

Ulster Scots and The War of 1812

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Having completed books on Sir Arthur Chichester, Lord Deputy of Ireland, 1605-16 and *The Flight of the Earls*, my research interests moved on in 2007 to the career of Major General Robert Ross from my home village of Rostrevor, County Down. During The War of 1812, or the 'Second War of Independence' as many Americans at the time called it, which began when the Americans invaded Canada, General Ross captured Washington, burning the White House in the process. His death some three weeks later was a 'key' event influencing Francis Scott Key when he wrote the lyrics of *The Star Spangled Banner*, later to become the US National Anthem. Ross is buried in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

After falling into disrepair, Ross' monument in Rostrevor, on the site of his proposed retirement dwelling, was restored and opened to the public in 2009. I am now co-authoring a book on his life with Chris George from Baltimore. Ross' expedition to the USA is attracting international attention with both the celebrated BBC broadcaster, Peter Snow and the Washington Post journalist, Steve Vogel, writing books on the subject. Both have visited the Ross monument in Rostrevor. Bicentennial commemorations of the War of 1812 begin this year, with events occurring in the USA and Canada. There are plans to feature a portrait of General Ross at a major War of 1812 exhibition opening in June 2012 at the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian, in Washington.

The earlier rebellion by the United Irishmen provided a sub-plot to The War of 1812 as Alan Taylor details in his recent book on *The Civil War of 1812* (New York, 2010). 'Irish republicans waged a civil war within the British empire, renewing in Canada their rebellion, which the British had suppressed in Ireland in 1798. Invading Canada, Irish American soldiers faced British regiments primarily recruited in Ireland'.

In general, Irishmen were heavily represented in all British army regiments defending Canada but there were a number of identifiably 'Irish' regiments serving in the British army there. Most famously, the 89th regiment distinguished itself at the Battle of Chryslers Farm and later fought at the Battle of Lundy's Lane (also known as the Battle of Niagara). Meanwhile the 100th regiment was active throughout the war, including at the Battle of Sackett's Harbour and again at the Battle of Chippawa. They were described as having been 'principally raised in the north of Ireland, and are nearly all Protestants; they are robust, active, and good looking'. Besides Ross, himself an Ulster Scot, some 40% of his expeditionary force came from Ireland, many from Ulster.

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On the American side, as Henry Bisharat, formerly of the US Consulate in Belfast, has remarked, these events reveal 'how special and close the ties were between Ulster and North America are that before President Obama, Ulster was the only region of the world outside the U.S. to have "First Fathers", and not just one, but three - and two of these fought against [the forces of] Gen. Ross!'; James Buchanan and Andrew Jackson. With his victory at the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson reunified a disUnited States that was riven almost to the point of civil war. His achievement was a key factor leading him to become the first Scots Irish president.

During the Battle of Baltimore in September 1814 (when Ross was killed), the defiant flying of the US flag at Fort McHenry, following a massive Royal Navy bombardment, features in the lyrics of the American National Anthem - the Star Spangled Banner. Fort McHenry was named President Washington's Secretary of War, Ballymena born Dr James McHenry.

Other prominent individuals involved on the American side with Ulster Scots roots included Oliver Hazard Perry, victor over the British at the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813. Perry is a member of the most famous family in US naval history. His father, Christopher Raymond Perry, was captured on board a US privateer during the American War of Independence and was held in Newry barracks where he fell in love with and later married a local lass, Sarah Wallace Alexander. Sarah traced her lineage through to William Wallace of Braveheart fame. Oliver Hazard Perry was very proud of his bloodline to William Wallace.

For further details about Major General Ross and the interconnecting ties with the USA and Canada see www.themanwhocapturedwashington.com The bicentennial commemorative period (2012-15) offers an opportunity to establish transatlantic links marking Ulster's involvement on both sides of the conflict during the War of 1812.