"Nothing more uncomfortable than our flat-bottomed boats:" Batteaux in the British Service during the War of 1812

Robert Malcomson

Les navires étaient les camions de l'époque, transportant d'importants chargements sur les autoroutes d'autrefois. On en sait peu sur eux et sur leur utilisation au début de la colonisation européenne des Grands Lacs. Cet article présente des données historiques sur leur construction, puis décrit l'utilisation qu'en a faite l'Angleterre pendant la guerre de 1812.

From the early days of European expansion into the Great Lakes region, the batteau was an essential part of the transportation system. This flat-bottomed boat was a common sight on the lakes and rivers of the wilderness, yet little has been written about it. This article investigates the batteau's development, its various features and uses with a close examination of the manner in which the British organized and utilized the craft during the War of 1812. It will be seen that this very ordinary boat, which received barely a mention from its crews and passengers, played a significant role in supporting the British war effort.

Although the simply-built, wooden utility boat is a universal means of transportation, the type that became known as the batteau developed in French Canada along the St. Lawrence River in the mid-1600s. Designed to carry men and cargo over rough and shallow water, as well as deep channels and stormy lakes, the batteau was characterized by its flat bottom, sharp ends, nearly flat sides and shallow draft.

Variations on the basic form of the craft evolved as seen in several reports from around 1750 comparing French batteaux with those built by the English near Albany, New York. The English boats, identified as "Schenectady Battoes" were smaller in size (32 feet long, 5 feet wide and 2 feet 5 inches from floor to rail) and constructed of pine, while the French made their boats larger (36 feet long, 6 feet 4 inches wide and 2 feet 5 inches deep) and stronger, using oak for the bottoms and uprights and fir for the planking. The French craft cost more to construct, but the English batteaux did not last long in the wilderness conditions; "I think our boats are not Strong enough for the Navigation of the Lakes," wrote General Jeffrey Amherst in February 1760, "and that we shall be obliged to build Some, near the same

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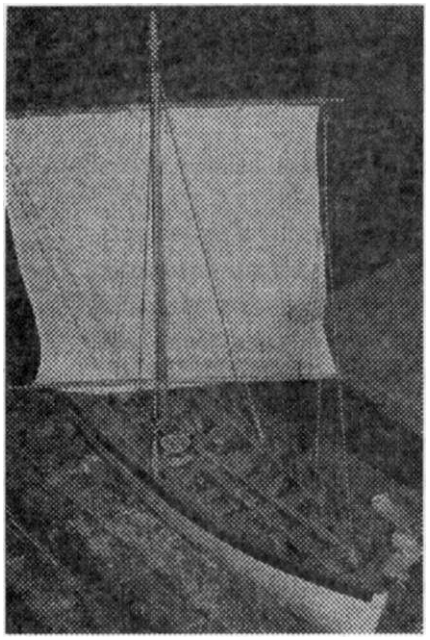
model of the french."[1] Another source from that period shows the English batteaux were capable of carrying 23 men with a month's provisions or 30 barrels of flour or 16 barrels of pork, equal to about 2 tons of burthen, while the French boats commonly hauled 3 tons of goods.



Model of a batteau, photo from the author,

Few contemporary plans or drawings of batteaux have survived but archeological studies have shown that the boats were built without keels.[2] The boards that formed the bottom were cut to size and shape and then fastened together by battens laid across the top of them at regular intervals along the length. The frames, shaped from single, naturally curved timber, were attached to the bottom but usually the opposing arms of each set of ribs did not meet in the centre as is often the case in other boats. Planking was added using the clinch-built (planks overlapping) or carvel (flush planks) methods and fastenings tended to be iron nails.

Being double-ended and without a keel, batteaux resembled dories but were considerably larger, more heavily built and less flared at either end and along the sides. During the Seven Years' War the British used whaleboats but found that they were not suited to the environment, as this explanation reveals. "The English have long-boats for hunting whales, which they call "Woel-Bot"; they are very light on the oar but are of no use navigating these rivers especially when the water is low. You often have to get into the water and haul them, and they are not made for that."[3]

A Royal Navy midshipman who saw his first batteau at Montreal in 1813 commented

Cited in, Brian L. Dunnigan, (ed.), *Memoirs of the Late War in North American Between France and England* by Pierre Pouchot, (Youngstown, NY: Old Fort Niagara Association, 1994), 365. Thomas D. Mackie, director of the Amherst County Historical Museum, argues that Anthony Rucker invented the batteau, launching the first craft in 1775 on the James River near Richmond, Virginia, in "Rucker's Battoe: A Study of the James River Batteau," www.batteau.org. Other references, given here, establish that batteaux appeared in the Great Lakes region and were used by the French and English decades before Rucker's battoe. Spelling of the term varies among the sources with "batteaux" prevailing.

[2] Kevin Crisman, "Struggle for a Continent: Naval Battles of the French and Indian Wars," in George F. Bass, ed., *Ships and Shipwrecks of the Americans: A History Based on Underwater Archaeology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988),130-148.

Dunnigan, *Memoirs of the Late War,* 396-7.

that the "flat bottomed boat [was] peculiarly built."[4] Its keel-less construction, however, had definite advantages since the boat had a draft of only inches when empty and was easy to beach, especially in an emergency as one traveller noted in the mid-1790s. "A dreadful storm arose," wrote Isaac Weld about a situation on the St. Lawrence above Montreal, "It was impossible now to counteract the forces of the wind with oars and the bateau [sic] was consequently driven on shore, but the bottom of it being quite flat, it was carried smoothly upon the beach without sustaining any injury. ... A keel boat... could not have approached nearer to the shore than thirty feet and . . . [would] probably have been filled with water."[5]

The amount of time needed to build a batteau two centuries ago is uncertain. A labour estimate done at Amherstburg, Upper Canada in 1795 for the construction of a ship's boat measuring 14 feet by 4 *Vt* feet showed that the work could be done in fourteen man-days. Given that a batteau was of simpler construction, it seems likely that the typical 30-foot craft could be built by one man in the same period. Other evidence supports this speculation. In the summer of 1812 Peter B. Porter, a prominent citizen at Buffalo, New York, served as quartermaster for the state militia. His duties included providing batteaux for army use on the Niagara River and on 9 July he wrote: "I have ventured already to build four, which are indispensable for ordinary uses. The village at the Falls [Manchester] is a place peculiarly fitted for this business. There is plenty of good timber, a saw mill, pitch, oakum, etc. and fine quarters for the men. A few ship carpenters ... and the artificers belonging to the troops would build them in a few days."[6] Porter later conscripted labour from the local militia and constructed forty-four batteaux, big enough to carry between thirty-six and forty men each (without their baggage) by the end of August. The simplicity of the design and easy access to resources and manpower made it possible to mass-produce batteaux that had to be serviceable without the attention to detail seen in other boats.

Quartermaster Porter also noted that his batteaux would be light and easy to handle which seems to have been another feature of this boat. The early French and English records refer to two-, three- and four-handed batteaux in operation on the rivers and lakes. Later evidence shows that a typical crew consisted of a conductor (per individual boat or brigade of boats), a "stern" man (who handled the steering oar), a "head" man (watching the way ahead and handling the boat to dock) and three "middle" men, those pulling the long sweeps. When the wind was favourable, a single sail provided propulsion, although since the craft had

Four Years on the Lakes of Canada... by David Wingfield, RN, National Archives of Canada (NAC), MG 24, F 18,3. Batteaux used on the James River at Richmond, Virginia were up to seventy feet in length and keel-less, Crisman, "Struggle for a Continent."

[5] Isaac Weld, "The St. Lawrence Valley in the 1790s," in Gerald M. Craig, (ed.), *Early Travellers in the Canadas, 1791-1867* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 18.

[6] Porter to Tompkins, 9 July 1812, Earnest A. Cruikshank, (ed.), *Documentary History of the Campaigns upon the Niagara Frontier in 1812-1814* (titles vary slightly) (Welland: Tribune Press, 1896-1908), 9 vols, 3:117. Abstract of Estimates ... by Reynolds, 15 December 1795, NAC, RG 8,1,723:54. Robert Malcomson, *A Very Brilliant Affair: The Battle of Queenston Heights, 1812* (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2003), 80.

no keel it fell to leeward quickly unless wind conditions were nearly perfect.

The rate of travel depended greatly on weather conditions. Elizabeth Simcoe, the wife of John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, showed in her diary that it took three days for a brigade of batteaux to travel from Prescott, Upper Canada to Kingston, a distance of about ninety kilometres (fifty-six miles). Under more pressing circumstances in 1812, a brigade of twelve batteaux carried a reinforcement of troops from Fort Erie to Amherstburg on the Detroit River (three hundred and sixty kilometres or two hundred and twenty-five miles) in nine days. The men were so tightly crowded into their batteaux that there was no room for anyone to lie down during the night passages. Weather affected their progress, as one of the men remembered: "Set off early with a fair wind, but it soon blew so hard we had to land on the beach and draw up our boats, having come 12 or 15 miles."[7]

Details are scarce as to specific plans used for the building of batteaux in the late 1700s and whether the French "model" was used in preference to the English style or if each builder had his own concept of the craft is difficult to say. It is most likely that the boats shared the basic generic features, modified by each builder's individual preferences. In size and shape, they do not appear to have changed much since the mid-1700s as commercial documents refer to them carrying between twenty-five and thirty barrels of flour or twelve to fifteen barrels of potash. Scows were built to carry one hundred barrels of potash at cheaper rates but they were sent down the rapids and did not make return trips, so batteaux remained ever present and essential.[8]

A number of case studies could be developed to present specifics about how batteaux were used. Amherst's campaign from New York State to Montreal during the Seven Years' War is an example of one relatively finite set of circumstances, as are campaigns in the American War of Independence. The place of the batteau in the growth of commerce in New York State or the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes are other areas for investigation. This paper focuses on one of the final periods that saw regular use of batteaux, their employment by the British during the War of 1812. It highlights the importance of batteaux in the British war effort, the manner in which they were aa"ministered and physically handled, as well as the less than desirable experience of travelling great distances in one of these cockleshells.

During the War of 1812 batteaux were needed on the Canadian rivers and lakes more than ever before. All the armaments and most of the troops and stores required for the army and navy west of Montreal came from abroad and had to be transported up to the posts in Upper Canada. An accounting of the war materiel that passed up the St. Lawrence would

Diary of William McKay, in William C. H. Wood, (ed.), *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1920-28), 1:546. J. Ross Robertson, *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1911; Reprint - Toronto: Prospero Books, 2001),105.

[8] Cartwright to Hunter, 31 March 1801, in Richard A. Preston, (ed.), *Kingston Before the War of 1812.* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1959), 213. Cartwright to McGill, 27 November 1811 and 21 July 1812, *ibid.,* 215 and218. Hoard andRosseel to Parish, 5 July 1811, *ibid.*,221.

provide subject matter for a separate article, but one example will offer an impression of how busy the batteau service was.

In 1814 the British launched a 102-gun ship, H M S *St. Lawrence,* at Kingston. It was armed with thirty-four 32-pdr and thirty-four 24-pdr long guns, thirty-four 32-pdr carronades and two 68-pdr carronades all of which were brought from Quebec. A typical 32-pdr long gun weighed in the neighbourhood of 5,500 pounds, while the weights of the other ordnance were approximately 5,000 pounds for a 24-pdr long gun and 1700 pounds for a 32-pdr carronade.[9] Given that a thirty-foot batteau could handle between two and three tons of burthen, it would have to make about sixty round trips to move the heavy guns and another ten or so trips to deliver the carronades. The extrapolation of this example indicates the importance of the batteau service to the British war effort.

Before the War of 1812 the Quarter Master General's Department and the Commissariat Department at Quebec shared responsibility for management of the army's batteaux. This arrangement changed, however, in April 1812 when a general order from the office of Governor-in-Chief Sir George Prévost turned over control of the boats to the Commissariat Department alone. Some suggestions were made for improving the system, but the basic routines that had been in place for years continued, that is, the batteaux were counted and inspected frequently to make sure they were on hand when needed and properly equipped.[10]

In April 1812 the army had 263 batteaux in operation between Quebec and Saint Joseph Island, as shown in Table One (following page). Since they were frequently in transit, it was difficult to maintain a set number in any place although efforts were made to keep boats on hand at key locations in case they were needed. In August 1812 for instance, an order required that batteaux be kept at the following posts in these prescribed numbers: Chambly - 10; Fort William Henry - 8; Isle aux Noix - 4; La Prairie - 6; La Chine - 25; Three Rivers - 10. The boats were to be used only for specific military purposes and, if possible, returned to their posts afterward. The order called for any station having more than its allotted number to send them either to Montreal or Quebec, which were considered "general depots" with an unlimited number of craft. It appears that a survey of all boats in the system was taken at the end of the navigation season when they were hauled up for the winter."

[9] Robert Malcomson, *Warships of the Great Lakes: 1754-1834* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 112. Ordnance weights vary with specific gun designs, but as reasonable representations these figures are taken from Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization, 1793-1815* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 80-85.

[10] Returns of Stores in the Quarter Master General's Department and the Commissariat at Montreal and Lachine by Vincent, 22 January 1812, NAC, RG 8,1,116:4. General Order, 18 April 1812, *ibid.:\Q5.* Robinson to Freer, 22 April 1812, *ibid.,* 106.

[11] General order, 21 December 1812, NAC, RG 8, 1, 1168:108. General Order, 24 April 1812, *ibid.:\29.* General Order, 25 August 1812, *ibid.:243.* General Order, 15 October 1812, *ibid:3Ql.* General Order, 11 December 1813, *ibid.,* 1171:139.

TABLE ONE
BATTEAUX IN THE BRITISH SERVICE, APRIL 1812.

A General Order of 24 April 1812 showed 263 batteaux spread around the various posts through Upper and Lower Canada.

Posts	Batteaux
Quebec	30
Three Rivers	20
William Henry	20
Montreal	100
La Chine	25
Kingston	30
York	10
Niagara	12
Amherstburg	12
St. Josephs	4
	263

Source: N A C, RG 8,1, 1168:129.

The contents and equipment of each batteau was also closely regulated. Table Two (on the two following pages) shows the list of "appurtenances" expected to be found in each of the batteaux used for moving troops between Montreal and Quebec. These items were registered on a way bill held by the conductor of the batteau or the brigade of boats in which it traveled. Upon arrival at his destination, the conductor had the receiving officer endorse the list, identifying any losses or surpluses and giving the conductor a receipt. The way bills remained with the batteaux throughout the season after which they were supposed to be checked against their receipts. A general order of 21 December 1812 stated: "Officers Commanding at the different Posts in Upper and Lower Canada are required immediately to make a return to the Office of the Quarter Master General at Quebec of the number and state of the Batteaux and appurtenances at each Post - Where an officer or Person of the Commissariat is present he is to take charge of the Batteaux, &c. And insert them in his Store

Accounts, reporting the Number to the Commissary General."[12] Sorting out the accounts for all the boats at the end of each year must have been an administrative nightmare.

TABLE TWO

EQUIPMENT FOR BATTEAUX, MAY 1812.

A General Order of 11 May 1812 listed the equipment to be kept, and carefully accounted for, in each batteaux in the British service. The lists provide insight into the outfitting of a batteau; note, for instance, the allowance of poles for pushing the boats over shallow stretches and twenty-five yards of fabric for sails. The dimensions of the masts and yards are not provided, nor is an explanation for why one camp kettle is intended "for Canada.".

Equipment of Batteaux for the Transport of Troops between La Chine and Kingston

Rates to be paid for Deficiencies

1 Axe	Six shillings*
1 Cable 15 Fathoms	Fifteen shillings
1 Hawlyard 5 Fathoms	Three shillings and three pence
2 Camp Kettles (1 of them for Canada)	At Three shillings & nine pence each
1 Mast	Five shillings
Mast Rope 1 Fathom	Nine pence
6 Oars	at Seven shillings & six pence each
2 Oil Cloths	at Forty shillings each
1 Paddle	Three shillings
6 Poles with Rings	One shilling & six pence each
1 Sail	Fifty shillings
2 Sheets, 1 Fathom each	Nine pence each
1 Scoop	Ten pence
2 Yards	One shilling & three pence each

*12 pence = 1 shilling, 20 shillings = 1 pound

General Order, 11 May 1812, NAC, RG 8,1, 1168:147.

TABLE TWO (continued)

Equipment of Batteaux for the Transport of Troops between Ouebec and Montreal

lAxe	Six shillings
1 - 2-Inch Cable 6 Fathoms	Six shillings
1 Grapnel	Thirty shillings
1 - Inch Hawlyard 5 Fathoms	Three shillings & three pence
1 Camp Kettle	Three shillings & nine pence
1 Mast	Five shillings
1 - 1-Inch Mast Rope 1 Fathom	Nine pence
7 Oars	At Seven shillings & six pence each
1 Oil Cloth - 12 yards Sheeting	Forty shillings
1 Paddle	Three shillings
2 Poles	at One shilling & three pence each
1 Sail 25 Yards sheeting	Fifty shillings
2 Sheets 1 Fathom I inch	at Nine pence each
1 Scoop	Ten pence
2 Yards	At One shilling & three pence each
1 Steering Rope 3 Feet	Four pence
1 Towing Rope '/z-Inch 20 Fathoms	Five shillings & three pence

The ends of the Ropes to be whipped with Tar'd Twine when delivered to the Troops and none to be received into Store but what are whipp'd and of proper length.

The Batteaux with an Equipment as above in a proper serviceable state are to be invariably furnished for the Conveyance of Troops and they will be required to be carefully delivered up to the Storekeeper at the Post of delivery.

If any Articles be deficient, the Officer Commanding will be responsible that payment be made to the receiving Storekeeper, unless the loss shall have occurr'd from unavoidable accident of which a Certificate is to be given; It is to be understood that no Articles except Oars, Poles and Paddles are liable to such accidents

Source: N A C, RG 8, 1, 1168:147-9.

Crew members were sometimes regular soldiers under the command of non commissioned officers, while companies of soldiers or seamen travelling up or down the system rowed themselves under the guidance of a supervising pilot or conductor. Officers appointed as commissaries of transport could also requisition militiamen to provide the

necessary "corvée," or labour required by law. This duty was compulsory, but every effort was made to record the names of the militiamen involved and their length of service so that they could be properly compensated for their work.[13] The corvée scheme failed to meet the demands of the system, however, owing in part to "the inconvenience that a great proportion of the Inhabitants are liable to, in supplying the hands necessary for this Service."[14]

There was also the need for expertise in the handling of the batteaux, especially when they made the return trips down any of the several stretches of rapids. Voyageurs supplied this skill, "veterans who have been trained from their youth to the use of the paddle and setting pole and who know every channel, rock, and breaker, in the rapids, from the Long Sault to Montreal."[15] In October 1812 the Corps of Canadian Voyageurs was formed, comprising three hundred voyageurs from the North West Company, but the unit lasted less than six months. In March 1813 it was replaced by a larger "Provincial Corps" named the Commissariat Voyageurs. With its headquarters at Lachine, the Provincial Commissariat Voyageurs (PCV) consisted of a lieutenant colonel, a major, a captain, ten lieutenants, ten sergeants (acting as conductors) and four hundred privates, many of them members of the former unit. As inducements to enter this service, the men were exempt from militia duty until half a year after their terms as voyageurs (eighteen months) ended. Their rations and wages would be the same as that of the militia, but for each journey from Lachine to Kingston and back the "head" and "stern" men received forty shillings while the "middle men" earned thirty shillings. Although required to garrison any post to which they were attached, the men of the PCV were allowed to return to their homes without pay during the winter months.[16]

As the quantity of materiel needed in Upper Canada increased, so did pressure on the transport system and even with the PCV in place there were shortages in manpower.[17] Furthermore the Commissariat Department's workload increased to such a point that its officers were unable to manage the batteaux service properly. Lieutenant General Sir Gordon Drummond, who commanded in Upper Canada from late in 1813, turned over control of the batteaux to the Quarter Master General's Department on 5 April 1814 in the hopes that "much benefit will accrue to the service."[18] The brigades of batteaux increased in number during the following summer until it was commonplace for the Royal Navy gunboats to

[a] General Orders, 15 and 19 October 1812, NAC, RG 8,1, 1168:307, 320. Instructions for Conducting the Department ofthe Commissary of Transport in Lower Canada," by Prévost, 10 January 1813, *ibid.,* 373:4. René Chartrand and Gerry Embleton, *British Forces in North America, 1793-1815* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1998), 23-4.

[14] General Order, 8 Aprill813 by Baynes, NAC, RG 8,1, 1170:155.

[15] James M. Duncan, "The Rapids ofthe St. Lawrence and the City of Montreal, 1818," in Craig, *Early Travellers,* 49.

[16] General Order, 8 Aprill813 by Baynes, NAC, RG 8,1, 1170:155. Chartrand and Embleton, *British Forces,* 33-4.

[17] Robinson to Freer, 5 April 1814, NAC, RG 8,1, 183:6.

[18] Drummond to Prévost, 5 April 1814, RG 8,1, 118:87.

convoy between fifty and one hundred of them at a time and it seems likely that the boats were manned in every way possible. When the parts for two ships and two brigs to be built on the lakes arrived from England in May and June 1814, the British army could not provide the batteaux and men needed to transport them to Kingston, choosing instead to hire a private contractor named William Forbes to carry up the parts of one of the vessels (Table Three overleaf). Where Forbes found the boats and manpower to deliver the vast timbers and myriad fittings is uncertain, but he managed to complete his contract before its due date. Faced with escalating transport demands, the British intended to delegate the 4th Embodied Battalion of militia in Lower Canada (numbering about four hundred officers and men in 1814) to the batteaux service in the spring of 1815.[19]

Life in the batteaux was demanding, the hours long, the labour hard and tedious, potentially dangerous and completely exposed to the elements.

The infantry lieutenant John Le Couteur, whose diary is a fine source of information about the period, travelled with part of his regiment for six exhausting days in a brigade of batteaux from Burlington Bay to Kingston in the first week of October 1813 and recorded his impressions. "Nothing," he wrote, "could be more uncomfortable than our flat-bottomed boats in an October morning with the cold at freezing."[20] The stretch of water from York to the village of Newcastle on Presqu'ile Bay nearly proved to be the end of the foot soldiers. "It came on to blow a perfect storm," Le Couteur scribbled in his journal, "the seas were really if not mountainous in the sense of those of the Atlantic, were quite so for the description of vessels we were scudding with, so high that in our fleet, when two were in a trough of the Sea, the Crews entirely lost sight of each other. More than one exclamation 'Here comes our finisher!' escaped some lips."[21]

That night they landed under difficult conditions near Newcastle and the carrying place into the Bay of Quinte. They were luckier than another brigade under the command of Captain John Sidney Peach, Canadian Fencibles, which was tossed ashore at the same place by a storm in November 1814 resulting in heavy damage to twenty-two of the twenty-four batteaux. A large portion of the flour on board the batteaux was ruined and Peach, who remained at Newcastle until all the boats were repaired and sent on, had to appear before an board of inquiry to explain the loss.[22]

To alleviate some of the discomfort the batteaux crews suffered as the weather grew

[19] Log book of Lieutenant Daniel Salter, RN, summer and autumn 1814, NAC, MG 12, ADM 51, 4096. Robinson to Freer, 6 February 1815, NAC, RG 8,1,119:60. Weekly Distribution State of the Left Division . . ., 15 February 1814, NAC, *ibid.,* 1709:49. Malcomson, *Warships of the Great Lakes,* 117-8. For documents regarding Forbes's contract, see NAC, RG 8,1, 733:92-116.

[20] Donald E. Graves, (ed.), *Merry Hearts Make Light Days: The War of 1812 Journal of Lieutenant John Le Couteur, 104th Foot* (Ottawa, 1993), 137.

[21] Graves, *Merry Hearts,* 137.

[22] Drummond to Freer, 19 December 1814, NAC, RG 8,1, 194:205.

TABLE THREE
RECEIPT FOR MATERIEL DELIVERED BY BATTEAU, OCTOBER 1814.

This information appeared on a receipt showing the heavy equipment that some of William Forbes's batteaux carried from Montreal up to Kingston in October 1814. This list might represent the materiel transported in five boats for use in the building of Frigate "B" which had been sent from England in parts and was launched in December 1814 at Kingston as HMS *Psyche,* 56. The second and third columns do not agree in totals.

Abbreviations and wrights:
cwt., one hundredweight, weighs 112 pounds
Qrs., quarters, refers to one, two or three quarters of a cwt.
lbs. refers to pounds left over.

Transport of Naval Stores From La Chine to Kingston

I certify that Mr. William Forbes, Contractor, has transported, as above specified, with his own Boats, Table and Men, the undermentioned Government Stores.

Description of Article	Net Number of lbs. Each	Equal To		
		Cwt.	Qrs.	lbs.
16Î4 Inch Cable: 101 feet	5934 lbs.	52	3	26
1 Anchor	3920 lbs.	35	3	0
1 Ditto	4032 lbs.	36	2	14
1 Ditto	4144 lbs.	37	3	0
1 Ditto	395 lbs.	3	2	3
1 Ditto	952 lbs.	8	2	0

plus 4 Anchor Stocks belonging to Frigate B

Payable at Montreal at the rate of——shillings and — pence, Currency, per cwt, - agreeable to the Contractor, dated 22 June 1814.

To: D. C. G. Clarke
Montreal

Kingston, 15 October 1814
Edward Laws, Naval Storekeeper

Source: NAC, RG 8,1, 733:106.

colder late in the year, additional rations of rum were distributed to the crews.[23] As if the work was not difficult enough, the batteaumen and the conductors were subject to mistreatment by military and naval officers in transit. This problem was so prevalent that a general order was issued at Kingston in September 1813 condemning "such practices ... greatly prejudicial to the service" as refusing to confirm the deficiencies in the equipment of a batteau and to validate the conductor's way bill.[24] It hinted that passengers removed items from the boats without permission and laughed at the batteaumen's complaints. To make the service more enticing the rate of pay was increased when plans were laid for the 4th Embodied Battalion of Lower Canada Militia to join the batteau service early in 1815. By the new schedule, which was recommended to be also paid to the members of the PCV, the round trip from Lachine to Kingston was worth 92 shillings and 6 pence to a steersman and 70 shillings to a middle man.[25]

Despite the hardship of life in the batteaux, the men who traveled in them found ways to amuse themselves. When Le Couteur's party reached the placid waters of the Bay of Quinte they turned their journey into a race. "Each boat pulling Eight oars," wrote Le Couteur, "the men to relieve each other as they liked, but no two men to pull at a time. It was a Capital match, stem and stern, or neck and neck, to the last length, when one of [our] oars broke and we lost the match."[26]

Even in an overcrowded batteaux, young man at work and at war could find a way to make "a Capital match" of the day. Le Couteur's remembrance adds a long missing human touch to a nearly forgotten but, for a time, essential element of maritime history.

[23] General Order, 25 October 1812, NAC, RG 8,1,1169:35. General Order, 20 January 1814, *ibid.,* 1172a:43.

[24] General Order, 6 September 1813, NAC, RG 8,1, 1171:24a.

[25] Robinson to Freer, 11 February 1815, NAC, RG 8,1,119:60. The route was broken into two parts: Lachine to Prescott and Prescott to Kingston, each worth as much and more as the whole trip had been in 1812.

[26] Graves, *Merry Hearts,* 137.