

Two Ships - Two Flags: the *Outaouaise/Williamson* and the *Iroquoise/Anson* on Lake Ontario, 1759 -1761

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En 1759, Louis-Pierre Poulin de Courval Cressé entreprit la construction de trois corvettes au chantier naval de Point au Baril (à Maitland, en Ontario), sur la rive du Saint-Laurent. Deux des navires (l'Outaouaise et l'Iroquoise) furent grésés et mis en service sur le fleuve et le lac Ontario. En août 1760, ils furent tous deux capturés - comme le navire non complété - au Fort Lévis ou dans ses environs par les troupes de Jeffery Amherst. Renommés respectivement Williamson et Anson, on s'en servit pour le transport d'approvisionnements du haut des rapides du Saint-Laurent jusqu'à Oswego et Niagara. Ils furent tous deux endommagés pendant leur service français; à titre de navires de transport britanniques, les deux furent perdus à cause de conditions météorologiques difficiles ou des plaines alluvionnaires.

On the 9th, we launched a bark which was named the Iroquoise...

On the 12th, the second vessel, named the Outaouaise, was launched. . . .

They were rigged at once .. }

It was April of 1759 and those words were penned in the French shipyard at Point au Baril² by Captain Pierre Pouchot. With these ships, France's hopes to retain control of Lake Ontario could remain alive.

France and Great Britain had been contenders in a war in North America since 1754 and around the globe since 1756. For Britain in 1759, the prize was Canada; not only the settlements on the St Lawrence from the Gaspé to Montreal but also the French areas of

Dunnigan, Brian Leigh, (ed.), translated by Michael Cardy, *Memoirs on the Late War in North America between France and England* by Pierre Pouchot, (Youngstown, NY, 1994), 164-165.

² "L'Anse au Construction," at what is now Maitland, Ontario, between Brockville and Prescott, on the St Lawrence River.

The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord, XIV No. 3, (July 2004), 41-55.

influence on Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and the upper Great Lakes. Even though Lieutenant Colonel John Bradstreet, commanding a mixed force mostly of Provincial troops, had captured, partially destroyed and had then abandoned Fort Frontenac at Cataraqui in August of 1758,³ the French had not been driven from Lake Ontario. They still occupied Fort Niagara at the western end of the lake and as early as October of 1758, Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, Marquis de Vaudreuil, the Governor General of Canada, planned to retain that dominance by ordering the construction of new ships to sail on Lake Ontario.⁴

There were three ships planned and hulls for all three were completed but only *Iroquoise* and *Outaouaise* were rigged. It is from the third vessel, which appeared to be the same size as the other two, that historians and marine archeologists have deduced the ships' dimensions based on a tonnage of 160 tons.⁵ The length of the keel for tonnage was estimated at 84 feet, the breadth of beam for tonnage was 22 feet and the depth of the hold [again for tonnage] was 9 feet 2 inches.⁶

It was intended that each of the ships was to be manned by two officers and thirty-four seamen⁷ and, when combat was anticipated, an additional complement of soldiers to act as marines was to be carried in each.

In August of 1760, the crew of the schooner, *Iroquoise*, consisted of the captain, René-Hippolyte LaForce, a master, a mate, a master gunner and thirty-two sailors.⁸ The brig, *Outaouaise*, carried the captain, Joseph Boucher *dit* La Broquerie, a master, seven petty officers, twenty-seven sailors and sixty-five marines.⁹ While designed for ten 12-pounders,

See Preston, Richard A. and Leopold Lamontagne: *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto, 1958), 262-263. The expedition using almost all provincial troops was unique in this war. For a description of Bradstreet's incursion, see *An Impartial Account of Lieut. Col. Bradstreet's Expedition to Fort Frontenac*, (London, 1759), and Robert J. Andrews, *John Bradstreet's Raid*, (Kingston, 2004).

Vaudreuil to the Minister, 30 October 1758, cited in Preston & Lamontagne, 456-457.

⁵ Queen's University Archives microfilm (hereafter QUA), WO 34/65, f28.

⁶ At General Jeffery Amherst's request, Lieutenant Bernard Ratzer of the 60th Regiment surveyed Fort Levy, which map Amherst included in his dispatch to William Pitt of 4 October 1760. On the map, Ratzer located the *Iroquoise* and the unfinished vessel side by side. The hulls appear to be identical in shape and size. See Library and Archives of Canada, H3 1250, National Map Collection 0007763. The dimensions cited are those found under "Our vessels" in a postscript written by Lieutenant Patrick Sinclair of the 42nd Regiment, who was in command of His Majesty's Snow *Mohawk*, in Sinclair to Amherst, 22 September 1760. QUA, WO 34/65, f28. Please note that these dimensions are for determining tonnage and do not represent real keel length, length overall, beam or draught. There was a suggestion that the third vessel was larger than the others. Captain John Lotteridge of the Indian Service wrote to Sir William Johnson on 10 May 1760, "the french Vessells are rigged, the third almost finished which was very large," Lotteridge to Johnson, 10 May 1760, QUA, WO 34/39, ff 142-143.

⁷ Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 261.

⁸ See "A return of the State of the Garrison Which Capitulated at Fort Levis August 25th. 1760." QUA, WO 34/8, f24. Amherst listed no marines assigned to the *Iroquoise*, as she was scuttled on the downstream side of the fort.

⁹ "A return of the State of the Garrison Which Capitulated at Fort Levis August 25th. 1760." QUA, WO 34/8, f24. A portion of the 65 man marine complement was probably previously aboard the damaged *Iroquoise*.

in August of 1760, *Outaouaise* had one 18-pounder, seven 12-pounders and four swivels.¹⁰ *Iroquoise* was also designed for ten 12-pound guns.¹¹

The existence of the French ships did not guarantee absolute superiority on the lake. While patrolling in June of 1759, *Iroquoise* missed a British force of 2300 men under Brigadier General John Prideaux and Sir William Johnson on the lake in batteaux and whaleboats.¹² Had the British been spotted, *Iroquoise's* cannons would have created havoc among the unprotected boats filled with troops but La Force was all alone on the lake.¹³ Pouchot, as always referring to himself in the third person, explained why in his Memoirs. "On the 27th, there arrived a troop of Mississakies whom M. Pouchot had sent out to gain intelligence about the English at Chouegen. These Indians had left on the bark *Outaouaise* which was assaulted by such a violent squall that its mainmast & its bowsprit were broken. It had to put into La Présentation for some time, which impeded patrolling on the Chouegen River & was in part responsible for the failure to detect the English advance."¹⁴

In July of 1759, Niagara fell to the British and on 13 September, Wolfe's army took Quebec, but the French army still retained Canada. In April of 1760, a bold move by the French almost took the British garrison at Quebec, but the timely arrival of the Royal Navy ensured it remained in British control. August saw the commencement of a three pronged British attack on Montreal, since the fall of Quebec, the seat of government for Canada. James Murray was to advance up the St Lawrence from Quebec, Colonel William Haviland was to traverse Lake Champlain, navigate the Richelieu River and join up with Murray and the commander-in-chief, Major-General Jeffery Amherst.

In July 1760, Amherst had moved up the Mohawk River and over the network of portages and watercourses that connect that river to Lake Ontario and arrived at Oswego. He found that the massing British army had had visitors.

I Arrived here on the 9th. the two French Vessells¹⁵ had been off this Port on the 6th. and on the 11th. & 12th. made their Appearance again; I was then every hour in Expectation of Captain Loring's Arrival from Niagara with

In his painting of the action with the *Outaouaise* of 16 August 1760, Thomas Davies showed the ship as pierced by 8 gun ports, presumably per side, with a broad yellow band on the sides, creating a chequering effect when the gun ports were open, and yellow on the frames of the stern cabin windows. Lieutenant Thomas Davies "A View of Fort La Galet." National Gallery of Canada.

¹ Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 172, n. 504.

¹² For a description of batteaux, see Robert Malcomson, "Nothing more uncomfortable than our flat-bottomed boats': Batteaux in the British Service during the War of 1812," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord*, XIII, 4, 17-28. [Ed.]

¹³ Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 190.

¹⁴ Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 189.

¹⁵ *Iroquoise* and *Outaouaise*.

our two Snows;¹⁶ the 14th. at Night he appeared, and the 15th. I sent him to the North Side of the Lake to Lay in wait for the Enemys Vessells, hoping they had no Intelligence of his being on the Lake, the 20th. the French Vessells came off this Place again, and I immediately dispatched Whaleboats to Captain Loring, that he may Post himself in the Entrance of the River, and Cutt them off from their Harbour. I have no News since, but I think it likely that Captain Loring will have taken such a Station, that they can't Avoid him; they are less than our Vessells from their Appearance and from the Intelligence I have of them, they Mount Ten & Twelve Guns; Ours have Sixteen, & are well Manned....

P.S. 10 at Night, I Just now hear the Enemys Vessells
have Escaped Capt: Loring, & got into the River S^t Lawrence.¹⁷

Poor Joshua Loring. He was almost the only Royal Navy officer in a sea of army red and scarlet and he was very much embarrassed that the French had escaped him. He wrote a lengthy letter of explanation to the commander-in-chief, which he began with the words, "I am extremely sorry that I am obliged to acquaint your Excellency that the Enemy notwithstanding my utmost Endeavours to intercept them have escaped me."¹⁸

After the fall of Niagara, Pierre Pouchot had become a prisoner of the British but he was exchanged in November 1759. In March of 1760, he was placed in command of Fort **Levis** on Orakointon island [Isle Royale] at the head of the rapids near Johnstown, Ontario/Ogdensburg, New York, in the St Lawrence River. The fort was designed to be the bottle-stopper in the river that would stop the British on their way to Montreal. The French ships were to skulk through the islands in the river and effectively hold up passage of the massive British force that Amherst was commanding in 1760, but the French plans for defence were complicated by misfortune. "On August 1st, La Force sent his longboat to inform us that his ship the Iroquoise had run aground on a poulrier¹⁹ in the middle of the river above Pointe au Baril. M. Pouchot immediately sent out some bateaux to help refloat it. On the 5th, the ships went and anchored at La Présentation & La Force came to the fort. His corvette was taking on 12 inches of water every hour & had 15 feet of the keel holed at the

After the fall of Fort Niagara, Sir William Johnson had ordered the construction of two snows, 29 July 1759. The first, christened *Mohawk*, or *Mohawk's Revenge*, was launched in October. The second, originally named *Apollo* and later renamed *Onondaga*, was launched 6 July 1760. She carried 18 guns while her sister snow carried 16. These two ships were similar in size to the French ships. These should not be confused with two schooners, *Mississaga* and *Farquhar*, completed from French hulks on the stocks at Niagara in 1759, but which were lost in December of that year. See Thomas Thornton to Joshua Loring, 24 December 1759. QUA, WO 34/65, ff2-3.

¹⁷ Amherst to Monckton, 24 July 1760. QUA, WO 34/43, ff143-144.

¹⁸ Loring to Amherst, 23 July 1760. QUA, WO 34/65, ff22-23.

¹⁹ A note in the original publication of the *A/emo/r* [1866], 252.a, says: "A Bank of large pebbles which forms in the river, like a rock." The location of the grounding seems to be near Brockville, possibly near the Three Sisters Islands or in the Brockville Narrows.

bow. We worked at repairing it as quickly as possible." *Iroquoise* was not quickly or readily repaired. Although Pouchot recorded in his *Memoir* that the ship had been repaired,²⁰ she never again saw action afloat. She was sailed to Fort Levis and scuttled alongside an unfinished hull. Her guns were removed to add to the armament of the fort. *Outaouaise* was on her own.

The British arrived at the burned out shipyard at Point au Baril and at Oswegatchie on 16 August. Row galley²¹ under Colonel George Williamson of the Royal Regiment of Artillery attacked *Outaouaise* the next day at 7am in a flat calm. Amherst recorded the action in his journal.

17th. at daybreak the Vessel began to fire and Col Williamson attacked her with the five Row Galleys, she was going up the River but the Wind calmed and the Row Galleys behaved very well fired 118 Shot the Vessel fired 72, had three men killed and twelve wounded and then Struck the Artillery had one Serjeant killed and a New York Provincial lost his leg, the Carriage of the Hautwitzer gave way & hurt the Row Galley, the Vessel called the Outawas had one 18 P', seven 12 P'' & two 8 P''' with four Swivels, the five Row Galleys had four heavy brass twelves & one Hautwitzer Col Williamson took the command of the Row Galleys to himself & executed it vastly well, on the Vessels sailing up the River I expected she would have been at our batteaùs & I immediately got Guns out for three Batteries to defend them but the wind calming favoured the Row Galleys the Army after this rowed down eight miles to Swegatchi & encamped there. I sent Sailors on board the Vessels & took the Prisoners on Shore being 27 Sailors 65 Miliciens & with the Officers made up 100 men.²²

La Broquerie's *Outaouaise* was renamed *Williamson*, and in spite of considerable damage to her from the British attack, she was pressed into service against Fort Levis which fell to Amherst's army on 26 August 1760.

With the fort,²³ came the unfinished third vessel and the sunken *Iroquoise*. Neither was to remain on the bottom for long. On 28 August, General Amherst recorded in his journal, "28th got the french Schooner up a very good new Vessel carries 10 Guns as the Brig."²⁴

The reclaimed *Iroquoise* was renamed *Anson* in honour of Admiral Lord Anson,

Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 299.

²¹ The French called these *Carcassieres*. Dunnigan, *Pouchot Memoirs*, 301, n. 904.

²² The Journal of Jeffery Amherst, Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, Amherst Family Papers, U 1350 015/8, 14-15.

²³ Renamed Fort William Augustus in honour of the Duke of Cumberland.

²⁴ Amherst journal, 35.

First Lord of the Admiralty. Amherst issued orders to Lieutenant William Deering, a Provincial officer from New England, who was to command *Anson*; to Lieutenant Nathan Tibbols who commanded the captured *Williamson*, as well as to other officers commanding vessels.²⁵ The unfinished French corvette that had been scuttled at the northern tip of Orakointon Island, was also raised, completed, rigged as a snow, named *Johnson*, and put to sea by the British by 22 September.

Now no longer required to fight, the ships were placed into service forwarding goods of all kinds from Fort William Augustus to both Oswego and Niagara. After the fall of Montreal in September 1760, the St Lawrence became the route by which goods were forwarded to Lake Ontario. While batteaux and whaleboats still played a role in the transport of both men and material on Lake Ontario, the availability of the ships meant that large cargoes could be moved over the lake more safely and with greater speed.

Navigation on Lake Ontario could be tricky, particularly in the latter half of the year. Winds over the lake are generally 30 per cent stronger than they are on land in summer, and in winter the over-lake winds are 100 per cent stronger than they are on land.²⁶ Modern data indicate that the strongest winds are in August reaching 40 knots from the west and gusting as high as 66 knots from the south-west. Modern monthly data for the north shore port of Trenton indicate maximum hourly speeds of 34 knots in August, 35 knots in September, 39 knots in October and 40 knots in November. Given the multiplier effect over water, with a median monthly increase of 10 per cent from July, winds could reach speeds of 52 knots in September, 62 knots in October and 68 knots in November. Both Oswego and Niagara were on the south shore of Lake Ontario which, under a west to northwest wind, was a lee shore.

Oswego in particular was open to storms and there was a need for protection in that harbour. Lieutenant Charles Robertson of the 77th Regiment, a soldier who spent more time at sea than serving with his regiment, wrote to Amherst at the end of October, 1760. His description of the late navigation season merits quoting at length.

The twelt of this month at Fort Will: Augustus I was ffavour'd withe The Honour of your Excellency's Letter Dated at Montroyal September the 28' 1760 Wherein your Excellency is Pleas'd to order that how soon the Season putts a stope to our Navigation to lay up the Shipping at Oswego, Excepting the Mohawk and Williamson, and to Remain myself at Oswego aforeS^d. for the Care of the Vessels. This and all other orders from your Excellency I Shall allways be rady to obey to my outmost , I may Say that your Excellency will believe that it grives me not a little that I have been able to make but one trip with the Sloop [*Missassago*] when the Schunnar [*Anson*]

²⁵ See Amherst's letters to various officers, 23 September 1760, QUA, WO 34/65, ff 131, 139, 157 & 158.

²⁶ Canadian Hydrographie Service, *Sailing Directions: Great Lakes*, Volume I, Tenth Edition, (Ottawa, 1986), 86-87.

has made two but it is entirely owing to the difference of the Vessels Sailing, I left Fort will: augustus in Company with the Schunnar the 14 Instant She got here the 19th and I only got here the 22^d at duskish. But the 20^t at night the Schunnar had the Misfortune to be drive out of the Harbour, the Particulars concerning hir is Sent your Excellency by Major Duncan of the 55th Regt. who at Capt. Dearings Pition ordered a court of Inquary to be held for that purpose. And by what I Can see Shee is not fit to go out of the Harbour till she is hove down which can not be done at present their being neither Calkers no Carpenters here. The Jonston Snow late a french hulk at Fort Will: Augustus Ariv'd here the 14 Instant with orders to Cary a Cargo of Provisions to Fort william augustus aforesid, but in hir way hither brock hir trusseltrees²⁷ So that for want of Carpenters to make new ons they Stript hir rady for laying hir up all winter. The Sloop Missassago is takeing a cargo of Provisions for Fort will: augustus, But their being no wharf made here for the Security of the Vessels I am under the necessity of Sending one James Setter [Seater] who Commanded the Johnston Snow hither to Command the Sloop as I most Immeadiatly do Something or other to Secure the other Vessel.

I have given Setter orders that If Lieu': Sinclair of y^e 42^d Reg': Commanding the Mohawk Should Judge it not prudent to venter the Sloop back to Oswego this winter that then he is to lay hir up at Fort william augustus and whatever orders he has Concerning the men under his Command in the Mohawk, he is to dispose of the Sloops Curse in like manner

If your Excellency Should order the Seamen here to be dischargd their will be but few of them here to give us that trouble as their is upwards of 20 of them diserted I have Sent by express a letter to the officers commanding at the different poss to Albany to pprehend them till your Excellencys plaesure is known

The Williamson Brig is now at Niagara with hir second Cargo, Whatever further my occur to me Concerning the Service I shall make known to Your Excellency in a few days mean time permit me to be with the outmost Respect.²⁸

To the problem of weather might be added the shortage of skilled tradesmen and desertion.

The "court of Inquary" on the *Anson* accident was convened quickly. Deering wanted the court so that he could clear his name of any blame.

²⁷ An obsolete form of trestletrees. Two strong pieces of timber fixed horizontally fore-and-aft on opposite sides of a mast head, to support the cross-trees, the top, and the fid of the mast above.

²⁸ Robertson to Amherst, 25 October 1760. WO 34/60: f 11.

Lieu. Robinson²⁹ Member of the Court, Askd Captain Deering, Why at this time of Year, And according to his own Declaration, when he Saw it was Like to Blow. Why He did not Moor the Vessell.

Captain Deering answers, as he was to Go Another Trip. He only chose to have the best Anchor ready to Let Go. That He intended to haul in next Morning, to take in another Loading. And did not Moore her for that Reason. As it woud have taken up time to Unmoor again.³⁰

Testimony given by Ensign Walter Young of the 5⁵th, who commanded a relief party from shore, offered a different perspective.

En^s Young informs the Court that when He went aboard the Vessell, with the Party to assist her. He found the Mate Very Active and was a Considerable time aboard before He knew the Captain. M^r Young does not Pretend to be Judge in those Affairs. But as things appear in his Judgement. The Captain was not so Active as the Mate. He Seemd Distresst at the Accident. And Much Rejoiced when She was got off. That He has not the Appearance of an Alert Active Behaviour, in Ordering things to be Done. But as M^r Young is No Judge of Sea Matters. He will not Pronounce on his Acting Right or Wrong.³¹

The captain, perhaps not surprisingly, attempted to fix blame on someone else. "Being askd by the Court Why He did Not Confine the Watch. Answers. He coud not find out the Persons Who had the Watch. That it was the Boatswain had his Orders to See the Watch set."³²

The commander at Fort Ontario, Major Alexander Duncan, felt that Deering would not fare well through the court. He wrote to Amherst forwarding the record of the proceedings and added a comment of his own about Captain Deering's testimony, which almost implied collusion between the deserters and the Captain.

"... [T]he Accident that happen'd to the Schooner Anson on 21st Inst. by which She is so much damaged as renders her unfit to go to Sea till dock'd. Cap' Deering applied to Me for a Court of Enquiry, to exculpate himself, how far he has done so, You will by the Proceedings which I send You with this³³ be the best Judge. I think it my duty to inform You, that the Boatswain, & Seamen, mentioned therein to have deserted, were never confin'd nor did they go off till 29th."³⁴ Duncan added a comment in this letter that presaged

²⁹ Charles Robertson.

³⁰ Court of Enquiry, 25 October 1760, QUA, WO 34/19, ff 22-24.

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Duncan to Amherst, 26 October 1760. QUA, WO 34/20, ff 20-21.

further problems associated with sailing on the Great Lakes in the autumn. "The Weather has been very Boisterous here for some Days past."³⁵ The setback to forwarding provisions and stores to western garrisons occasioned by the near loss of *Anson* was immediately eclipsed by another.

This time the bad news came from Niagara at the western end of the lake. *Anson's* sister ship had also been driven ashore. The commandant at Niagara, William Walters, wrote to Amherst on 26 October.

I am to Acquaint Your Excellency that the Williamson Brig Arrived within a mile of this Garrison the 22nd: Instant in the night and obliged to come to an Anchor, the wind, and a Strong Currant being against her, the 25th: in the Evening the Master³⁶ came on Shore and acquainted me that the Vessell had Sprang a Lake and that, She had Six foot water in the Hold, Upon which I maned all the boats I could get and Sent them on board with two officers in order to Lighten her and to keep a number of Men Constantly at the pumps, notwithstanding all they could do, the water gained upon them, which obliged them to run her on Shore five miles from the Garrison, I have Employed all the Troops in geting the provisions out, I am in hope of Saving the most part of it, altho Some part of it will be much damaged, I shall do my best Endeavour to get the Vessell of and to get her in as soon as the wind & weather will permit but I fear She will not be able to return to Oswego Therefore I Dispatch, this with an officer in a whale boat to acquaint Your Excellency & the commanding officer at Oswego What has happen'd, that he may Load another Vessell with provisions, and Send her here . . .

I shall do all that is in my power in saving the provisons and in Saving the Vessell.³⁷

Walters' hope of being able to salvage the vessel soon proved to be false. *Williamson* was stuck fast on the beach east of Niagara. The pounding she had suffered at the hands of the British row galleys some two months earlier off La Galette had taken a significant toll. At the beginning of November, Walters wrote again.

I am to acquaint Your Excellency that I have done Every thing in my power to save the Williamson Brig & her cargo but there is no possibility of geting her of the Master tells me that She is full of Shot holes and Leaks & that her hull is mostly buried in the Sand, I have got all the provisions out of her and am Employing all the troops in getting them up to the fort, I fear they will suffer Some Damage as some part of it has been under water,

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ It is not certain just who this was by this time. Nathan Tibbols had commanded her earlier and may still have been there.

³⁷ Walters to Amherst, 26 October 1760. QUA, WO 34/21, f 109.

but shall do the best I can, I have ordered all the Rigging Sails Gun &c to be Saved and brought to the Fort I now Send the Captain of the Brig with his crew with two carpenters that was kept here who has been of great use in mending and patching some old boats up without which we could not saved the Provision out of the Brig.

... by this opportunity I have wrote to the commanding officer at Oswego to use his utmost Diligence in Loading a Vessell and Sending her with provisions as Soon as Possible.³⁸

Back at Oswego, Charles Robertson was attempting to get things squared away for the winter. Major Duncan had adhered to the terms of enlistment for the seamen [as mentioned in Robertson's letter] and had also let Deering go home.

. . . Cap': Dearing of ye Hanson Schoonar told me that their was Signd Artickles betwixt Cap' Loring and the Seamen on this Lake, that they, Should be discharg'd in Six months from the time of their entrie or at moss they were to Serv no longer than during the Campagen . . .

The reason Major Duncan gave Cap': Dearing a pass till your Excellencys Plasuer was known was his falling very bad with the Fever and ague.³⁹

The loss of *Williamson* put the plans for wintering the vessels on hold but it also put at least one other of the vessels at risk. At the time of *Williamson's* wreck, *Johnson* had been laid up for the winter.⁴⁰

There were questions about the wreck of *Williamson*.⁴¹ William Walters, the commander at Niagara, was anxious to set the record straight with General Amherst, in April 1761.

I must take notice of the behaviour of the master of the Williamson Brig I think he was very Idle he did not come near me for two days after he came to an anchor nor did I get my Letters from him untill he run the Vessell on shore altho I was told that he was a Shore all the first night, he come here drinking in one of the Indian Traders Hutts, the Riging Sails &c is Saved but for the Vessel there was no Possibility of Saving her Hull being buried in Sand and half full of water

I have been told that the Master of the Williamson Should Say at Oswego that I had forced him to way anchor when he had a foul wind which

Walters to Amherst, November 1760. QUA, WO 34/21, ff 112 - 113.

Robertson to Amherst, 31 October 1760. WO 34/60: f 12.

Robertson to Amherst, 4 November 1760. WO 34/60: f 14.

I have not yet found a record of a Court of Enquiry convened on the loss of *Williamson*.

occasioned her to run on a rock which caused the Lake

I do assure Your Excellency that I gave him no Such orders for When he came to me which was the Second day after he came in, I Desired him to take the first fair wind to bring the Vessell in and that I should give him all the Assistance in my power and to told him he must do his best Endavour to go back to Oswego and bring another Cargo of Provisions which he did not Like to come back, by any means taling me that his people's time was out and that they wanted to go whom to their friends My Reason of proposing to Lieu': Robertson to take the Johnson Snow with him to Oswego was that he could get materials and workmen there to fit her up in a proper maner, I told him I would give him all the Assistance in my power to repair her at this post and give him hands to help to navigate her to Oswego thinking She might be wanted as She will be useless here.⁴²

Amherst's response was brief and to the point. In his mind at least, the ship's loss was deliberate. "I am Sorry to hear such an Account of the Behaviour of the Master of the Williamson Brig: It is like the rest of them; they will, at any time, lose one of the King's Vessells, when they are home sick, to get their people to the Inhabited Country."⁴³

In June 1761, Amherst, sent Sir William Johnson and Major Henry Gladwin to Detroit. Sir William, in his capacity as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, was to meet with the First Nations around Detroit and attempt to calm them and sway them to the British interest. Gladwin was to take detachments of the 60th and 80th Regiments to occupy the posts dependant upon Detroit, and to remove the French garrisons thereof. *Anson*, now commanded by Lieutenant Roderick McLeod, was used to carry Sir William Johnson and his party from Oswego to Niagara, 21 to 24 July, and Sir William's journal recorded that voyage.⁴⁴ That was a successful voyage, but the misfortune at Oswego on 21 October 1760, had compounded damage resulting from the grounding in the St Lawrence on 1 August 1760. In August 1761, Alexander Duncan wrote to Amherst *that Anson* was so leaky she had to be hove down and repaired.⁴⁵

In October 1761, just more than a year after she had scraped ashore at Oswego, *Anson* was on her regular run ferrying people, stores and provisions from Fort William Augustus to Oswego and on to Niagara. She never got to Oswego! Accounts of the ship came to Amherst from several sources. Captain Loring got the news in a second hand fashion and immediately wrote to Amherst from Albany. "I Beg leave to acquaint Your

" Walters to Amherst, 5 April 1761. QUA, WO 34/21, ff 137 - 138.

⁴³ Amherst to Walters, 17 May 1761. QUA, WO 34/23, f 58. The General was reflecting on his experience with Provincials in 1759.

⁴⁴ Hamilton, Milton W. (ed.), *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, (Albany, 1962), Volume XIII, "The Detroit Journal," 222-227.

⁴⁵ Duncan to Amherst, 2 August 1761. QUA, WO 34/19, f 62.

Excellency that there is a Serjeant of General Gages Light infantry come to Town Yesterday who informs me that about the middle of October he was on Board the Schooner Anson coming from Fort William Augustus, with a Load of Provisions for Oswego. that about ten o Clock one Moring having a Fresh Gale at North about twenty miles below Cataroque they Run upon a Ledge of Rocks, and as the Vessell was then going very fast Stove her Bottom in immediately."⁴⁶ The official version came in a letter from Roderick McLeod who had written to Alexander Duncan at Fort Ontario.

This brings you the Disagreeable News of the Anson's being Cast away Unfortunately on her return to Oswego, on a Sunken Rock,⁴⁷ till then unknown to the Pilate, under whose Direction the Vessell was while In the River, we had on Board 494. bl^l. of Beef 113. Casks of Oatmeal 27 Tierces⁴⁸ of Rice, & 9. Casks of Pease

This unfortunate Accident happen'd the 23^d. Ins^t: w^h\. a hard Gale of wind at N. East Being under full Sail right before the Wind She run on with Such force, that in less then a Quarter of an Hour, She was almost full of water, we imagin'd it was only the old Leak, enlarg'd,⁴⁹ but after unloading Some Part of her Cargoe, found a Large Rock: through her in the Lazarella, we got the Most of the Dry Provisions a Shore, and in the hopes of Saveing the Rest.

Upon Running a Shore I immediately Sent a bark Cannoe Express to Fort Will^m.. Augustus, but the weather being very bad they Could not get Down 'till the 26th. upon Which Cap^t. Thody [Francis Thodey] with his Comp^{ts}: was order'd up to Assist me, & we are now unloading her With all Possible Dispatch, and in hopes having with what was landed before his Arrival 300.

Loring to Amherst, 13 November 1761, QUA, WO 34/65, f70. See also Walters to Amherst, 1 November 1761, QUA, WO 34/21, f214. Another version of the wreck came from Captain George Le Hunte of the 80th Regiment who was in command at Fort William Augustus while Henry Gladwin was off securing the King's possessions in the *pays d'en haut*. See Lehunte to Amherst, 7 November 1761, QUA, WO 34/54, f20.

⁴⁷ It is believed that the ship struck the Niagara Shoal in the southern channel of the Upper Narrows of the St Lawrence River, 2500 metres upstream from the southern span of the Thousand Islands Bridge. The island referred to by McLeod as *Mi Survi* and by George Le Hunte in WO 34/54, f20, as a Neighbouring Island was probably Susan or Sophia Island, which is the first island south-west of the Niagara Shoal. As the wind was blowing strongly from the North east, it seem likely that an island directly down wind might be the place of choice where the shipwrecked crew could transfer the cargo from the wreck.

⁴⁸ A Tierce is a cask whose content is one third of a pipe. A pipe is a cask of two hogsheads. A hogshead is a cask varying in size from 63 to 140 gallons, depending on the contents and the then current usage. In this case the hogshead is 63 gallons. Therefore, a tierce is 42 gallons. Richard M. Lederer, *Colonial American English*, (Essex, CT., 1985).

⁴⁹ Presumably the leak exacerbated by the grounding at Oswego in October 1760 and initially caused by the grounding of the ship when she was *Iroquoise*, in August of 1760

barrels landed to Night Upon Surveying her we Judg'd it impracticable to get her off at least till the water is higher. Therefore if you think proper to Send Down the Mohawk or Johnson to Carry off the Provision & Rigging we will Endeavour to have all ready against their Arrival, the Johnson I think to be the safest Vessell this time of Year, but I Don't think she Can Carry all, the Mohawk tho' not So Safe can Carry all The People are very uneasy, and I am Oblige to use all means to keep them Quiet & Should I Send any of them up to help to Rigg the Vessell I'm Afraid they wou'd find means to Avoid Coming back. As Cap'. Lehunt gave me Strict Orders to remain here with the People till everything was taken off; which I think highly Necessary There were on board when this unfortunate Accident happen'd Lieu'. Jamat of the Roy'. American Regim'.. gone to Niagara in the Sloop. & M'. Waters Late Commissary at Fort W^m. Augustus, whom I beg you would Examine That his Opinion may Appear when any Enquiry is made, which I hope will be done upon our Arrival at Oswego. As the beef was full of fresh water when it Arriv'd at Oswegatchie and no Bungs in the Cask⁵⁰, & the most of them in bad Order it's my Humble Opinion that a Cooper with Proper Tools & Salt would be Very Necessary, As it wou'd be the Means of Saving the Prov".. and take notime in Loading the Vessell when She Comes⁵¹

Alexander Duncan waited three weeks until he knew more before writing to the General. In his letter he included a copy of McLeod's letter.

I am sorry to acquaint Your Excellency, with the Misfortune that has befallen the Anson Schooner On Her passage from Fort Augustus to this Place; When I received Capt". McLeod's Letter on 1st Inst (a Copy of which I inclose)⁵² the two Vessells that lay here were both unrigged; and most of the Seamen out in the other Vessells. We cou'd do little therefore towards fitting out the Johnson Snow till the 3^d when, M' Seatter in the small Schooner⁵³ arrived here from Niagara. The Wind being contrary, it was the 9th before these Vessells cou'd sail to the Assistance of the Anson. As Major Gladwin went in the Johnson, I have desired him to give what directions he may think proper, for the saving of the Vessell, & Cargoe.

Meat was packed in barrels with brine included to keep the meat from spoiling. All too often the bungs were removed, the brine drained because of the high salt content, and either fresh water substituted or the bungs left out and the meat would dry. Salt was expensive and hard to get. An illicit trade in brine salt continued for some time. See the Gladwin to Amherst correspondence QUA, WO 34/54.

⁵¹ McLeod to Duncan, 28 October 1761. WO 34/19: f 102.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ James Seatter was in command of the *Mohawk*.

And as flour is the only Article of Provisions that can be wanted I have desired him to send from Fort Augustus as much, as these two Vessells can carry, besides the Anson's Cargoe; most of which is got on Shore as Captⁿ Thodey reports who came here on the 4th. Inst. The Sloop [*Misstssaga*] which had gone from Fort Willtm. Augustus to Niagara with 424. Barrels of Pork & 30 Bar^{ls}. Pease came in here on the 13th Inst. after a very tedious Passage. I was in hopes Major Walters wou'd have sent this Vessell to the Assistance of the Anson. . .

I have put on board of her 350 Bar^{ls}. flour. & this Day She sailed for Niagara with a fair Wind, with this they will have above above 450 Barrels of flour, which is all Major Walters thinks they will want untill they may expect a Supply in the Spring. However if I get any flour from Fort Augustus I shall send some more, if the Season will permit after the Vessells return. I shall likewise find some live Stock. . . .

Since I began this Letter the Small Schooner [*Mercury*, built at Niagara and launched in 1760] is come in with 220 Barrels of Beef of the Anson's Cargoe. M^r McLeod writes me that he has secured the Anson from receiving any damage from Ice; I suppose by that, he does not propose attempting to get her of till the Spring; but most People that come from thence say, She will never be got off. the Johnson is gone down with all the rigging and furniture to Fort Willtm Augustus, is to take in some flour there, and to return for the remainder of the Anson's Cargoe & then proceed to this Place.

I shall order the Beef to be issued first to troops as the great quantity of fresh water that has got in to the Casks will make it spoil when ever warm weather comes.⁵⁴

Of course, following the loss of this one of His Majesty's ships, there had to be a court of enquiry and Alexander Duncan convened one.⁵⁵ The court discovered that the ship was hard to steer; the pilot was not on duty although the captain thought he was and said that he was; the captain who was conning the ship may have been off course; a wind shift was cited as having caused the ship to veer onto the shoal; the crew, made up of New York Provincials, tended to side with the pilot's version of events. Curiously, Lewis Jack Rosier was the pilot of *Anson* on two of the three occasions on which she went aground.

M^r Leod stayed with the wreck for nearly a month and during that time Henry Gladwin had returned to Fort William Augustus from his journey to Detroit. No doubt, as Duncan had indicated to Amherst, Gladwin would have ensured that every thing useable and worthy of salvage came off the wreck.

⁵⁴ Duncan to Amherst, 17 November 1761, QUA, WO 34/19, ff 100-101.

⁵⁵ Duncan to Amherst, 2 December 1761, QUA, WO 34/19, f 103.

Even though no one had been drowned, there were human costs in this episode. McLeod, for example, "being much afflicted with the Rheumatism (occasioned as is imagined from his being exposed to the Cold most of the Month of November on an Island in the River S' Lawrence, taking Care of the Cargoe of the Anson Schooner) was confin'd to His Room ever since, and was not able to proceed down the Country by Land."⁵⁶ His poor condition was substantiated by the regimental surgeon.⁵⁷

The losses of *Williamson* and *Anson* slowed the forwarding of provisions to the Lake Ontario forts and to the establishments beyond Niagara, but did not cripple it. *Mohawk* was converted to carry provisions and stores and, as has been pointed out, the unfinished corvette, begun by the French at Point au Baril and scuttled at Fort Levis in 1760, had been raised, rigged as a snow from spars and cordages of the ruined *Onondaga* and christened *Johnson*. She was already plying the route from Fort William Augustus to Oswego to Niagara. The additional construction in 1760 of the sloop *Mississauga*, and the schooner *Mercury*, built at Niagara and Oswego respectively, kept the functioning Lake Ontario fleet at four ships. It was clear to General Amherst that even with the labour required to circumvent the St Lawrence River rapids, the use of ships on the Great Lakes would facilitate on-going supply more quickly, in greater quantity and with greater safety than using the old war-time, and often low-water, routes from Albany to Oswego for Lake Ontario and from Pittsburg to Lake Erie for the *pays d'en haut*. In 1761 and 1762, two ships⁵⁸ were built and launched in the Niagara River for Lake Erie. Rather than batteaux, canoes or whaleboats, decked ships would remain preferred.

Sometime between 1761 and the 20th century, *Anson* slid off the shoal on which she had foundered and now lies off the Niagara Shoal in the main channel of the St Lawrence River just west of the American span of the Thousand Islands' Bridge. She has become a magnet for divers. One wonders what articles of value might have remained aboard her and so *Iroquoise/Anson* remains an historical curiosity.⁵⁹

Of *Outaouaise/Williamson*, while her parts were used on other ships, not a trace remains.

⁵⁶ Duncan re McLeod, 11 May 1762., QUA, WO 34/65, f211.

⁵⁷ Certificate of Robertson and Constable, 11 May 1762, QUA, WO 34/65, f210.

⁵⁸ The schooner *Huron* and the sloop *Michigan*.

⁵⁹ *Iroquoise Project*, the St Lawrence River Historical Foundation website has a very thorough and informative look at the site and the findings thereupon at <http://home.netcom.com/~srhf/index.html>. The author acknowledges assistance from Dennis and Kathi McCarty.