

The Battles of the Windmill

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It is an unknown fact of history that there were actually two Battles of the Windmill and, although the first Battle of the Windmill is well known to historians it is time that the second battle of the Windmill be recorded for posterity since we have such record in the diary and field notes of James West, Provincial Land Surveyor and Civil Engineer.

The windmill, now decapitated and converted into a lighthouse in 1872 stands on Windmill Point $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the Town of Prescott on the St. Lawrence River. It was erected in 1822 by a West Indian merchant named Hughes and served the farmers in Grenville County. The village, adjacent to the mill, is now nothing but roofless, windowless stone ruins.

The first Battle of the Windmill occurred because of the unrest in both the United States and the five Canadian provinces in the 1830's. There was a rebellion in both Upper and Lower Canada in 1837, the uprising under William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada at Toronto and the rebellion in Lower Canada under Louis-Joseph Papineau.

After the unsuccessful uprisings, Mackenzie, Papineau and other Canadian leaders stirred up strong sympathy among the American population when they had fled across the border. This was instrumental in the formation of secret, underground Patriot Hunter's Lodges both in the United States and Canada. By the middle of 1838 they probably numbered 150,000 members, all of whom were dedicated to the forcible overthrow of Canada's so-called "Oppressors". After the senseless acts at Prescott in November 1838 and a few weeks later at Windsor, both American and Canadian popular support of the Movement dwindled until the Hunter organization disappeared in 1842.

The first Battle of the Windmill is credited with planting concern about the possible survival of a divided Canada in the mind of John A. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, and probably resulted in the unification of the Canadian provinces under Confederation in 1867. The second Battle of the Windmill, as you will see, cannot claim such distinction.

Around 2 a.m. on the morning of November 12th, 1838, a schooner with 177 Patriot Hunters aboard mostly Americans with a handful of Canadians, attempted to land at Prescott and capture Fort Wellington, but the unexpected resistance of the people of Prescott forced the schooner to cast off and attempt to return to Ogdensburg on the American side of the St. Lawrence River. The schooner drifted down river and grounded on a shoal immediately opposite the windmill and Von Schoultz, the leader, decided to land his group and make use of the $3\frac{1}{2}$ foot thick stone walls of the eighty foot high mill as a fortress and a sharp-shooter's tower. Von Schoultz reasoned that the British Army and the Canadians, if they resisted, would recognize the impregnability of the fortress and a stalemate would result. He was quite wrong.

Apparently, the Canadians did not want to be liberated and the British Army did not want an American attack on Canada. By 9 a.m. of November 12th, three British steam boats came down from Prescott and a small British steamer "Experiment", containing armament of one eighteen pound cannon and one three pound carriage gun, had arrived from Brockville, patrolling the river and effectively blocking planned reinforcements from Ogdensburg. 1,500 Canadian militia and regulars had also arrived. The militia was made up of volunteers from Prescott, Brockville, Glengary and surrounding areas and men of the Eighty-Third Regiment and of the Royal Marines arrived by steamer from Kingston. The first skirmish commenced on Tuesday morning November 13th. By the end of the day two officers were dead, thirteen men were killed and many wounded. The Hunters lost thirteen men and there were twenty-eight wounded. The "Experiment", while patrolling up the river, had been fired on by several of the steamers near the American shore and, when the steamer "United States" attempted to ram the British boat at full speed a shot from the "Experiment" decapitated the helmsman of the "United States". He was actually the first known casualty in the Battle of the Windmill.

The armament of the British steamers was ineffective against the stone windmill, the cannon balls bouncing harmlessly off, so larger armament was requested.

After several more skirmishes on November 14th and November 15th, by November 16th the largest guns in British North America had been brought from Toronto and began cannonading the stone buildings and the mill. After nearly seventy hours without sleep and very little to eat the Hunters made an unconditional surrender at the end of the day.

About 140 able-bodied survivors were loaded on board ship at Prescott to arrive at Kingston on the night of November 17th.

The Military Court Martial was held at Fort Henry on November 28th and started with the three leaders, Von Schoultz and his two Lieutenants. Early that morning

the brother-in-law of one of the Lieutenants had tried to interest two prominent Kingston lawyers in defending the prisoners before he was able to persuade a young lawyer by the name of John A. Macdonald to undertake the defence. There was little Macdonald could do since Von Schoultz pleaded guilty with the words "It would be useless to deny that I am guilty. I was induced to take command under false impressions and although now I see through the whole and discover the delusion I was under, I must plead guilty to being the leader". Von Schoultz and fifty-nine others were condemned to be hanged but after Von Schoultz and twelve others were hanged the remaining survivors were transported to Tasmania. Many of the others had been previously released. Von Schoultz directed Macdonald, in his will, to grant 400 pounds to the wives and orphans of the militia members killed in the battle and Macdonald was to receive \$100.00 but he refused to accept the money.

Von Schoultz and his band of Patriot Hunters came to "free the Canadian people from the thralldom of Britain" but succeeded in swinging a wavering Canadian population from the course of Americanism and an open break with Britain. So ended the first Battle of the Windmill.

The second Battle of the Windmill took place on the nineteenth of November 1868 during the course of a survey made by James West. The following is a complete account of the second Battle of the Windmill as recorded in West's field book.

"Thursday, 19th. Rather milder today. Working at survey for Mr. Wells. Measured off the 4 Village lots in what was called Newport. These were the two Nos. 9 and the 7, Nos. 8. The latter were what Hughs used to own, but I found he erected the WindMill to the west of No. 8 that is on No. 7, it being about or rather just 13 ft. 5 in. to the west of the line. The foundation where I caused a mark to be made, nearly under a cannon ball mark in the wall; being that distance from the line between the said old Village lots 7 and 8. After I made the survey I went up to Mifs Gainfort's. When I returned Mr. Wells told me he expected he would have some trouble with Kane, when he went to put up the fence. So I put on my coat and went with him and Horace. When we went there Kane had drawn a Small Wageon, a Sleigh & a wheel barrow just where I had marked the line for the south side of the road, and where Mr. Wells, had laid the bottom rails for his fence. Kane was standing in the wheel barrow, which was just next to where the last bottom rail was laid and was partly over the line that I had picketed between Mr. Well's land and the King's Highway, as it is called in the descriptions of Village lots in Newport. Then went on the Second Battle of the WindMill which I had witnessed. John Wells went to the Wageon and taking a hold of the shafts, which with the whole body of the wageon were lying across his line, he attempted to move the wageon out entirely on the highway. Kane immediately rushed at him and clutched him, by the hands and pushed against him to prevent him (Wells) from shoving the wageon on the road. In the struggle, Wells was getting the better in pushing the wageon on the road, when Kane caught Wells by the neck and pushed him partly over. Wells recovered himself and shoved harder, when Kane drew his fist and struck Wells over the eye. Wells then struck at Kane and staggered him. Kane then struck at Wells furiously, then the son, went towards the father to assist him, when Kane's wife rushed at the boy and kept him off. Wells had Kane down at this time, when a man standing by attempted to assist Kane. I forbid him to attempt to touch Wells, which he did not. Wells was at this time holding Kane down. Kane's wife would rush at Wells but the son would then seize her to pull her off the Father when he would turn on the son and pound at him. At length Wells let Kane up, and he then picked up a club and rushed at Wells. I then went near to him and told him not to attempt to strike with the club. He flourished it at the son, the father and at me, but did not strike. The son dared him to strike with the club, but he did not. Kane then turned and abused me very soundly and said, I did not want fair play as the father and the son he said was at him together but that was not so, for the wife was to Kane's assistance before the son interfered and I considered Kane and the wife were a full match for Wells and the son."

As can be seen, the Second Battle of the Windmill was not as decisive as the First and one can't help wondering if Wells' fence was ever finished. However, this is often the manner in which our surveys end. We establish the lines, accompanied by some diversions and difficulties at times, and so often are not called back to witness the full results of our surveys. We are left to speculate.

Bibliography

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