record of his deed in his celebrated letter. It is commonly attributed to D.B. Viger. Another little fact mentioned in the correspondence of De Salaberry is that his men in the battle were barefooted.

The almost unique nature of the victory strikes one. Its keystone was De Salaberry's masterly use of illusion. Of it was the choice of a thick wood to conceal his small force, their entrenchment behind the abatis and in bush positions, the unexpected fire from the left bank upon Purdy, the Indians in the woods, and, more than everything, the ruse of the multiplied bugles. But besides illusion there was the ablest possible disposition, for there seems no doubt but that no spot could have been chosen along his projected route greater in strength when fortified and guarded just as that was. The enemy could only reach it fatigued, and far from sources of supply, the wood was thick, the ravines occurred happily, the river was free from fords for a long distance, and a frightful swamp occupied the opposite bank. How would De Watteville's small and raw army have acted in the open country had this position not been tried?

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Next, how ought the credit of the affair to be apportioned, for it is clear that it is due to a number concerned? De Salaberry is, of course, in every way the leading figure. His courage and spirit were perfect, his intelligence rapid, his labor incessant, and the whole choice of the field and strategy of the battle were, by all the testimony, due to him. On the whole, it almost seems, in its broad lights, like a battle of this one man against the enemy. His task was the greater from the extent and obscurity of the battlefield. On these accounts, some of those holding the positions used afterwards to say there was no battle at all, and one—Lieut. Delisle, who received a pension—that the whole thing was a farce. Frankly—and it may seem at first sight like a discourtesy to say it—it is doubtful whether the Voltigeurs would have stood much real fighting had they been opposed to veterans. On reasonable consideration this objection must disappear. It is well known that recruits away from their homes are utterly unstable in their first battles. For instance, at Bull's Run, in the first two battles of the American Civil War, it was a toss-up which side would run away from the other, and they decided it by one side doing so the first day, and the other side the second. Many of the Upper Canadians were fearful and undecided at the beginning of the War of 1812. It is pretty probable that the promptitude of the few regulars in the country, including such officers as Brock, was its salvation at the outset. Most of De Salaberry's own men had withdrawn a month previous at the attack on the camp at Four Corners, though so disproportionate an enterprise was no fair test of recruits. The Sedentary Militia, when drafted, deserted in great numbers, and the duty assigned to the newly raised Voltigeurs by their commander at Chrysler's Farm just afterwards was that merely of making a temporary display in the woods. De Salaberry probably intended to do more with his division at Chateauguay, and might have succeeded if put to the test, for they were now probably superior to the American force in the very important respect of acquired confidence in a leader, who was even then the hero of the Province. Being of the same stock as Napoleon's men, a long course of fighting under a De Salaberry would have undoubtedly made them into a similar force; but in any case, too much cannot be said for the patriotism and willingness exhibited by these young men in defence of united Canada.

Every man on the field, apparently, did the duty assigned to him. One—Jean Bte. Leclaire, was also one of the heroes of Fort Detroit and afterwards Chrysler's Farm. To the memory of such a man let his country do some honor. To the axemen's force also is due credit for cheerful and dangerous labor in chopping trees and working at the obstructions and defences. The Temoin Oculaire names "Vincent, Pelletier, Vervais, Dubois, Caron," who swam the river and took prisoners those who refused to surrender.

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Captain Daly is the name to be mentioned next to De Salaberry. His courageous onslaught is testified to by both Purdy and the Temoin, and twice wounded, he fought until he fell. It may be truthfully said that it was he who bore the brunt of the fight. Schiller also specially distinguished himself, and won his captaincy on the field. Of Ferguson and the two Captains Duchesnay we have spoken. The Temoin Oculaire praises the courage of Captain La Mothe, of Lieuts. Pinguet, Hebden, Guy, Johnson, Powell, and Captain L'Ecuyer (the latter two for captures of prisoners in the woods.) Captains Longtin and Huneau, of the Beauharnois Militia, are also mentioned by him for good conduct. Louis Langlade, Noel Annance, and Bartlet Lyons, of the Indian Department, were in the action of the 26th and the affair of the 28th. McDonell of Odgensburg, and no doubt many others, ought to be added. As to credit, in fact, every man in the region who did his duty and was ready to defend his country deserves it, and those named are but the examples who were put to the test. The brave Scotch settlers, few as they then were, were inspired with that spirit. The women stood literally ready to burn the roofs over their heads. The men, except those who had teams, who were drafted into an invaluable transport service, were formed into a company and drilled for the defence, under Lieut. Neil Morison and Captain James Wright, whose house was the headquarters of General De Watteville and a frequent scene of the council of officers. He was a tall and stern man, a Highlander, his name of "Wright" being a translation of his Gaelic one, "MacIntheoir." His Chateauguay sword is said to have long hung on the wall in the house of one of his descendants.

We should not be so ungrateful also as to forget the services of those faithful Indians, to whom, as all through the war, a share of the success was due.

In 1847 it was decided in England, after much agitation, to issue what was called "the War Medal," rewarding all those who had fought British battles during the years 1793 to 1814 and not received any special medal. Clasps were attached for each battle in which the recipient was engaged. A medal seems to have been given, as was meet, to almost every one on the field of Chateauguay, for 260 were distributed. It was, in fact, erroneously issued to some who were not present. One lieutenant, in particular, says Mr. Dion, is known from the De Salaberry letters to have himself lamented that he only came up the day after. The Indians and regulars also got medals. The simple record of what was done, however, is the best memorial of honor to those who were present on that memorable day.

Mr. R.W. McLachlan relates his recollections of one of the veterans at Montreal. "Clad in an old artillery uniform, he was always seen marching out alongside of the troops on review days. He was ever ready to recount his adventures on the day of battle. Although we have heard it often from his lips, all that we can remember is that: 'De Yankee see me fore I see him, and he shoot me drough de neck.'"

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It is the privilege of the men of Chateaugay to remember that their region is haunted by the spirits of heroes.

“The dead still play their part”

sings the Canadian poet Sangster, and here the musing thought must for ever conjure up De Salaberry, McDonell, the 800 waiting behind their breastworks in the gloom of the woods, the touching scene of Captain Longtin and his Beauharnois men, and the stubborn onset of Daly against overwhelming odds. The meaning of it all is: that given a good cause, and the defence of our homes against wanton aggression, we can dare odds that otherwise would seem hopeless; that it is in the future, as in the past, the spirits of men, and not their material resources, which count for success; that we need only be brave and just, and ready to die, and our country can never be conquered; and that we shall always be able to preserve ourselves free in our course of development towards our own idea of a nation.

APPENDIX.

NOTES BY W. PATTERSON, M.A.

1. Mr. James Walsh, Sr., who still resides in Ormstown, Que., was informed by one Saint Charles Moreau, alias Legault, that the stone house, situated on the Chateaugay about two miles below the village of Ste. Martine, and known during the early years of the present century as “The Stone Tavern,” had just been built and finished the day before the battle, and the officers of the Canadian forces unceremoniously took possession of it on coming forward that evening.

2. This same Legault or Moreau, shortly after the battle and before the dead were removed, visited the scene of the fight. There he saw several dead and several dying. He had a vivid recollection of the cruelty of the Indians. “The cursed savages,” said Legault, “did nothing to secure the victory, and yet were foremost in plundering the dead and dying.” He remembered in particular having seen an American officer, who was seriously wounded, lying on the field. The officer had a coin in his mouth which he was evidently anxious to save. An Indian, upon noticing this, bade him by making signs open his mouth and give up the piece. The command being apparently misunderstood, the Indian impatiently struck him with his tomahawk on the forehead. As his head was knocked back by the blow, the man opened his mouth, and his assailant taking out the coin passed on.

3. Mr. David Monique, who lived at the “Portage” (modern Dewittville) at the time of the war, used to say, as Mr. Walsh many a time heard him relate, that his impression was

that the Canadians did not hang upon the American rear after the fight, for had they done so, the American guns, which were all left behind, would have been captured. A division retreated up the Island of Jamestown by way of the "Portage," on the South side of the Chateauguay, passing on their route Mr. Monique's farm.

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There they had their morning meal near his house, on October 27th, 1813. Their pork they fried on the ends of sticks before little fires. They were poorly clad. All were quite civil. They said that they had been “badly licked the day before.” Their retreat was witnessed by this man and his family, and certainly they were not pursued by the Canadians, nor, in his opinion, did the Canadians pursue the other division, which retired across the Outarde by way of the ford, made on their inward march, and since known as the “American Ford,” for in the following year, they returned for their guns and carried them off without molestation.

4. Mr. Thomas Baird, merchant, of Ormstown, remembers well a Mr. Laberge, a very old man, who had been one of the soldiers on picquet duty at Ormstown, when the Americans invaded this country, in 1813. Laberge said that the Canadians stationed at this point were few in number, and were posted near the mouth of the Outarde, along the North bank of the Chateauguay, and also along the creek which now runs through the village of Ormstown. There the Canadians were taken by surprise. Those who escaped, retreated to De Salaberry’s headquarters a few miles down the Chateauguay.

Laberge also said that some of the Americans who were killed in the battle of the next day, October 26th, were buried on the bank of the creek, to which reference has been made. In this connection it is interesting to relate that while excavations were being made a few years ago for a roadway through this bank, the remains of five or six men were unearthed. The U.S.A. military buttons, the belt buckles and the bayonet found in their grave removed any doubt that these were the remains of American soldiers. This last item was kindly given the writer by Mr. Chas. Moe, who assisted in making the road.

5. The ford over the Outarde, by which the Americans crossed, still remains and is known as the “American Ford.” It is about three miles west of Ormstown village. The annual Spring floods have undoubtedly changed it somewhat. Both banks of the river shew the place to be a coarse gravel bed. By the addition of more gravel they easily made a fine roadway.

6. Mr. John Symons, who came to the Chateauguay River in 1828, and has lived in its vicinity ever since, and who at the time of writing resides in Ormstown, informed the writer that Alexander Williamson, one of the earliest settlers, used to say that what is spoken of as the battle of Chateauguay, is greatly magnified. Williamson regarded the Americans as a great lot of cowards who were glad to take advantage of the slightest opposition to return home.

7. Mr. James Brodie, a retired farmer, residing in the village of Ormstown, and who also was well acquainted with Alexander Williamson, states that Williamson was about twelve years of age when the battle was fought and was not present at the fight, but what he knew of it he had learned from others.

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8. Mr. William Allan who for years did business as a general storekeeper at Allans Corners, Que., informed the writer that he heard Alexander Williamson describe what is generally known as the battle, many times. "Williamson," says Mr. Allan, "could not repeat the same story twice."

9. Mr. Brodie, in view of all the information he could gather from the early settlers, including Mr. Williamson, sincerely believes that the merits of De Salaberry have been much over-estimated. "That officer has no claims," said he, "to being a hero by what he did in that encounter."

Yet the Canadians, so that gentleman gives the account, were most skilfully managed and made the best of their opportunity. Wearing the red coats, they were made to march in a circle for a time under the cover of the woods, and for a time exposed to the view of the Americans. To them, as they marched along, they gave the impression that they were a numerous force. These same Canadians, (Miss Anne Bryson, an aged lady, residing at Allans Corners, relates the story), still further exaggerated their strength by turning their coats whilst behind the trees, the white lining then giving them the appearance of being another regiment. The story is also told how the Indians, being well scattered, made the forests resound with their war cry.

10. Where was the battle fought? The battlefield is situated about five or six acres west of the passenger bridge at Allans Corners, which is a small village on the Chateauguay River, thirteen miles below Huntingdon, three miles below Ormstown village, and about forty-three miles from Montreal. The site was a position on the North bank of the Chateauguay, where, almost at right angles to it, a deep and wide creek, then a large stream, emptied itself into the river. At that point was the foremost line of De Salaberry's breastworks, consisting of felled trees, stones and earth. There the main division of the Americans was repulsed. A sharp encounter in which the enemy were defeated by Captain Daly took place several acres below this on the opposite bank. Bullets are found every year on the scene.

11. It is popularly believed that some of the American guns were sunk in the Chateauguay River at the point where the battle took place, although no trace of them has ever been found. The river is very deep there.

12. About 13 acres west of Allans Corners there was a settlement of American squatters who fled the country before the outbreak of the war. They had planted an orchard which was always afterwards known as the "American Orchard." Traces of it were to be seen a few years ago. The early settlers, Mr. Williamson among others, have handed down the fact that some of these people were employed as guides by the American invaders.

13. Mr. James Gilbert, who was the first settler on the land on the south bank opposite the point where De Salaberry was encamped, years ago, when ploughing, unearthed

the remains of a man wrapped in the American military dress, and at various times, Mr. George Nussey informed the writer, ploughed up bones.

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14. Mr. Williamson remembered well, Mr. Brodie informed the writer, that the settlers on the Chateauguay at the time of the battle, excepting of course the militia, were prepared to flee towards Montreal, intending to take with them what household effects they conveniently could, should the Canadian forces suffer defeat.

15. Near De Salaberry's first line, on the north bank of the river, stood the old block house. Miss Anne Bryson remembers it well.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Wm. James' Mil. Oc. of War of 1812.

[2] History of the War of 1812.

[3] James says at St. Regis.

[4] James.

[5] Letter of Hampton to Armstrong.

[6] James.

[7] To the Secretary of War, Sept. 25th, 1813, in Palmer's Hist. Register of the U.S., I., for 1814.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Chiefly Appleton's Cycl. of Am. Biog.

[10] Supplement to same. It contains a portrait of Izard.

[11] H. Sulte.

[12] Garneau, Hist. Can.

[13] Garneau.

[14] Garneau.

[15] Christie gives him credit for this point.

[16] See letters of "Veritas."

[17] Christie Hist. Can.

[18] Wilkinson's letters

[19] All full accounts of the battle from this stage on are chiefly founded on that remarkable letter of a participant signing "Temoin Oculaire," published in Montreal, 29 Oct., 1813. It is open, however, to some corrections of detail.

[20] Garneau and Sellar; but Coffin says they were French-Canadian *voyageurs*, and Mr. John Fraser, from tradition, says *five-sixths* French-Canadians. I have been unable to obtain the necessary verifications from Ottawa or elsewhere.

[21] W.F. Coffin, Hist. War of 1812.

[22] Jame's Military Occurrences, I., 306.

[23] Coffin.

[24] James.

[25] Coffin.

[26] James, I., p. 308.

[27] Purdy gives an interesting and clear account (*Vide* Palmer's Hist. Register for 1814) of this march and some other matters, in his report to Wilkinson.

[28] James.

[29] James says sixty.

[30] James.

[31] Temoin Oc.

[32] Garneau.

[33] Tradition.

[34] James.

[35] James.

[36] Temoin Oculaire.

[37] James.

[38] Tradition.

[39] James.

[40] Coffin.

[41] James.

[42] This was “a fact known to many persons now alive,” according to a petition for a medal by his family in 1849.

[43] James.

[44] See his despatch.

[45] Sulte.

[46] Hampton’s Report on the Battle: Palmer’s Hist. Register, 1814.

[47] James.

[48] James.

[49] “Officier actif et zele.” (Temoin Oculaire.)

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[50] James.

[51] Palmer's Hist. Register.