

# George Henry Wyatt (1828-1883): Agent, Shipowner, Entrepreneur, and One-Man Naval Department

## Walter Lewis and Roger Sarty

*This is a first attempt to trace the life of George Henry Wyatt. He has previously been known only for his work procuring and administering the civilian steamers provided by Canada for arming and operation by the Royal Navy on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence frontier during the Fenian crisis of 1866-1871. The research presented here shows that by the 1860s he had become a significant member of the Toronto business community. Among several enterprises, he was particularly active as a ship owner and agent for steamship and railway lines. This experience accounted for his selection by the government to organize the flotilla of steamers for the Royal Navy, and his success in that role. He was, however, not able to overcome the effects in Canada of the international economic downturn of the 1870s. He died in a new venture, to promote immigration to the newly opening Canadian west.*

*Cet article est une première tentative de retracer la vie de George Henry Wyatt. Par le passé, il n'était connu que pour son travail d'acquisition et d'administration des bateaux à vapeur civils fournis par le Canada pour appuyer les efforts d'armement et d'exploitation de la Marine royale sur la frontière des Grands Lacs et du Saint-Laurent pendant la crise des Fénians de 1866-1871. Les recherches présentées ici indiquent que, dans les années 1860, Wyatt était devenu un membre important du milieu des affaires de Toronto. Entre autres entreprises, il était particulièrement actif en tant que propriétaire de navires et agent de compagnies de navigation et de chemin de fer. En raison de son expérience, le gouvernement l'a choisi pour organiser la flottille de bateaux*

*à vapeur pour le compte de la Marine royale, où il a joué un rôle particulièrement efficace. Par contre, il n'a pas été en mesure de surmonter les effets au Canada du ralentissement économique international des années 1870. Wyatt est décédé alors qu'il travaillait sur un nouveau projet, la promotion de l'immigration dans l'Ouest canadien.*

George Henry Wyatt, a Toronto businessman, served as Canada's one-man navy department in the defence against Fenian insurgents from the United States in the late 1860s and early 1870s. With the Fenian attack on Fort Erie, Canada West (Ontario) on 1 June 1866, he immediately volunteered for naval service, sailing as the navigation expert (quartermaster) in a steamer that had been hastily armed for patrol duties on the lakes. Wyatt had arranged the charter of the steamer at the moment of crisis, and within weeks the government appointed him Canada's "Gunboat Agent," to arrange the charter or purchase and maintenance of five steamers that kept watch in the waters from Montreal and the upper St. Lawrence River in the east through to Lake Huron in the west. He held the position until it disappeared when the last of the vessels left military service in 1874.

Wyatt has only recently had more than a passing mention in Canadian maritime history and solely in connection with his eight years in government employment.<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper began in an effort to find out how such a capable individual was immediately available to a government that had previously been unwilling to undertake naval defence measures. Who was George Henry Wyatt, and how did he come to be so well qualified and well connected? What was his later career? The answers provide an intriguing case study of the opportunities open to an ambitious British immigrant to Canada West, how Toronto became a transportation hub with the rise of steam shipping and railways, and the risks of doing business in the emerging national economy following Confederation.

### **Seizing Opportunity in Canada West**

Wyatt was baptized in Brome, Suffolk on 19 December 1828, the son of Henry Wyatt Jr. and the former Emma Squibb.<sup>2</sup> He was named for his

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<sup>1</sup> The only account of more than a few lines known to the authors is Cheryl MacDonald, *Gunboats on the Great Lakes 1866-68: The British Navy's show of force at the time of Confederation* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2017), 79-93.

<sup>2</sup> Genealogical Society of Utah, *British Isles Vital Records Index*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Intellectual Reserve, 2002).

grandfathers. Henry Sr. had been a tenant farmer in Brome in the late eighteenth century, holding from the Marquis of Cornwallis, a British general best known for his surrender at Yorktown, bringing the fighting in the American Revolutionary war to an end.<sup>3</sup> Grandfather George Squibb ran a well-known London auction house in the Savile Row district.<sup>4</sup> George Henry Wyatt would be the third child and eldest son among the eleven siblings born between 1824 and 1841. The first five were baptized in the neighbourhood of Brome, while after 1835 the younger ones were largely baptized in Long Ditton, Surrey, a parish to the west of London just south of the Thames.



George Henry Wyatt (from Ancestry.com)

What prompted George's family to move the family across the Atlantic is unclear, but when they disembarked from the US-flagged *Hendrick Hudson* in New York on 16 October 1843, Henry gave his occupation as "Farmer" and noted his intent to settle in Canada.<sup>5</sup> *Hudson* was one of a line of packets sailing between London and New York that year, and included a stop in Portsmouth in its thirty-eight day crossing.<sup>6</sup> The Wyatts and their brood of eleven, including the almost fifteen-year-old George, were among fifty in the ship's "cabin," the highest class of accommodation. Theirs was not the only family in the cabin, but certainly the largest. London's *Morning Chronicle* noted the families of poor agricultural labourers among the seventy "intermediate" and steerage

<sup>3</sup> County of Suffolk, vol. 2, f. 72, Land Tax Redemption Office: Quotas and Assessments, Records of the Boards of Stamps, Taxes, Excise, Stamps and Taxes, and Inland Revenue, IR23, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England (hereafter TNA).

<sup>4</sup> There is a profile of Squibb online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Squibb\\_\(auctioneer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Squibb_(auctioneer)). The will of his son Francis, names his sister, Emma Wyatt, as one of his beneficiaries. Will of Francis Squibb, Auctioneer of Saint James Westminster, Middlesex, 23 December 1833 (PROB 11/1825/325, TNA).

<sup>5</sup> List or Manifest of all the Passengers taken on board the Ship Hendrick Hudson ... 16 Oct. 1843 in Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group (hereafter RG) 36, Microfilm Serial: M237, 1820-1897, National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>6</sup> See advertisement in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Naval Chronicle* (Portsmouth), 4 September 1843, 4. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 10 September 1843, 8 (Cleared St. Katherines dock). *Evening Post* (New York), 16 October 1843, 1 reporting arrival in New York, where it listed Mr. Wyatt, his wife, and then named the five oldest children before giving up and saying "and six children."

passengers, and the fact that, at harvest time, the steerage was not as crowded as usual.<sup>7</sup> While not a record, just over five weeks was a good crossing and it seemed to have a profound impact on George, who would make a business of promoting the Atlantic crossing and the emigration experience and come to spend much of his leisure as well as working time on the waterfront.

The Wyatts appear to have quickly acquired property on the well-settled north shore of Burlington Bay, in the vicinity of Hamilton at the head of Lake Ontario. Within two years, the eldest daughter, Emma, would marry the manager of the local branch of the Bank of Montreal, Hugh C. Baker. Baker, in turn, was well connected with the Hamilton business community. In 1846, he began organizing what would become the Canada Life Assurance Company, for which he would serve as president, general manager, and actuary.<sup>8</sup> His brother-in-law's name would open doors for the young George Wyatt.

By 1851, at the age of 23, Wyatt had become the senior clerk of a young Scot, P.S. (Phillans Scarth) Stevenson. Given that the new family farm was a few miles across the bay, Wyatt boarded with Stevenson's family, which included his wife, their newborn, and two female servants.<sup>9</sup> Among the striking things in this relationship was the minor difference in their ages: Stevenson was only 26, while his wife and servants were in their early twenties. Stevenson was a merchant who, among other things, dealt in agricultural exports. That January, Wyatt bought on Stevenson's account 5,000 bushels of red fall wheat in Goderich to be ground in St. Catharines before being shipped to market in Montreal.<sup>10</sup> In a different venture, Stevenson was acting for the owners of the

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<sup>7</sup> "Emigration to America," *Morning Chronicle* (London), 9 September 1843, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Baker's network involved in other insurance firms, banks, railways, the Hamilton Board of Trade and other business organizations. "Baker, Hugh Cossart" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII: 43-45 (hereafter *DCB*) [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/baker\\_hugh\\_cossart\\_8E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/baker_hugh_cossart_8E.html)

<sup>9</sup> The Wyatt house was built in what was East Flamborough township, and is now in part of the City of Burlington. Given that Hugh Baker and Emma Wyatt were married in Wellington Square (the former name of what is now the downtown section of Burlington), the family may have been there as early in 1845. The 1847 Wyatt house (aka Herberton House) is now a featured home in the area. Susan Evans Shaw, *Heritage Treasures: The historic homes of Ancaster, Burlington, Dundas East, Flamborough, Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Waterdown* (Toronto: Lorimer, 2004), 58. Patricia Green et al., *...and They Came to East Flamborough: A celebration of East Flamborough Township's pre-Confederation heritage* (Waterdown: East Flamborough Heritage Society, 1997). Census of Canada, 1851, Hamilton, St. Lawrence ward, No. 332, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, ON (hereafter LAC). Note that Wyatt is incorrectly entered as 25 on the form. At the time the census was taken he would have been only 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Stephenson v. Ranney, Report of Cases Decided in the Court of Common Pleas of Upper Canada*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Rowsell & Hutchison, 1875), 198-226. Note that even within the report of this case, they use "Stevenson."

schooner *James Coleman* on a new trade, made possible by the opening of the St. Lawrence canals, between Hamilton and Halifax.<sup>11</sup> Of much greater significance for Wyatt's career, in 1852, Stevenson took on the role of Hamilton agent for the Northern Railroad, an American line which had just opened between Ogdensburg on the St. Lawrence River and Rouses Point, where passengers could transfer to the steamboats on Lake Champlain which connected with other rail lines to Boston and New York.<sup>12</sup>

The following spring, on 14 April 1853, Wyatt issued his first newspaper advertisement as agent for the Ogdensburgh Railroad Line at the Ogdensburgh Railroad Office on Front St. in Toronto. Stevenson remained the company's Hamilton agent.<sup>13</sup> The reference to the line in this fashion was no doubt in part to reduce confusion with what was generally known as the Northern Railway from Toronto to Collingwood.<sup>14</sup> Wyatt would remain associated with the line in some capacity until the end of the decade, being especially active on their behalf in the first few years of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854. The American railroad acted through Canadian agents to charter or buy a succession of schooners and steamboats to run to ports between Ogdensburg and Hamilton.<sup>15</sup> By 1861, it was no longer chartering special steamers to make connections, instead advertising connections to the Grand Trunk and Ottawa and Prescott railways and to steamer services on Lake Ontario.<sup>16</sup> In parallel, the railroad had developed a connection with the Northern Transportation Company which ran

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily British Whig (DBW)* (Kingston), 13 March 1851 says it had just been bought for this purpose by the Hon. John Elmsley. It arrived back in July (*DBW*, 16 July 1851). The link to Stevenson can be found in Ivan S. Brookes, *Hamilton Harbour, 1826-1901*, transcribed by Walter Lewis (Halton Hills, ON: Maritime History of the Great Lakes, 2001), chapter 8, "1851," <https://www.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/documents/Brookes/default.asp?ID=Y1851#p08.51.8>. Coleman returned to the sea in 1852 under new ownership.

<sup>12</sup> Brookes, *Hamilton Harbour*, chapter 8, "1852," <https://www.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/documents/Brookes/default.asp?ID=Y1852#p08.52.4>.

<sup>13</sup> *Globe* (Toronto), 14 April 1853. The ad acknowledged that P.S. Stevenson was still the agent in Hamilton, and Ralph Jones in Cobourg. Although Wyatt and Stevenson would pursue different paths in their subsequent business careers, after the death of Stevenson's first wife in the Desjardin Canal Bridge disaster in 1857, he married Wyatt's sister-in-law Annie S. Harris in 1864. (*Full details of the railway disaster of the 12th of March, 1857, at the Desjardin Canal, on the line of the Great Western Railway* (Hamilton: J. W. Harris, 1857), 5, available at <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.35650/13>. Ontario County Marriage Registers, 1858-1869, v. 66, Toronto, p. 205, Archives of Ontario)

<sup>14</sup> Officially, it was first the Toronto, Simcoe and Huron Railway and then the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway, before being renamed the Northern Railway in 1859. That said, a letter to the *Globe* as early as 24 December 1850 referred to the project as the Northern Railway, and the local papers routinely referred to it as such in articles throughout the early 1850s.

<sup>15</sup> *St. Catharines Journal*, 17 March 1853; *Globe*, 14 April 1853; *Globe*, 31 March 1855.

<sup>16</sup> *The Advance* (Ogdensburg, NY), 3 May 1861, 8.

a line of American propellers (steamers driven by screws rather than paddle wheels) from Ogdensburg through the Welland Canal to the upper lakes.<sup>17</sup> Those boats did not require a special agent in Toronto, but from his Front Street office Wyatt was prepared to act as agent for the Ogdensburg line as well as the connecting Vermont Central Railroad.<sup>18</sup>

After Stevenson, the next major influence on Wyatt's career was his father-in-law, Thomas D. Harris. By trade, Harris was a wholesale and retail hardware merchant, but his civic life led him to leadership in Toronto's fire brigade, a succession of insurance companies, the Board of Trade, the Toronto Harbour Commission, and more. Wyatt's wife, Elizabeth was the eldest daughter in a family of twelve.<sup>19</sup> Through the Harrises, father and daughter, Wyatt was introduced to significantly more of Toronto's waterfront and business establishment. With the birth of his first child in the spring of 1856, Wyatt shifted his living quarters from the Wellington Hotel, a block or two from his offices, to a house on Mutual Street.<sup>20</sup>

In part, Wyatt's business strategy became to collect more agencies. By far the most important of these was the Inman Line. Wyatt served as their Toronto agent for almost twenty years beginning in the spring of 1857, when it was still the Liverpool, Philadelphia and New York Screw Steamship Company.<sup>21</sup> His relentless advertising on their behalf in local papers, like the *Globe*, was a potential buffer against criticism for other activities, and greatly improved the chances that his name would be reported among those in a crowded meeting. A much briefer association was for the Vanderbilt lines, arranging travel from Toronto to New York to Nicaragua to California in 1858-59, with connections on to the British Columbia gold fields.<sup>22</sup>

On Lake Ontario and the upper St. Lawrence, he would serve as the Toronto agent for the *Boston* (1855-56), *Bowmanville* (1855-63), *Mayflower* (1854-

<sup>17</sup> The relationship was initially contractual, but eventually the succeeding railroad took over the propeller line. *Daily Democratic Press* (Buffalo), 20 February 1855. William C. Pletz, "Rutland Railway Lake Steamers," *Inland Seas* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 277-87.

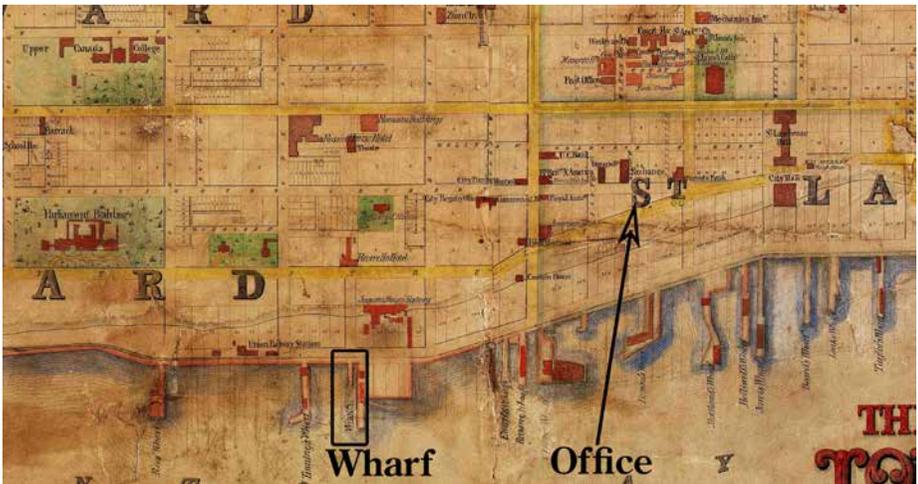
<sup>18</sup> *Brown's Toronto General Directory* (Toronto: for W. R. Brown by MacLear & Co., 1856), lix.

<sup>19</sup> "Harris, Thomas Dennie," *DCB*, 10: 335-36.

<sup>20</sup> *Brown's Toronto General Directory*, 1856, 245. *Caverhill's Toronto City Directory, for 1859-60 ...* (Toronto: W. C. F. Caverhill, 1859), 209. The Toronto directories chronicle his shifting about the streets of Toronto. In 1862 his personal address was 28 Elm Street West; by 1864, 26 Wellington West at the corner of Windsor; in 1868, Front Street West near Peter; 1872 at the corner of Brock and Wellington Place; in 1878 further up Brock. In 1880, his family settled at 256 Simcoe. The cynical might suspect that this only came about because after 1878 he was rarely in Toronto.

<sup>21</sup> *Globe*, 28 April 1857; *Globe*, 8 September 1876.

<sup>22</sup> *Globe*, 9 August 1858, 17 April 1859, 8 August 1859.



Wyatt's wharf was the short wharf just east of the Union Railway Station and not quite opposite Jaques & Hayes furniture factory. His office was on Front Street east of Yonge. (Detail of H. J. Browne's "Plan of the City of Toronto ..." 1862)

58), and *Indian* (1858).<sup>23</sup> He also developed a close relationship with Captain William Donaldson, thus becoming the agent for *Welland* (1855-56), *Silver Spray* (1864-65) and *Southern Belle* (1876).<sup>24</sup> Along with these individual ship agencies, on at least two brief occasions he served whole freight lines again: Nixon & Swale's Independent Line (1855-56) and Macpherson & Co.'s Freight Line (1858). None of these ventures were major successes. Most were quickly victims of the challenging economic times and the competition from the newly opened Grand Trunk Railway.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from his ticket agencies, and freight forwarding efforts, by 1857 Wyatt had leased a wharf.<sup>26</sup> He quickly became involved in the coal and cordwood trade. On the one hand, steamboats needed fuel. More importantly, both coal and wood were a winter necessity for the survival of Toronto's growing population. For the next fifteen years, in addition to the office on Front Street, Wyatt maintained a second place of business on the waterfront between York and Bay. It would be neither the largest nor the most successful wharf on Toronto's waterfront, but it had its place in Wyatt's ambitions.

<sup>23</sup> *Boston: Globe*, 5 July 1855, 17 August 1855, 30 June 1856. *Bowmanville: Globe*, 26 October 1855, 13 April 1859, 13 August 1860, 2 July 1862. *Mayflower: Globe*, 10 July 1854, 18 September 1856, 20 March 1857, 36 May 1858. *Indian: Globe*, 2 June 1858.

<sup>24</sup> *Globe*, 28 April 1855, 23 January 1856, 4 June 1856, 23 July 1864, 24 April 1865, 20 May 1876.

<sup>25</sup> *Globe*, 18 September 1855, 30 August 1856, 19 January 1857, 26 May 1858.

<sup>26</sup> *Globe*, 28 May 1857, 3 October 1857, 20 December 1858 (donation to the House of Industry), 26 September 1859, 6 February 1862.

It was as a ship broker that Wyatt was nearly unique on the Canadian Great Lakes in the 1850s and 1860s. As noted, he had been involved with the Ogdensburgh railroad interests which were actively chartering steam and sailing vessels between 1853 and 1855. We can only speculate about the extent

**GEORGE H. WYATT,**  
**COMMISSION AND SHIPPING AGENT,**  
**TORONTO, C. W.,**  
**A** GENT for the Oswego, Ogdensburgh, and Montreal  
 Line of first-class Freight Steamers  
**BOWMANVILLE, BOSTON,**  
**ST. NICHOLAS, BANSHÉE,**  
**CITY OF HAMILTON,**  
 and Steamers **WELLAND** for St. Catharines, &c.,  
 and **GULLINGWOOD** for Sault Ste. Marie, &c.  
 and **OGDENSBURG AND VERMONT CENTRAL**  
**RAILROADS.**  
 Passage Office for Liverpool and London.  
 Vessels always on hand to charter or sell.  
**OFFICE, 21 FRONT STREET,**  
 Toronto, September 9, 1856 2002-121

An advertisement featuring Wyatt. (*Globe*, 9 Sept. 1856)

“Vessels always on hand to charter or sell.”<sup>28</sup> His offers ranged from sail and steam for sale, to vessels wanted or available for charter.<sup>29</sup> An 1862 ad stands alone for the offer of “Insurance on Hulls and Cargoes taken at the lowest rates.”<sup>30</sup>

In expanding his range of activities from agent and ship broker to shipowner, Wyatt developed another strong relationship within the Toronto mercantile community. A.M. (Alexander Mortimer) Smith was ten years older than Wyatt. Despite poor beginnings and a limited education in his native Scotland, by the late 1850s Smith was a leading retail and wholesale grocer in partnership with John Smith (no relation). A.M. Smith had served on city council, the Toronto Board of Trade, and from 1863 served a term as the Reform Member of Provincial Parliament for Toronto East where he supported the Confederation movement.<sup>31</sup>

Wyatt, in partnership with the Smiths, became a ship owner. In 1859, he had acted as broker in offering for sale “a large vessel, now on the Stocks”

<sup>27</sup> *Globe*, 17 March 1855.

<sup>28</sup> *Globe*, 9 September 1856.

<sup>29</sup> *Globe*, 26 January 1857, 10 February 1857, 9 April 1857, 15 February 1861, 16 April 1861, 4 April 1862, 7 March 1874, 2 February 1875, 8 November 1876.

<sup>30</sup> *Globe*, 29 March 1862.

<sup>31</sup> *DCB*, XII: 975-76.

on the Nottawasaga River, near Georgian Bay.<sup>32</sup> Later, with A.M. Smith, he purchased the incomplete hull and in the spring of 1861 arranged to have John Potter of Oakville complete *Queen of the North* as a brigantine.<sup>33</sup> This was one of the largest sailing vessels owned and sailing out of the port of Toronto, the size being constrained by the dimensions of the second Welland Canal.<sup>34</sup> After spending two seasons in the Chicago grain trade, in 1863 the vessel was dispatched to the Atlantic with a cargo for Halifax,<sup>35</sup> and in 1864 and 1865 ventured as far south as Havana, Cuba.<sup>36</sup> After the Civil War the vessel seems to have again operated on the Lakes, carrying coal, among other cargoes, to Toronto, before Smith and Wyatt sold it around 1869.<sup>37</sup>

In going to sea, the *Queen of the North* followed in the wake of the *Snow Bird*, a small American brigantine built in Baltimore, MD as *Baltimore*. Wyatt purchased the vessel in November 1861 for \$6,000, although the paperwork was not filed in Quebec until 14 June 1862. Six weeks later he sold 42 of the 64 shares in *Snow Bird*, to A. M. and John Smith.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, in April, the vessel was reported arriving in New York from Sicily with a cargo of oranges and lemons, and was going to take another cargo of coal oil from there to Liverpool.<sup>39</sup> *Snow Bird* took another cargo of petroleum products to London that summer, before coming to Toronto with “Wallsend” coal for Wyatt’s coal dock.<sup>40</sup> Wyatt and the Smiths passed the vessel on to Abraham Farewell of Oshawa and W. D. Mathews of Toronto that October for \$7000.<sup>41</sup>

With *Queen of the North* at sea and *Snow Bird* sold, Wyatt and the Smiths took delivery of another John Potter hull, the barque *Silver Cloud*, built on the banks of the Severn River, also on Georgian Bay, in May 1863.<sup>42</sup> After a trip

<sup>32</sup> *Globe*, 11 February 1859.

<sup>33</sup> *Northern Advance* (Barrie), 15 May 1861 quoting *Globe*. C. H. J. Snider, “Queen of the North: Schooner Days VII” *Toronto Evening Telegram*, 14 March 1931.

<sup>34</sup> *Globe*, 31 January 1862.

<sup>35</sup> *Globe*, 29 April 1863, 11 Dec 1863

<sup>36</sup> *Daily News* (Kingston), 5 November 1864; *Globe*, 8 December 1864, 12 August 1865.

<sup>37</sup> *Globe*, 5 December 1866.

<sup>38</sup> The original sale for \$6,000 was reported in the American press without naming the purchaser. *The Commercial Bulletin* (Boston), 9 November 1861, RG 42, vol. 267, p. 198, LAC, available at [https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c2065/211?r=0&s=5](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c2065/211?r=0&s=5).

<sup>39</sup> *Globe*, 29 April 1862. As the Brig *Baltimore* (Br), Captain Cocker, it was reported in the *Journal of Commerce, Jr.* (New York), 6 December 1861 (for Gibraltar), 28 April 1862 (from Messina, February 12), 7 May 1862 (for Elizabethport).

<sup>40</sup> *Globe*, 13 October 1862.

<sup>41</sup> *Globe*, 23 October 1862 which reported Farewell and Mathews were also shipping petroleum from Hamilton direct to London and le Havre. The vessel probably remained at sea because Farewell and Mathews sold it to Paoli Randall of Windsor, NS for \$10,000 on 29 May 1863, and in July it was reported as arriving in Havana. (*New York Daily Herald*, 28 July 1863).

<sup>42</sup> *Northern Advance*, 27 May 1863.

to Chicago to load cargo, this one quickly followed *Queen of the North* to sea, being registered in Quebec on 13 November 1863. Unlike *Queen*, however, the Smiths and Wyatt sold the vessel the following June, and it remained at sea.<sup>43</sup>

Among the other marine investments of Wyatt and the Smiths was the propeller *Nicolet*, a 100-foot steamer originally operated on the St. Lawrence, before being sold to Collingwood owners in the summer of 1861. On 26 February 1862, Wyatt and the Smiths bought the steamer for a reported £1,000 (\$4,000).<sup>44</sup> They used it, in part, to tow sailing vessels out of the awkward harbours of south-eastern Georgian Bay. In August 1863 *Nicolet* was laid up, and Wyatt reported that the machinery would be removed for a new hull then under construction.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Wyatt became involved with a distinctly more controversial purchase and sale. Since 1855, he had been the agent for the independent freight steamboat *Bowmanville*. In early 1863, the vessel had been put up for sale by the owners and bought by its captain, Charles Perry, for \$15,000.<sup>46</sup> Failing to make much profit that spring, in early July, Perry offered the steamer to the Quartermaster General of the Union army as a transport, for “\$25,000 in Canada money.”<sup>47</sup> With no positive response from Washington, Perry sold *Bowmanville* to Wyatt, who sent the steamer down to Montreal to be registered and fitted up to go to sea.<sup>48</sup> Reports that Wyatt had acquired the vessel “for a New York gentleman” failed to suppress the rumours it had been sold to parties who wanted it to run the Union blockade of Confederate ports.<sup>49</sup> On 7 August 1863, the registered title was transferred to Bonifacio Jimenez, a Cuban merchant for \$30,000. Attached to the registry was a note that Jimenez had been empowered to sell the ship “for a sum not less than Thirty Thousand dollars (\$30,000.00) at any place out of the Province of Canada, within Three Months.” As a blockade runner, *Bowmanville* proved particularly inept. The steamer put into New York in mid-October leaking, set out a second time and

<sup>43</sup> *Globe*, 3 July 1863 quoting *Chicago Tribune*; RG 42, v. 268, p. 156, LAC ([https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c2065/405?r=0&s=5](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c2065/405?r=0&s=5)).

<sup>44</sup> RG 12, A 1, v. 203, p. 17, LAC ([https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c2064/626?r=0&s=5](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c2064/626?r=0&s=5)). It is interesting that the vessel appears to have wintered on Lake Ontario at Kingston, from where it was reported bound for Georgian Bay in April 1862. (*Daily News* (Kingston), 16 April 1862).

<sup>45</sup> *Globe*, 26 August 1863.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 10 February 1863, 24 February 1863.

<sup>47</sup> *Army and Navy Official Gazette* (Washington, D. C.), 7 July 1863, 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Globe*, 17 July 1863; RG 12, A 1, v. 177, p. 122, LAC available at [https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c2466/298?r=0&s=5](https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c2466/298?r=0&s=5).

<sup>49</sup> *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 12 September 1863. *Evening Courier and Republic* (Buffalo), 12 September 1863.

returned leaking, and disappeared on the third attempt.<sup>50</sup> To what extent Wyatt profited on this exchange is unclear.

Meanwhile, there was the new steamboat under construction on Georgian Bay. *Georgian* was launched at the Severn River in December 1863 with the engines of *Nicolet* already on board. The vessel was somewhat larger than *Nicolet*, having been, like most of the Wyatt and Smith projects, built to the dimensions of the Welland Canal.<sup>51</sup> *Georgian* seems to have been deployed in the summer of 1864 around Georgian Bay, towing and hauling local cargoes but had been expected to run during the season between the rail head at Collingwood and Chicago.<sup>52</sup> Controversy flared in November when news got out that Wyatt and his partners had sold the propeller to a “Mr. Bates of Detroit.” On 17 January 1865, the title was transferred to a Canadian, George T. Denison. The following April the Canadian government, through the collector of Customs at Collingwood, seized *Georgian* on the grounds of suspicion that it would be used in violation of the province’s neutrality.<sup>53</sup> Whether or not Wyatt was paid in gold by the Confederates as some alleged, he and the Smiths appear to have collected their money, handed over the boat, and carefully washed their hands of the affair.

Wyatt and the Smiths were not interested in developing a fleet. Apart from the *Queen of the North*, by the spring of 1865 all of their acquisitions had been sold. In April, they picked up the *Mary Roe*, a Port Burwell barque, a vessel that had gone ashore at the entrance to Toronto harbour the previous fall.<sup>54</sup> Like many of their previous sailing vessels, it was despatched to Halifax in the summer of 1865. Less lucky than the others, *Mary Roe* was wrecked on the return voyage.<sup>55</sup>

One final sailing vessel was built for Wyatt and A.M. Smith, this time in conjunction with their investment in lumber operations on Georgian Bay. Where *Silver Cloud* and *Georgian* had been built on the Severn River at the

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<sup>50</sup> *Evening Union* (Washington, D. C.), 10 October 1863. *Age* (Philadelphia, PA), 4 December 1863. The loss at sea is documented on its Montreal registry.

<sup>51</sup> *Globe*, 18 December 1863.

<sup>52</sup> *Globe*, 28 March 1864, 10 May 1864 (quoting *Collingwood Enterprise*, 5 May).

<sup>53</sup> “In the Matter of the Propeller *Georgian*,” in Christopher Robinson, *Report of Cases decided in the Court of Queen’s Bench*, (Toronto: Carswell and Co., 1881), 319-23. Richard J. Wright, “Stars and Bars Over Lake Erie (Conclusion),” *Inland Seas*, v. 20, n. 2 (Summer 1964): 110-12. *The petition of George Taylor Denison, Jr. to the Honorable the House of Assembly, praying redress in the matter of the seizure of the steamer “Georgian”, together with copies of the petition and affidavits filed in the county court of the county of Simcoe*. (Toronto, 1865). *Correspondence relating to the Fenian Invasion and the Rebellion of the Southern States* (Ottawa: Hunter, Rose & Company, 1869), 87-97 (esp. 88-89).

<sup>54</sup> *Globe*, 5 November 1864; *Daily British Whig*, 8 April 1865.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily British Whig*, 13 July 1865, 17 August 1865; *Globe*, 12 August 1865.

south-east corner of Georgian Bay, John Potter would construct *Indian Maid* for them on the Spanish River north of Manitoulin Island, where the vessel was launched in November 1868. *Indian Maid* was intended to trade between their mill on the Spanish River and other ports on Lake Huron.<sup>56</sup> A newspaper account of Georgian Bay shipbuilding published in the summer of 1869 featured the four Wyatt and Smith hulls and mentioned that *Indian Maid* had also been constructed “especially for the ocean trade,” a statement somewhat at odds with the reported length of only ninety feet.<sup>57</sup> The waters around the North Channel being particularly challenging for sailing vessels, Wyatt acquired the new tug *George Campbell* from the Northwoods at Chatham for some \$5,000.<sup>58</sup> By the end of 1871, Wyatt and Smith had sold the Spanish River mills to Chaffey and Freddingburn and probably the tug with them.<sup>59</sup>

Of Wyatt’s other investments at this stage in his career, there is little evidence. He attended the annual meetings of Canada Life, but this may have been little more than support for his brother-in-law’s legacy with the firm.<sup>60</sup> More intriguing is his routine appearance at the annual general meeting of Toronto’s Northern Railway. He never served as an officer of the firm, but occasionally took on the role of scrutineer or offered a motion, always in support of the current management.<sup>61</sup> That Wyatt had an interest in the northern part of the province was evident from the places where his ships were built, where some of them were deployed, and where for a time he and Smith undertook the lumber trade. Much of that trade would pass through Collingwood, down the rail line to the Toronto waterfront.

Wyatt was strategically active in various social settings in the city. He was an officer in the local Masons and served as steward in the lodge led by the Northern Railway’s F.W. Cumberland.<sup>62</sup> As such, he also participated in a number of the Masonic balls of that period.<sup>63</sup> During the tour of the Prince of Wales in 1860, he organized excursions of *Bowmanville* and the *Peerless* to greet the royal party and escort them to Montreal, Toronto, and later to events in Hamilton and Queenston.<sup>64</sup> He also served with dozens of other leading

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<sup>56</sup> *Globe*, 7 November 1868. Note that the partnership of A. M. and John Smith had ended in 1865. See also *DCB*, XI: 835-37.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily News*, 27 July 1869.

<sup>58</sup> *Globe*, 14 April 1869. There is other evidence that they renamed the tug *Wenonah*.

<sup>59</sup> *Globe*, 21 November 1871.

<sup>60</sup> *Globe*, 29 October 1857, 8 October 1862, 30 October 1862, 1 November 1862.

<sup>61</sup> *Globe*, 17 February 1859, 9 February 1860, 12 February 1863, 15 February 1866, 11 February 1869, 10 February 1870, 15 February 1872.

<sup>62</sup> *Globe*, 10 September 1857.

<sup>63</sup> *Globe*, 20 January 1859, 4 January 1861.

<sup>64</sup> *Globe*, 16 August 1860, 5 September 1860, 6 September 1860, 15 September 1860

Torontonians on committees for the reception of the prince, and was formally introduced with well over a hundred others.<sup>65</sup> That he met the Prince of Wales is far less significant than the fact that he was inside the – admittedly large – circle of men who organized the event.

Some of Wyatt's social activities kept him on the waterfront. In the winter of 1861-62, Wyatt was the captain of a volunteer "Naval and Pilot Brigade" that met initially at his offices on Front Street.<sup>66</sup> In 1862, he and Elizabeth attended the ball of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club.<sup>67</sup> Three years later Wyatt had acquired a leading yacht, *Arrow*, and was competing for the club's Prince of Wales cup. In 1867, he was vice-commodore of the club, in which role he assisted in its incorporation.<sup>68</sup> For a number of years he was one of the senior officers of the Toronto Rowing Club.<sup>69</sup>

By 1866, George Henry Wyatt was well-established on the Toronto waterfront. His persistent advertising on behalf of the Inman line kept his name in front of newspaper readers. While he acted on behalf of fewer other steamboat lines by that point, he was still brokering sales and charters as well as selling coal and wood from his wharf near the Union Station. With A.M. Smith he had run a number of ventures to the Atlantic including some vessels built to their account. As such he had just the right connections when the government came calling in the wake of the June invasion of Canada by the Irish-American Fenians.

### **Gunboat Agent**

Wyatt entered government service as a result of his participation in the mobilization of Canada's defences following the invasion at Fort Erie by a force of about 1500 Fenians on 1 June 1866. The Fenians, after defeating a force of inexperienced militia at nearby Ridgeway the following day, then withdrew as British regular troops neared the scene, and US forces arrived in Buffalo to shut down the insurgency. Intelligence of other Fenian plans, however, kept large British and Canadian forces on the border that were only significantly reduced starting in the fall of 1868.

Wyatt, as we have seen, had shown an interest in defence when he raised the "Naval and Pilot Brigade" in the winter of 1861-62. At that time, leading citizens at several lake ports raised units to drill for potential naval service in

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<sup>65</sup> *Globe*, 20 August 1860, 6 September 1860, 10 September 1860, 28 September 1860.

<sup>66</sup> *Globe*, 11 January 1862, 18 January 1862, 1 February 1862, 8 February 1862.

<sup>67</sup> *Globe*, 10 September 1862.

<sup>68</sup> *Globe*, 5 September 1865, 30 September 1865, 6 March 1867, 9 September 1867, 3 March 1869, 8 September 1870, 24 November 1874.

<sup>69</sup> *Globe*, 9 April 1866, 4 May 1868, 4 May 1869, 17 May 1870.



*Rescue* at Collingwood. (Thunder Bay Research Collection, Alpena County Public Library)

response to the war scare with the United States resulting from the US Navy's seizure of the British steamer *Trent* in November 1861. Wyatt's brigade does not seem to have lasted beyond the winter crisis and was not established under the provincial militia department whose purview included units for naval training. His initiative may have been overtaken by the longer-lived Toronto Naval Brigade, established at the same time and well funded by Captain William Fenton McMaster (1822-1907), a member of the large business enterprises led by his uncle, William McMaster (1811-1887), the founder of the Bank of Commerce and McMaster University. Captain McMaster's naval brigade joined the rolls of the provincial militia in July 1862.<sup>70</sup>

With the news of the Fenian attack on Fort Erie, the Toronto brigade immediately crewed the steamer *Rescue*, armed with a 32-pounder howitzer

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Richard Melville, "Canada and Sea Power: Canadian Naval Thought and Policy, 1860-1910" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1981), 71, 75, 78; Roger Sarty, "The Army Origin of the Royal Canadian Navy: Canada's Maritime Defences, 1855-1918," *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2020), 345, n10; "Capt. M'Master Has Passed Away," *Globe*, 8 January 1907, 10. William Fenton McMaster's business was in dry goods, and he had no professional marine connection. The "captain" by which he always liked to be known was in fact a rank in the Canadian militia, which did not use naval ranks. McMaster seems to have liked the naval connotation, and thus continued to term himself captain even after he was promoted major.

supplied by the British Army, and on 4 June 1866 set out for Windsor in response to warnings of possible incursions from the Detroit area. Wyatt had arranged the charter of the vessel and sailed as the “quartermaster.”<sup>71</sup>

The Toronto men were bitterly disappointed when Royal Navy personnel arrived at Windsor and, by 7 June, took over *Rescue*, and a second, larger steamer, *Michigan*, just chartered from its American owners in Detroit.<sup>72</sup> A few experienced Canadian mariners remained on the vessels to operate the steam engines and navigate them safely in the inland waters. Among those who stayed aboard *Rescue* was Wyatt, who now became the “sailing master.”<sup>73</sup>

The Royal Navy had been able to respond quickly because of plans made earlier in the spring following warnings by the Canadian government and the British Army command in Canada, at Montreal, about the Fenian threat. The corvette HMS *Pylades* reached Quebec City on 10 May, soon after navigation opened, and carried on to Montreal. The sloop HMS *Rosario*, and the frigate HMS *Aurora*, the largest of the three warships, arrived at Quebec City on 16 and 13 May.<sup>74</sup> These ships were prepared to provide crews and armament for civilian steamers chartered by the Canadian government should that prove necessary. Captain A.F.R. de Horsey of *Aurora*, senior officer of the force, focused his attention on the Great Lakes. He delegated arrangements in the St. Lawrence to Captain A.W.A. Hood of *Pylades*. As soon as word of the attack on Fort Erie arrived on 2 June, Hood worked with the British Army command to take up and arm steamers to patrol the waters between Montreal and Kingston, while de Horsey rushed the crews and guns for *Rescue* and *Michigan* by rail to Toronto and then Windsor.<sup>75</sup>

Although the Canadian government chartered steamers for conversion to gun boats, it did so reluctantly. Since the early 1850s, Britain had pressed

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<sup>71</sup> John A. Macdonald, *Troublous Times in Canada: A History of the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870* (Toronto: W.S. Johnston and Coy, 1910), 100-3; A.M. Smith to Attorney General, 30 June 1866, Record Group (RG) 9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> *Michigan* was, however, a Canadian vessel. It had been built at Sarnia in 1859 for the Grand Trunk Railway, and sold to John Pridgeon, a Detroit based shipowner, in 1863, but had never been registered either in Canada or in the United States (whose shipping laws, in any case, forbade the registration of vessels built outside of the United States). Wyatt to McDougall, 30 July 1866, enclosing bill of sale from the Grand Trunk Railway to Pridgeon, 5 January 1863, RG 9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC; ‘Bowling Green State University... Historical Collections of the Great Lakes/ Vessels/ Michigan,’ <https://greatlakes.bgsu.edu/item/437992>.

<sup>73</sup> Wyatt to McDougall, 6 July 1866, RG 9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC. Wyatt signed as “Sailing Master S[teamer] ‘Rescue.’”

<sup>74</sup> *Morning Chronicle, Commercial and Shipping Gazette* (Quebec City), 10 May 1866, 2, 14 May 1866, 2, and 17 May 1866, 2.

<sup>75</sup> De Horsey to Hope, “Letter[s] of Proceedings,” and other reports, 2-7 June 1866, ADM 128/24, ff. 351-376, TNA, copy on reel C-2538, LAC.

the North American colonies to assume responsibility for their own defence. The financial burden on British taxpayers was onerous and, given that Britain granted the colonies the self-government they demanded in the late 1840s, an anachronism. People determined to govern themselves should look after their own defences. Canada had expanded its volunteer land militia as border tensions increased in the last year of the Civil War, but insisted that naval defence should still fall wholly to Britain. This was why the provincial government so quickly turned *Rescue* and then *Michigan* over to the Royal Navy crews, and immediately demobilized the Toronto Naval Brigade. Canada strictly limited its commitment, as a matter of policy, to providing the steamers.

Wyatt won the confidence of Captain de Horsey and Major General G.T.C. Napier, the British Army commander in Canada West at Toronto, in making arrangements to sustain the gunboat service. A key issue was economy and the three agreed that it would be less costly in the longer term to purchase rather than continue to charter steamers.<sup>76</sup> Wyatt made contact with the owners of *Rescue* and *Michigan*, and concluded that the latter could likely be purchased for \$12,000 and the former for \$22,000, sums that would be exceeded during a single season at the existing charter rates of \$150 and \$130 a day.<sup>77</sup>

Wyatt travelled to Ottawa to offer to organize the purchase. He brought two letters of endorsement. The first, from his business partner W.H. Smith of the Royal Canadian Bank, observed that Wyatt's mission was "by instruction of the General here [General Napier]," and attested to Wyatt's deep knowledge of "the Lakes and ship building in all its details...."<sup>78</sup> The second was from Captain McMaster of the Toronto Naval Brigade who commended Wyatt's performance during *Rescue's* brief cruise under McMaster's command: "I fully appreciated your knowledge of Vessels, Ports and everything in fact connected with the Lake Navigation...."<sup>79</sup> Immediately on reaching Ottawa, Wyatt visited George Brown, the Reform leader in the coalition government, and Angus Morrison, the Reform MP for Niagara, and they gave him their support. "No one in our part of the country," Brown wrote, "has shown such shrewdness or energy in the management of Lake Craft...."<sup>80</sup>

On 6 July 1866 the government's Executive Council (the forerunner of

<sup>76</sup> Wyatt to Napier, 28 June 1866, and de Horsey to Monck, 30 June 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>77</sup> As reported by McDougall in Executive Council Minutes, 6 July 1866, RG1E1, vol. 91, pp. 592-3, LAC.

<sup>78</sup> A.M. Smith, Royal Canadian Bank to Attorney General, 30 June 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> McMaster to Wyatt, 28 June 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>80</sup> Brown to Wyatt, 6 July 1866 (quoted) and Morrison to McDougall, 6 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

the modern Cabinet) approved the purchase of *Rescue* and *Michigan*.<sup>81</sup> The ministers were evidently impressed by Wyatt's credentials, for right after the meeting William McDougall, the marine minister, informed him that he had been appointed as the government's "agent ... to negotiate for the hire or purchase of certain steamers to be used as Gunboats on the Saint Lawrence River and the Lakes." He was in fact to have wider authority including "employment of such crews, engineers, pilots, etc as may be found requisite."<sup>82</sup> His compensation was to be five dollars per day, plus reimbursement for expenses, when he was conducting government business.

Wyatt faced a hurdle in concluding the terms of purchase from the hard-driving owner of *Michigan*, who now demanded \$25,000 in US currency, the equivalent of \$16,787.50 in Canadian currency. This was considerably more than the asking price of \$12,000 in Canadian funds elicited by Wyatt's first inquiries. Still, Wyatt advised, the increased price was more economical than continuing *Michigan*, whose services were urgently needed, at the high rate of daily charter. Indeed, there was no point in prolonging the negotiations, as within a few weeks the daily charter rate would fully account for the additional \$4787.50. On 17 July, Executive Council approved the purchase of both *Michigan* and *Rescue* (whose price Wyatt was able to reduce by a thousand dollars from the original offer, to \$21,000).<sup>83</sup> He suggested a name change for *Michigan* to avoid confusion with the USS *Michigan*, the sole American naval vessel on the Lakes. Lord Monck, the governor general, dubbed the province's new ship *Prince Alfred*, for the second son of Queen Victoria, who had entered the Royal Navy at the age of fourteen in 1858 and was known as the "Sailor Prince."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Executive Council Minutes, 6 July 1866, RG1 E1, vol. 91, pp. 592-3, LAC.

<sup>82</sup> McDougall, "Acting Minister of Marine," to Wyatt, 6 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC. On the draft, the "Provincial Secretary" letterhead is scratched out and replaced by "Minister of Marine Department." See also McDougall, "Memorandum on the Steamer 'Royal,'" 19 September 1866, file numbers 63-109, RG9 IC8, vol. 9, LAC, in which McDougall notes he was appointed "Acting Minister of Marine" in early July 1866.

<sup>83</sup> Wyatt to McDougall, 13 and 14 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC; Executive Council Minute, 17 July 1866, RG1 E1, vol. 91, pp. 608-14, LAC. The account in MacDonald, *Gunboats on the Great Lakes*, 86-8 does not mention that *Michigan*'s owner's demand for \$25,000 was in US funds, and that the equivalent in Canadian funds was \$16,787.50, the amount Wyatt recommended accepting and which the government paid: Munro, accountant, Bank of Montreal to Wyatt, 25 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> McDougall to de Horsey, 15 September 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 9, file numbers 63-109, LAC; MacDonald, *Gunboats on the Great Lakes*, 87; John Van der Kiste, "Alfred, Prince, duke of Edinburgh (1844-1900)," (online version, 8 January 2009), <https://doi-org.libproxy.wlu.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/346>; "The Naval Brigade Dinner," *Globe*, 27 December 1862, 2. The US government had dispatched USS *Michigan* from her home port of Erie, Pennsylvania on 31 May 1866 to Buffalo to interdict the Fenian attack on Fort Erie; it arrived too late, but did prevent

Wyatt also made more economical arrangements for the steamers operating on the St. Lawrence and in eastern Lake Ontario, with which he had no previous involvement. In the panic during early June, the British Army's main headquarters at Montreal had worked with Captain Hood to charter four steamers, *St. Andrew*, *Royal*, *Canada*, and *Hercules*, at the high rate of \$120 a day, and to fit the upper decks with protective iron plates, and mount guns. In late June, Hood, as an economy measure, had dismantled the armament and protective plates on *Hercules* and *Canada* and returned them to their owners, leaving *Royal* and *St. Andrew*, but still on the high charter rate.<sup>85</sup> Hood recommended purchasing at least *Royal*, which the Executive Council approved at its meeting on 17 July. Wyatt carried out discussions in Montreal with the owners of the vessels in service, as well as owners of other suitable steamers. He was able to drive down the charter rates, in the case of *Royal* from \$120 a day to \$70.<sup>86</sup> A complication was fresh intelligence of increased Fenian activity that brought General Sir John Michel, the army commander at Montreal, to recommend that Hood's force be restored to four vessels.<sup>87</sup> Hood got one additional steamer, *Hercules*, which came back on charter, the owners having agreed to a bargain rate of \$45 a day.<sup>88</sup> Wyatt, McDougall reported to the Executive Council on 1 September, had decided not to pursue purchase of *Royal*, presumably because of the reduced charter rate.<sup>89</sup>

Reinforcements had meanwhile arrived, from the UK via Halifax. The gunboats HMS *Britomart* (the name ship of the class), *Cherub*, and *Heron* entered Lake Ontario in early August. One vessel was assigned to each of lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron. They thus augmented *Michigan* on its patrols of western waters (the vessel was too broad to pass through the Welland Canal to Lake Ontario), and *Rescue* in Lake Ontario (which, with a narrower hull, could also reach Lakes Erie and Huron).<sup>90</sup> The RN gunboats were smaller than

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reinforcements from crossing the river, and caught and arrested those who later fled back to the US. Lawrence E. Cline, *Rebels on the Niagara: The Fenian Invasion of Canada, 1866* (Albany, NY: Excelsior Editions, 2018), 116-118.

<sup>85</sup> Hood to Major General Hon. James Lindsay, 27 June 1866, RG9 1C8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> McDougall, "Memorandum on the Steamer 'Royal,'" 19 September 1866, file numbers 63-109, RG9 1C8, vol. 9, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> McDougall to Wyatt, 19 September 1866, de Horsey to Monck, 12 September 1866, Michel to de Horsey, 14 September 1866, RG9 1C8, vol. 9, file nos. 63-109, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> "Charter Party Calvin and Breck to Honble William McDougall Str. Hercules," 19 September 1866, RG9 1C8, vol. 9, file nos. 63-109, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Executive Council minute, 1 September 1866, RG1 E1, vol. 92, pp. 131-4, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed account see Cheryl MacDonald, *Gunboats on the Great Lakes 1866-68: The British Navy's show of force at the time of Confederation* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2017), especially chapter 6. Monck to Hope, 23 July 1866, ADM 128/24, ff. 235-239, TNA, reel

the Canadian steamers,<sup>91</sup> but heavily armed, each with a 110-pounder and a 40-pounder Armstrong rifled breech-loading gun. The heaviest guns carried by the Canadian vessels were 20-pounder Armstrong rifled breech-loaders.<sup>92</sup> The British gunboats, with a best speed of nine knots (about ten statute miles per hour) were slower than the Canadian steamers, which could make as much as fourteen statute miles per hour and were thus better able to navigate the strong currents often found in the inland waters.<sup>93</sup> This was why British defence planning for the lakes had long noted the importance of taking up fast civilian steamers. The crew of each gunboat was about forty personnel. The Canadian vessels each had crews of some fifty to seventy personnel, which included the Royal Navy fighting crew and perhaps a half dozen civilian personnel, the only crew provided by Canada, to assist with navigation and to operate the engines.<sup>94</sup>

Wyatt kept up a frenetic pace, regularly travelling from Toronto to Ottawa, and to ports from Montreal to Windsor. Aside from dealings with ship owners,

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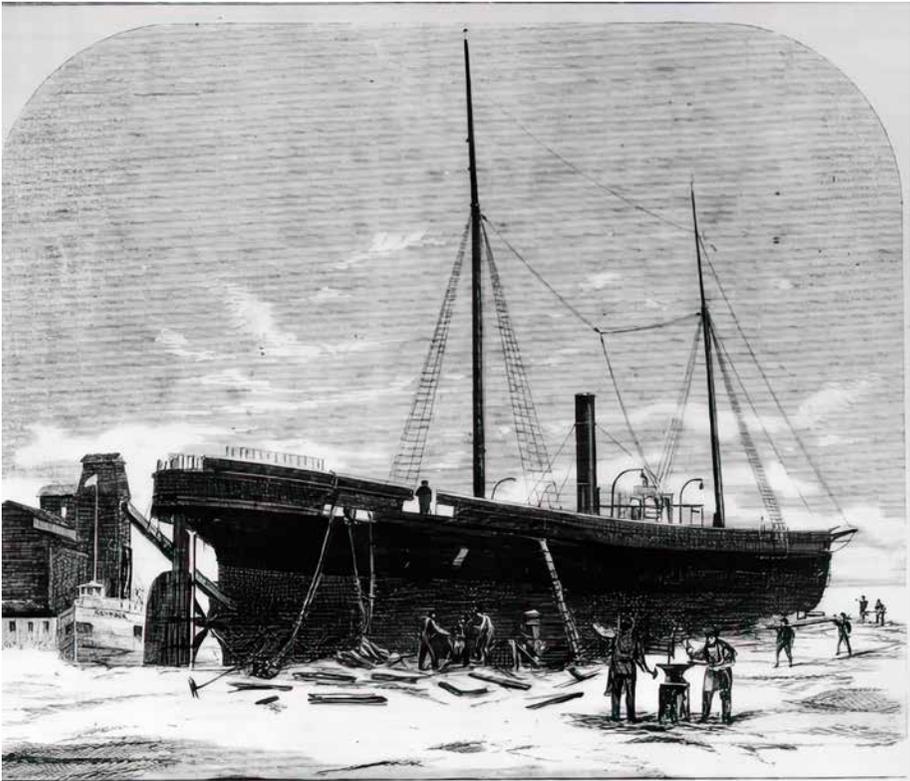
B-2358, LAC includes de Horsey's plan for the lakes deployments, which Monck notes General Napier had approved.

<sup>91</sup> The Britomart class were 120 feet in length with a 20-foot beam. The largest Canadian vessels were *Michigan* (later renamed *Prince Alfred*), 160 feet length and 26-foot beam, and *Royal*, 150 feet length and 38-foot beam. On the Britomart class see J.J. Colledge and Ben Warlow, *Ships of the Royal Navy: The Complete Record of all Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present* (London: Chatham, 2006), xii and MacDonald, *Gunboats on the Great Lakes*, 97. On the Canadian steamers see Wyatt, "Rescue," 5 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC (with coal *Rescue* could do "10-12 miles"); Wyatt, "Michigan," 5 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file numbers 1-20, LAC. (*Michigan* best speed "13-14 miles"). Hood, "Report of Steamers hired and fitted as Gun Boats for Service in St. Lawrence," 8 June 1866, ADM 128/25, f. 522, TNA, reel B-2359, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Wyatt to minister of Militia and Defence, 23 September 1868, forwarding "Statement respecting the armed vessels owned by the Government of Canada or by the British Government in Canadian waters," RG9 IIA1, vol. 2, file 908, LAC. This gives the armament for each of *Prince Alfred* and *Rescue* as two "14 Armstrong" and one "10 Brass," which may refer to the weights in hundredweights of the 20-pounder Armstrong gun and the 24-pounder smooth-bore brass howitzer that earlier correspondence shows were the heaviest guns fitted in the Canadian vessels; see, e.g., de Horsey to Hope, "Report of Proceedings," 4 June 1866, ADM 128/24, ff. 365-368, TNA, reel B-2358, LAC; Hood, "Report of Steamers hired and fitted as Gun Boats," 8 June 1866, ADM 128/25, f. 522, TNA, reel B-2359, LAC; Hood, "Guns belonging to the [Royal Navy] Ships [at Montreal and Quebec] now in use in steamers on the St. Lawrence," [June 1866], f. 533, ADM 128/25, f. 522, TNA, reel B-2359, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> A point de Horsey underscored in advocating the purchase of *Michigan* and *Rescue*: de Horsey to Monck, 30 June 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file nos. 1-20, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Wyatt, 23 September 1868, "Statement respecting the armed vessels..." gives *Rescue*'s crew as fifty-five, and *Prince Alfred*'s as seventy. De Horsey, "Civilian Crews of the hired gunboats 'Michigan' and 'Rescue'...", 22 July 1866, RG9 IC8, vol. 8, file nos. 1-20, LAC recommended trimming the larger civilian crews that had initially sailed on the Canadian steamers to six personnel each.



THE GUNBOAT "PRINCE ALFRED" HAULED UP FOR REPAIRS AT GODERICH.—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY CAMPBELL.—SEE PAGE 195.

A major part of Wyatt's challenges involved the maintenance of the vessels in his care. Above the Welland Canal there were no formal ship repair facilities on the Canadian shore and taking a naval steamboat to an American yard was out of the question. Consequently *Prince Alfred* had to be hauled out onto temporary ways. (From *Canadian Illustrated News*, 30 March 1872, p. 197)

he kept a close watch over repairs to vessels, which he certified on behalf of the government, and hired and paid the navigating crews. Although the British government paid for coal, Wyatt appears to have made the arrangements for supply and delivery for both the Canadian and British vessels. McDougall relied on Wyatt to keep the financial accounts and trusted his judgement for the settlement of contested claims.<sup>95</sup>

Gunboat patrols on the Saint Lawrence and the lakes continued in the 1867

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Wyatt to McDougall, 5 September 1866, McDougall minute, 15 September 1866, and McDougall to McCallum, 4 October 1866, RG9 1C8, vol. 9, file nos. 63 to 109, LAC. McDougall referred McCallum's claim for \$5209.55 for the employment of his steamer *W.T. Robb* as a gunboat for twenty days in June 1866 to Wyatt, and acted on Wyatt's advice to pay only \$4,000.00 on the basis of the rates paid at that time for other hired steamers.

and 1868 seasons, with the Royal Navy gunboats overwintering at Kingston, Toronto, and Goderich. The Canadian government resisted British pressure to organize a Canadian naval service to supply fighting crews for its own steamers insisting once more that naval defence against foreign attack was a British responsibility.<sup>96</sup> Royal Navy personnel thus returned to operate three steamers, *Rescue*, *Prince Alfred*, and one chartered vessel, *Hercules*, in the 1867 season, and then *Rescue*, and *Prince Alfred* in the 1868 season. The Royal Navy withdrew its ships from the lakes and St. Lawrence in October 1868,<sup>97</sup> and in the spring of 1869 the British government advised that Canada would have to pay for any future naval assistance on the inland waters. The Canadian government, despite its previous warnings that the British underestimated the continuing Fenian threat,<sup>98</sup> did not take up the offer. During the 1869 season the government brought its own ships, *Prince Alfred* and *Rescue*, back into service only with a new alarm in October 1869. *Prince Alfred*, with a fighting crew from the militia artillery, set out from its home port at Goderich to patrol the western waters down to the Windsor-Detroit area until the freeze up started at the end of November. *Rescue*, at Kingston, was prepared for service but was ready too late in November to undertake patrols.<sup>99</sup>

In April 1870, intelligence of Fenian activity brought both gunboats out on patrol with militia artillery fighting crews as soon as the ice cleared. Later in the spring and in the summer they operated between Collingwood on Georgian Bay and Sault Ste. Marie as part of the steamer service that transported supplies for the military expedition to Manitoba dispatched in response to the

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<sup>96</sup> See, e.g., PC 593/2 June 1868, RG2 A1a, vol. 259, reel C-3288, LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Secretary to commander-in-chief, "British North American Frontier Protection from Fenians – 1867," 31 March 1868, ADM 128/62, ff. 1005-1007, TNA, reel B-2366, LAC; Secretary to commander-in-chief, "Protection of the British North American Frontier from Fenian incursions...1868," 1 May 1869, ADM 128/63, ff. 1-4, TNA, reel B-2366, LAC; Canada, Parliament, *Sessional Papers, 1869*, vol. II, no. 4, "Public Accounts...Fiscal Year Ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1868," pt. I, 115, pt. III, 40-41; *Sessional Papers, 1870*, vol. III, no. 7, "Public Accounts... Fiscal Year Ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1869," 151.

<sup>98</sup> In early 1867 and again in early 1868 the Canadian government successfully resisted the efforts of the Admiralty to significantly reduce the force on inland waters, arguing that the Fenians were still an imminent threat. "Copy of a Report of a Committee of the executive council approved...16 March 1867," ADM 128/24, ff. 321-5, TNA, reel B-2358, LAC; [Executive Council minute,] 13 March 1868 and attached correspondence, *Sessional Papers, 1869*, vol. VI, no. 75, "Return...Correspondence...relating to the outlay...by Canada in Defence of the Frontier of the United States in 1863-4, and also...the threatened Fenian Invasion subsequently...," 164-5; Granville to Young, 14 April 1869 in *Sessional Papers, 1871*, vol. V, no. 46, "Return...Correspondence...withdrawing ...Her Majesty's Troops from service in this Dominion," 13.

<sup>99</sup> PC 758/23 October 1869, RG2 A1a, vol. 270, reel C-3292, LAC; *Sessional Papers, 1870*, vol. IV, no. 8, "Report on the State of the Militia...for the Year 1869," 17-19.

Red River Rebellion against Canadian administration in the former Hudson's Bay Company lands.<sup>100</sup>

Since Confederation the gunboats had come under the militia department, the only change being that Wyatt reported now to George-Étienne Cartier, the militia minister. The British military command valued the vessels whose mobility was a force multiplier in keeping watch along the border and responding quickly to any alert.<sup>101</sup> Colonel Patrick Robertson-Ross, the British officer who served as adjutant general of the Canadian militia, supported Wyatt's recommendation that the older *Rescue* should be replaced by a new purpose-built gunboat. The government would not go that far, but did fund the refit and improvements Wyatt recommended for the vessel.<sup>102</sup>

For much of the 1871 season, *Rescue* operated under the orders of the chief engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway transporting men and equipment for survey of the rail construction route along the north shore of Lake Superior. *Prince Alfred* served as a transport for militia units and as a firing platform for artillery practice during annual training. The vessel had been built as a powerful tug and during the fall returned to that role assisting ships caught in heavy gales on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. As Wyatt noted, the insurance companies of the ships the steamer had rescued paid all its operating costs for that period.<sup>103</sup> Both vessels participated in the militia's annual training in 1872<sup>104</sup> and this appears to have been their last active employment with the military. The Fenian movement in the US, whose threat was the reason why the ships had been purchased, looked like a spent force, and relations between Britain, Canada, and the United States were greatly improved by the resolution of outstanding disputes in the Treaty of Washington concluded in 1871. Late in that year, the last of the British Army garrisons in Canada departed, save for the troops that protected Halifax, which was still the Royal Navy's main base in the north-west Atlantic. The Canadian government sold *Rescue* in the spring of 1873, and in the following spring transferred *Prince Alfred* to the

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<sup>100</sup> *Sessional Papers, 1871*, vol. IV, no. 7, "Annual Report on the State of the Militia for 1870," 132-3; *Sessional Papers 1871*, vol. VI, no. 47 [appended], "Return...showing the Names of all Vessels Chartered... Expedition to the North-West in 1870," 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> Lieutenant General James Lindsay to governor general, 26 July 1870, *Sessional Papers, 1871*, vol. V, no. 46, 52; Lieutenant General Sir Hastings Doyle to governor general, 25 November 1870, 62.

<sup>102</sup> "Annual Report on the State of the Militia for 1870," 49; PC 156/24 February 1872, RG2 A1a, vol. 295, reel C-3299, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> *Sessional Papers, 1872*, vol. V, no. 8, "Annual Report on the State of the Militia for 1871," 60, 96-9.

<sup>104</sup> *Sessional Papers, 1873*, vol. V, no. 9, "Annual Report on the State of the Militia for 1872," xvi, xlii.

Department of Marine and Fisheries.<sup>105</sup> Wyatt's final payments for services and expenses was \$460.88 for fiscal year 1873-4, compared to \$1,500 or more in previous years.<sup>106</sup> Thus ended the Canadian government's first, very closely hedged, venture into naval development.

Under Wyatt's management, the *Toronto Globe* commented in October 1866, "our navy, small though it is, is in as complete and efficient a state as it is possible to make it."<sup>107</sup> Of course the newspaper's proprietor, George Brown, had supported Wyatt's engagement. In 1870, however, Colonel Robertson-Ross, described Wyatt in similarly laudatory terms, "the able and intelligent gunboat agent."<sup>108</sup> Wyatt's goal, throughout his government service, was to obtain value for money. His efficiency enabled Canada to provide the minimum contribution the British government found acceptable to support its much larger naval efforts at a cost the young country was willing to bear. He achieved these good results by operating as a one-person navy department, and always on a per-diem basis that brought his tenure to an end when the last vessel left military service.

### Disappointments in the Final Years

Following Wyatt's government service he left aside some of his old ventures. The coal and wood wharf had already been passed on. His last association with that appeared in the city's 1872 directory.<sup>109</sup> His sole advertisements as a Great Lakes steamboat agent had been for the Beatty's Lake Superior Line in 1874.<sup>110</sup> His last season as agent for the Inman Line was 1876.<sup>111</sup> He did some work as a ship broker, although the last advertisement for that was also in 1876 (at least which has surfaced).<sup>112</sup> Wyatt's last venture with A.M. Smith may well have been the purchase of the burned wreck of the *City of London*.<sup>113</sup> This they had towed to Owen Sound where Wyatt superintended the building of the *City*

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<sup>105</sup> PC 633/31 May 1873, RG2 A1a, vol. 310, reel C-3304, LAC; PC 535/11 May 1874, RG2 A1d, vol. 2754, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> *Sessional Papers, 1875*, vol. I, no. 1, "Public Accounts of Canada for the fiscal year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1874," 131.

<sup>107</sup> 9 October 1866, 2.

<sup>108</sup> *Sessional Papers, 1871*, vol. IV, no. 7, "Annual Report on the State of the Militia for 1870," 49.

<sup>109</sup> Wm. Henry Irwin, ed. *Toronto City Directory for 1872-73 (Corrected to June 25<sup>th</sup>)* (Toronto: Telegraph Printing House, 1872), 326.

<sup>110</sup> *Globe*, 22 June 1874, 27, June 1874, 8 August 1874, 13 October 1874.

<sup>111</sup> *Globe*, 8 September 1876. His name appeared in the 1877 city directory in association with Inman's, but other names appeared in the newspaper advertisements.

<sup>112</sup> *Globe*, 7 March 1874, 2 February 1875, 8 November 1876.

<sup>113</sup> *Globe*, 9 November 1874.

of *Owen Sound* by John Simpson, John Potter's nephew, in early 1875.<sup>114</sup> In the city directories of 1875 and 1876, he was identified as one of the Toronto agents of the Royal Insurance Company of Liverpool, a firm that dealt in fire and life insurance.<sup>115</sup> Shortly after that he gave up his office on Front Street East.<sup>116</sup>

Wyatt had been associated with Toronto's Board of Trade since at least 1860, serving on its council on occasion.<sup>117</sup> The board had the power to nominate two members of the Toronto Harbour Commission, and for years one of those members had been his father-in-law, Thomas D. Harris, who also briefly served as Harbour Master in the early 1870s.<sup>118</sup> In the wake of Harris' death in January 1873, Wyatt's name was proposed for the Harbour Commission, on which he served from 1874 to 1878. By 1878 there was a rising concern that when finished the enlargement of the Welland Canal would yield a generation of new canallers with drafts too deep for much of the existing harbour, including its entrances.<sup>119</sup> Much of the commission's inaction has been laid at the feet of its chair, the other board appointee, J.G. Worts.<sup>120</sup> When a long list of Toronto captains and vessel owners presented a petition demanding action on the eastern gap to city council that November, Wyatt and two others broke ranks with the rest of the Harbour Commission and added their signatures.<sup>121</sup> He would not be re-appointed.

With his departure from the commission, Wyatt appears to have broken his last ties to Toronto's waterfront and its businesses. What remained of his life would be spent promoting tourism to and settlement of northern Ontario and western Canada. While his family remained in Toronto, he spent much of

<sup>114</sup> *Globe*, 8 March 1875. Ronald F. Beaupre, "Ship of the Month No. 153, CITY OF OWEN SOUND," *Scanner*, vol. 19, no. 6 (March 1987). One of Wyatt's daughters was given the honour of naming the vessel (*Owen Sound Advertiser*, 17 June 1875).

<sup>115</sup> *Toronto Directory for 1875...* (Toronto: Fisher & Taylor, 1875), 5. *Toronto Directory for 1875...* (Toronto: Fisher & Taylor, 1876), 367.

<sup>116</sup> *Toronto Directory for 1878...* (Toronto: Fisher & Taylor, 1878), 105 lists Front St. East without his office.

<sup>117</sup> *Globe*, 25 Jan 1860, 30 January 1862.

<sup>118</sup> *DCB*, 10: 335-36.

<sup>119</sup> *Globe*, 26 February 1878.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Moir, "Planning for Change: Harbour Commissions, Civil Engineers, and Large-scale Manipulation of Nature," in Gene Desfor and Jennefer Laidley, *Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 34. The concern in the *Globe* article was for a twelve-foot draft, which was the original intent of the Welland enlargement, but between 1882 and 1887 this was extended to fourteen feet which represented an even greater threat to the harbour.

<sup>121</sup> *Globe*, 19 November 1878. Wyatt would later justify breaking ranks with the rest of the Commission because the petition had been intended to secure a grant from the federal government. *Globe*, 1 February 1879.

those years in Liverpool and occasionally in Winnipeg. This promotion of a connection to the far west dated from as early as the summer of 1856 when he attended the meeting of Toronto merchants leading to the formation of the North-West Transportation Company.<sup>122</sup> The meeting has been cited by a number of Canadian historians as an early example of Toronto's elite taking an interest in securing what has become known as western Canada as a hinterland of Toronto.<sup>123</sup>

Wyatt would later claim that he had been actively promoting settlement in Manitoba from 1875. His first connection was with what he called the "Lake Superior Route," by which he more specifically meant the steamers owned by his former partner A.M. Smith and Smith's new partner, W.W. Keighley. In 1880, these steamers were folded into the Canada Lake Superior Transit Company while continuing to run from Georgian Bay to both Canadian and American ports at the head of Lake Superior. In 1879, he was reported in Quebec recruiting laborers for construction on the Canadian Pacific Railway among recent arrivals. Later in 1879, he shifted his activities to Great Britain, travelling through England, Scotland, and Ireland promoting emigration to Manitoba. This he explained to Sir John A. Macdonald, who was also serving as Minister of the Interior (the Canadian government department whose portfolio included promoting immigration): "Then in 1879 finding from the information defused[?] in Great Britain through the Dominion Govt many settlers were coming out and the Lake route not known I came over to work it up appoint agencies give information &c."<sup>124</sup> The request that Macdonald facilitate a meeting with Canadian Pacific Railway officials in Britain in anticipation of yet another agency does not appear to have yielded additional work.

The following year he published at least two works. *The Traveller's and Sportsman's Guide to the Principal Cities Towns and Villages near the Hunting and Fishing Grounds of the Great Northern Lakes in Canada and Manitoba* came in a sixpence edition featuring a woodcut of a man on horse

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<sup>122</sup> *Globe*, 13 August 1856.

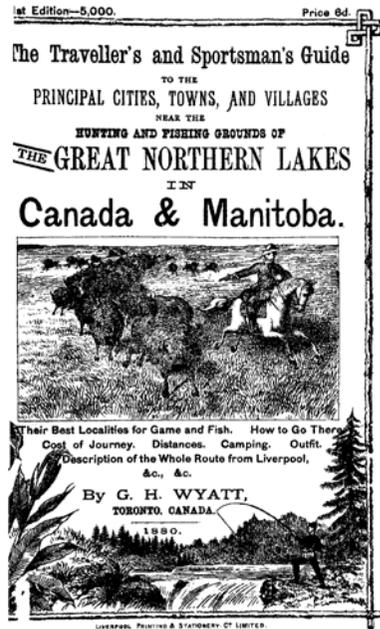
<sup>123</sup> J. M. S. Careless, *The Union of the Canadas: The Growth of Canadian Institutions, 1851-1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1867), 205-6; Doug Owrarn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 38-40, 44-5, 48; Donald Swainson, "The North-West Transportation Company: Personnel and Attitudes," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Papers*, Series II, No. 26 (1969-70): 59-77; Malcolm E. Davidson, "Changing Patterns of Great Lakes Vessel Ownership As a Factor in the Economic Development of Toronto, 1850-1860," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 16, no. 3 (February 1988): 249.

Wyatt was among the many names attached to a request for a public meeting regarding the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company the following year. *Globe*, 15 August 1857.

<sup>124</sup> Wyatt to Macdonald, 23 July 1881, Sir John A. Macdonald fonds, Manuscript Group (MG) 26A, vol. 164, pp. 66504-66506, reel C-1568, LAC; *Globe*, 24 July 1879.

shooting a buffalo with a pistol.<sup>125</sup> Wyatt offered himself as having “a residence of nearly 30 years in Canada, and, with few exceptions, personally knowing every part of the country described.” More to the point, the end pages of the volume were filled with advertisements for agencies operated by Wyatt, including what he labelled the “European Passenger Office” of the “Manitoba and Canadian Rail and Lakes Route.” He also advertised his role as agent for the Lake Superior and Collingwood Line, the Georgian Bay Transportation Company, the Northern Railway of Canada and the Hamilton and North-western Railway in conjunction with either Barlow or Fred Cumberland. Wyatt was also prepared to supply information for prospective travellers on the Great Western Railroad, the Toronto, Grey & Bruce Railway, and the Muskoka Steamboat Line. All of these directed the reader’s attention to “Geo. H. Wyatt, 15, Water Street, Liverpool.” The address was not a casual choice as in the same building could be found a John Dyke, the Liverpool agent of the Canadian government, although Dyke’s reports from those years include no reference to Wyatt or his activities. In one widely reprinted article claiming that 77,000 emigrants had passed west from Sarnia into the United States, only to pass through to Manitoba, he identified himself as “of the Manitoba office.” Again, this was not official, but simply a marketing brand that Wyatt provided.<sup>126</sup>

A second travel volume also appeared in 1880 entitled *Manitoba, the Canadian North-West and Ontario*. Again, Wyatt claimed “a residence of nearly 30 years in Canada, an intimate connection with leading railroad and steam-ship lines throughout the Dominion and having answered thousands of questions from intending settlers ...” as his qualifications. Original writing, however, was not among those skills, as he dodged anticipated claims of



<sup>125</sup> Liverpool: Liverpool Printing and Stationery Co., 1880). This appears to have been marketed in Canada as *A Journey from Liverpool to Manitoba*, as that title was described as “by G. H. Wyatt, is an instructive sketch, intended chiefly for the sportsman, of the routes to the North-West, via the Hunting and Fishing grounds of the Upper Lakes.” *Dominion Annual Register and Review 1880-1881*, (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1882) 294.

<sup>126</sup> *Manchester Evening News*, 6 August 1880.

plagiarism with “It is hoped ... that all the writers whose labours have to some extent been appropriated, will accept this acknowledgment.”<sup>127</sup> Among those “appropriated” were the opinions of a delegation of English agriculturalists who visited Manitoba in 1879. The following summer Wyatt came back to Canada, where he was noted sailing from Owen Sound with “a large party from England, in charge of Captain Wyatt, in search of homes in Manitoba. He also had 100 deck passengers for Bay Mills, Lake Superior, and 95 laborers for the Canada Pacific Railway works.” Their passage was on the *City of Winnipeg* another vessel of Wyatt’s former colleague, A.M. Smith, for whom Wyatt was the English agent.<sup>128</sup>

In 1881, Wyatt turned from agencies to actively promoting the Great North West and Manitoba Land Company. The firm anticipated raising a capital of £400,000 Stg to acquire land in Manitoba which they would sell in Britain, and especially in Ireland. The plan called for a British board along with a local board in Winnipeg, which would include two local MPPs and “George H. Wyatt, Esq., Winnipeg.”<sup>129</sup> In the summer of 1882, Wyatt returned to Canada with two of the company directors.<sup>130</sup> For all that he was advertised as having been living in Winnipeg, this appears to have been his first extended stay in the city. It ended with his death there on 6 January 1883.

According to the obituary in the *Manitoba Free Press* he “has been busy gathering material for a new work relative to this country” but had intended to leave for Britain before the new year.<sup>131</sup> The *Globe* offered a more salacious account of Wyatt’s passing in his room in the Royal Exchange Hotel:

Wyatt’s death was due to reckless exposure to the fierce cold of the past week. All the winter he persisted in wearing clothes barely warm enough for autumn, merely that he might produce his clothes on the platform in England, as proof of the mildness of the climate. For ten days he gradually froze to death.<sup>132</sup>

The *Free Press* obituary had also noted that Wyatt had been “separated from his wife for a number of years.” Hints of scandal were dropped in the version later quoted in the *Montreal Gazette*: “... the particulars of the separation being no doubt fresh in the memories of many of our readers who

<sup>127</sup> Geo. H. Wyatt, *Dominion of Canada. Manitoba, the Canadian North-West and Ontario* (Toronto, 1880).

<sup>128</sup> *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 28 August 1880.

<sup>129</sup> *Daily News* (London, England), 20 May 1882. This prospectus was widely distributed among the British press. Earlier references had involved Wyatt with the “Canadian North-West Land Company” *Globe*, 17 October 1881, 28 December 1881.

<sup>130</sup> *Gazette* (Montreal), 2 September 1882.

<sup>131</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 8 January 1883.

<sup>132</sup> *Globe*, 8 January 1883.

have lived in Toronto.”<sup>133</sup> Some weeks later, the *Free Press* offered a rather weak apology, claiming that Wyatt had not been separated, and indeed had visited his home twice over the previous three years, written from time to time, and at least on one occasion sent money.<sup>134</sup> It was not a particularly convincing retraction.

This rather sad domestic tale adds some depth to the stress and perhaps desperation that Wyatt may have been under in the decade after his service as gunboat agent. In addition to whatever personal scandal being hinted at, the fact is that the international economy had taken a downturn in 1873 and one by one Wyatt’s ventures fell by the wayside, leaving him to re-invent himself as an immigration agent, author, and lecturer in the promotion of western Canada.

The detailed records that survive from Wyatt’s government work leave no question that he deserved a better legacy. It was a rare achievement to win and maintain the confidence of political leaders and the senior officers of the British Army and the Royal Navy. Wyatt must be given much of the credit for the nearly seamless cooperation in a combined undertaking fraught with potential discord between the two British services, and between the British and Canadian governments, which disagreed fundamentally about responsibilities for the defence of the Great Lakes. The records show that Wyatt won such influence through his deep knowledge of shipping and other waterfront industries, and his diligence and clear headedness as an administrator, not least with ship owners ready to drive a hard bargain by whatever means necessary.

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<sup>133</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 13 January 1883.

<sup>134</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 January 1883.