

P B Porter

PETER B. PORTER, CITIZEN AND STATESMAN

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
Ottawa University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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June 1950

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The descendants of Peter B. and Augustus Porter were very helpful to the writer by making available various family records and papers still in their possession. To Mr. Augustus Granger Porter of Niagara Falls, New York, the author is indeed very much obligated for the time he so graciously relinquished in the many interviews which took place.

Mr. Preston B. Porter of Darien, Connecticut, great-grandson of Peter Buell Porter and Mr. J. Cabell Breckinridge of Lexington, Kentucky, were of much aid by their prompt, courteous replies to the many letters of the writer.

To Dr. Charles A. Brady, Chairman of the Department of English at Canisius College, the author is greatly indebted for his constructive criticisms in the editing of this dissertation.

For his invaluable suggestions and other aids which made this work possible, the author extends his heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Robert Warwick Bingham, Director of the Buffalo Historical Society, Historian of Erie County, New York, Historian of the City of Buffalo, Consulting Director of Old Fort Niagara and author of several books on the Niagara Frontier.

Sincere expressions of gratitude are extended to the members of the staff of the Buffalo Historical Society who so cheerfully obtained, from the various parts of the Society, all the material requested by the writer.

The writer is indeed obligated to the Rev. Joseph M. O'Donnell, C.M., S.T.D., who spent many hours preparing the photostats for this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of a nation or a locality within a nation is not always the result of the sword; more often it is the effect of the fortitude, intelligence and business acumen of one of its citizens or of a group of citizens. The growth of the Niagara Frontier in Western New York was primarily due to the efforts of Peter Buell Porter, soldier, citizen and statesman. Though his public and private life is historically important and interesting, historians have submerged that part of his biography in his heroic exploits on the battlefield. Consequently, the people of the frontier and the United States at large know him only as the audacious general of the War of 1812 who captured Fort Erie in Canada from the English.

The history of a nation, however, is not only an account of its military feats but a record of its economic, social and political progress as well. Without success in the latter three phases there can be no military success.

The primary purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to acquaint the people of the United States, especially those on the Niagara Frontier, with the deeds of Peter B. Porter as a citizen and statesman which resulted in the beginning of industrial activity on the frontier.

Since nothing of a non-military nature has been written about him, the secondary purpose of this work is to bring to the name of Peter B. Porter the civic prominence it justly deserves.

The region in which he lived, worked and died is located in Western New York. It extends north and south from Buffalo Creek, about four miles from the source of the Niagara River, to the mouth of that river at Lake Ontario and east and west from the Niagara River to the present eastern boundaries of Niagara and Erie counties.

As a private citizen of his district, he was esteemed for his benevolence, respected for his leadership and applauded for his confidence in the future of his community. This faith, in addition to Porter's business ingenuity and political power, led him to foster commercial enterprises of many descriptions. Among these was the establishment of a portage around Niagara Falls, the development of water power as an aid to manufacture, the building of the Black Rock Harbor, the promotion of a railroad and the creation of a large milling industry. Porter's numerous business ventures were vital factors in the early development of Western New York, one of the leading industrial regions in the nation today.

During his colorful career as a public servant, he served as Clerk of Ontario County, Member of the New York State Assembly, United States Congressman, Erie Canal

Commissioner, Secretary of State of New York, American Boundary Commissioner, and Secretary of War. In the fulfillment of the various offices of public trust which he held for over thirty years, Porter acquitted himself with honor.

It is the sincere hope of the author that the information contained in the following pages will be of aid to the future students of the Niagara Frontier and that the sterling character of Peter B. Porter will be a source of inspiration to the youth of the region.

In the first chapter the reader will become acquainted with the ancestry of Peter B. Porter and the events of his life from birth to the time he moved to Black Rock on the Niagara Frontier.

Chapter II deals with the formation and activities of Porter, Barton and Company, one of Porter's greatest business ventures. The impact of this firm upon the frontier and on the western part of the United States will also be discussed.

The part played by Porter in the building of the Erie Canal is related in the third chapter. Here will be found too the story of the quarrel between the residents of Buffalo and Black Rock over the terminus of the waterway. The result of the quarrel and the effect of the canal on the frontier will be described in some detail.

The long political career of Peter B. Porter will unfold to the reader in Chapter IV. Porter's role in precipitating the War of 1812, his activities in the various political positions he held and his ambitions for Henry Clay will be recounted at length.

Chapter V is a narration of Porter's labors as Boundary Commissioner under the sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent which provided for a survey of the Canadian-American boundary from the point where the forty-fifth parallel of North Latitude meets the St. Lawrence River, to the St. Mary's River. Included in this chapter will be found the rules of survey, the personnel of the Commission and the ultimate results of the survey.

In Chapter VI, the reader will find the story of the progress of the survey from the St. Mary's River to the most northwest point of Lake of the Woods as stipulated in the seventh article of the Treaty of Ghent. The points of disagreement between the Commissioners which resulted in repudiation of the survey will be discussed in detail.

In the seventh chapter we will show how the business acumen and farsightedness of Porter resulted in the establishment of industries which eventually caused the frontier to become the great industrial area it is today.

The last chapter will relate the story of Porter's activities as a private citizen. It will include his home,

family and social activities. His removal to Niagara Falls and his subsequent death and burial will also be narrated.

With the exception of the Will of Peter Porter and the Appraisal of his estate which were found in the records of the Surrogate's Court in the Niagara County Hall at Lockport, New York, and the case of the United States versus Peter Porter which was obtained from the records of the United States District Clerk in the Federal Courthouse Building in Buffalo, New York, all the material for this research was obtained at the Buffalo Historical Society.

At the Buffalo Historical Society the author had access to the General Peter B. Porter Collection which consists of the following separate collections: Peter A. Porter Collection; General Peter B. Porter Papers; Black Rock Harbor Papers; Boundary Commission Papers; and the Henry Clay-Peter B. Porter Correspondence.

In addition, the following collections were used in this study: Augustus S. Porter Collection; Joseph Ellicott Letterbooks; Holland Land Company Papers; William A. Bird Papers, and other documents in the possession of the Society.

CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF PETER B. PORTER

The anchoring of the Mayflower off the shores of New England was but the beginning of an exodus of the so called Puritans from the old world. With a group of these in the year 1630, John Porter, sixteenth in line from William de la Grande, a Norman Knight of Kenilworth, England, arrived in the new world. His ancestor de la Grande was named "Grand Porteur" to Henry I and it was from this designation that the name Porter was derived.¹ John Porter with others journeyed to Windsor, Connecticut, where he established his home. To him was born a son named Samuel who later moved to Hartford, Connecticut, and became a merchant.

Nathaniel, son of Samuel, joined the army in the expedition against Canada in 1708-9, losing his life for his country at Fort Anne, near the present town of Lake George, New York. He was survived by a son, Nathaniel Buell Porter, a merchant and farmer in Lebanon, Connecticut, who died in 1739. Surviving Nathaniel B. Porter were his wife and four children: Mehitabel, Nathaniel, Joshua and Eunice. When

¹ Compilation of papers of the Porter genealogy by Peter A. Porter, 1916. Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, New York.

Mrs. Porter remarried five years later, Joshua, then fourteen years old, went to live with his great uncle Peter Buell, Esquire, of Coventry, Connecticut, with whom he remained for the next five years.

In the meantime, Joshua's older brother, Nathaniel, had been attending college and, when he graduated, Joshua was present at the commencement at Yale University in New Haven. Of this event Joshua wrote, "I then determined to lay out ye small patrimony left to me by my father in getting an education".² After studying with his brother for a year, he was admitted to Yale University from which he graduated in 1755. Immediately thereafter, he began the study of medicine at Coventry and in the latter part of 1757 began to practice at Salisbury in Litchfield County, Connecticut.

His practice became extensive and he continued as a physician for more than forty years, accumulating much wealth and property. In Salisbury alone his holdings were registered as two hundred and forty acres and it was to the farming of this property that he devoted the latter part of his life. During his period of medical practice he pioneered in the practice of inoculation against smallpox. As at that time any extreme advancement in medical science

² Frank H. Severance, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, Vol. VII. B.H.S. P. 232.

was frowned upon, in 1761 he was prosecuted for his supposed charlatanism. Eventually he proved the real value of the idea and by 1785 was allowed to continue his experiments for a month.³ These were undoubtedly of marked success as the practice was continued.

For many years Joshua was active in public affairs. Beginning in 1765 he served for more than fifty years as a member of the state legislature. Concurrently he was appointed Judge of Common Pleas and Probate Judge. During the Revolutionary period, Joshua was very useful to the patriot cause. Being a member of the legislature, he was frequently named to committees charged with the prosecution of the war and with providing for the manufacture of gunpowder and other military necessities. At the same time he was superintendent of the iron works at Salisbury, Connecticut, where large numbers of cannon were cast under his supervision. Much of the iron used for this work was taken from the iron pit on his own farm.

Despite his many commitments Joshua frequently served as medical officer on the field of battle. At Saratoga, there being a scarcity of line officers, Dr. Porter voluntarily led a regiment through the engagement and at its close attended the wounded. In all his duties he acquitted

³ Severance, op. cit., p. 232.

himself creditably. Throughout the entire period of the struggle for national existence he was one of the most active men, not only of New England, but of the country.

Col. Joshua Porter, M.D., married Abigail Buell, descendant of that indomitable spirit - Roger Williams. Of this union six children were born: Joshua, May 1, 1760; Abigail, October 20, 1762; Eunice, September 10, 1765; Augustus, January 18, 1769; Peter B., August 14, 1773; and Sally, September 10, 1778.⁴ Peter Buell Porter, the third son and fifth child of this family was born at Salisbury, Connecticut. Like his brothers and sisters before him, Peter was taken to the Salisbury Congregational Church and baptized.⁵

When he reached the age of seven he attended the common school of the town, completing his studies there when he was about fifteen years old. His attendance at school was for a short time sporadic because the boys were working on farms to replace the men who were nobly fighting for freedom in the American Revolution. Later Peter attended Yale University. After his graduation in 1791 he gained his professional

⁴ Severance, op. cit., p. 277.

⁵ Salisbury Congregational Church Records for 1741-1890. P. 48 of a copy of P. 133 of the original records which are now in the library of the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut.

education by apprenticing himself to Judge Reeves, a very famous lawyer of Litchfield, Connecticut.

Shortly before his graduation, Peter's father, Joshua Porter, together with several men from New England, purchased Township number twelve of the first range and township number ten of the fourth range in Western New York. The purchasers, anxious to have these tracts surveyed and made ready for sale, engaged Augustus Porter who had studied mathematics and had some practical knowledge of the art of surveying to locate and survey the land. Subsequently, Augustus, after accomplishing his object, remained in the town of Canandaigua in the Genesee Valley where he continued as a surveyor.

Peter B. Porter first came to Western New York in 1793 to visit his brother Augustus who was ill with fever. Accompanied by his brother Joshua, he entered the forest at the German Flats (west of Albany, New York) on the Mohawk River, which was then the extreme verge of civilization, and slowly made his way to the Genesee River. The only evidences of civilization which he saw consisted of some half dozen log huts at Utica, New York, a small settlement at Geneva and one at Canandaigua. Besides these, there were a few crude cabins scattered along the road at a

distance of five to fifteen miles apart.⁶

When Peter arrived in the Genesee Valley he was so impressed with the fertile and beautiful land in this section that he resolved to become a resident of Canandaigua. He did not select a location at this time, however, as he and his brothers returned to Salisbury, Connecticut, where Augustus spent the winter recuperating from his illness. In 1795 when Augustus returned to Canandaigua, Peter joined him and became a resident of Western New York where he was destined to have a long and illustrious career in the society of the new community and in the affairs of the state and the nation.

At Canandaigua, the young pioneer lawyer, now a member of the bar, became associated with Nathaniel Howell, a practicing attorney. Soon after Peter participated in the first trial by jury in Western New York as defense counsel in an indictment for stealing a cowbell.

One of the most interesting cases in which Porter was counsel was that of an Indian named Stiff-Arm George. This Indian of the Seneca tribe, while intoxicated, wandered into New Amsterdam (now Buffalo) in 1802, hurled abusive epithets at some of the inhabitants, drew his knife,

⁶ Peter B. Porter Papers, #78, B.H.S. Manuscript of speech to be delivered before the Euglossian Society of Geneva College in 1831. Porter never delivered the speech because of the illness and death of his wife on July 27, 1831.

attacked several men, wounded two and stabbed a third, named John Hewit to death. The Indian was captured, bound, taken to Fort Niagara and handed over to the soldiers the same night. On the following day, when the Senecas heard of the trouble, they hurried to New Amsterdam and warned the people that if Stiff-Arm George were executed, they would massacre everyone in the village.⁷

Arriving on the scene, Benjamin Barton, Jr., sheriff of the county, suggested to the Senecas that he would remove Stiff-Arm George to the Canandaigua jail. The Indians fiercely protested saying George was drunk and therefore not responsible for his actions. After much debate, Barton and some Seneca chiefs went to Fort Niagara and consulted with Major Moses Porter, (no relation to Peter) commander of the Fort. After the chiefs promised to produce the culprit on the day of the trial, George was freed. The following February the trial was held at Canandaigua. Peter B. Porter and the famous Indian orator Red Jacket, appeared in defense of the Indian. Both defense counsels cited the many unpunished murders of Indians by whites but it was of no avail. George was convicted and sentenced to be executed on the fifth of April 1803. Fearing the wrath of the

⁷ Holland Land Company Papers 1800-1805. Letter, Joseph Ellicott to John Taylor, Aug.7, 1802. B.H.S.

Senecas on the whites, George Clinton, Governor of New York State, pardoned George with the stipulation that the Indian leave the state and never return.⁸

In those days the profession of law was more than at the present time a natural means of entrance into public life. While still a very young man, Porter became active in politics and was appointed clerk of Ontario County in 1797. Porter's new position kept him quite busy. It was his duty to swear in witnesses, impanel grand juries, read papers and enter verdicts. He kept the court records, noted in the records of each case the name of the defendant, whether he pleaded guilty or innocent, and the rules for judgement. The following is a list of fees charged as of May 1, 1803 by Peter B. Porter as clerk of Ontario County:⁹

Subpoena and seal.....	\$.25
Calling pannel and swearing jury.....	.06
Reading one paper in evidence19
Reserving and entering verdict.....	.12 $\frac{1}{2}$
Swearing one witness.....	.06
Entering a rule for judgement.....	.12 $\frac{1}{2}$
Entering common rules in one cause.....	.25
Filing and entering one execution of court.....	.12 $\frac{1}{2}$

⁸ Pardon of Stiff-Arm George by Governor George Clinton, Mar. 12, 1803. B.H.S.

⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, Peter Porter to James Stevens, July 28, 1803. B.H.S.

Most of the cases were for trespass and other petty offenses. In cases of felonies Porter collected fees from the prisoners when they were acquitted. If they were unable to pay or were convicted he considered his services as public duties and made no charge.

Elected to the Assembly of New York State in 1801, Peter made his brother Augustus deputy clerk of Ontario County to carry on the duties of the clerkship while he himself was attending the Legislature in Albany. At the close of the legislative session of 1802, Peter did not seek reelection in order that his brother might be elected to the position. Augustus was successful and served as a member of the Assembly in 1803.

Following his term in the Assembly, Augustus moved to Niagara Falls (then called Manchester). There he obtained land bordering the river just above the Falls and erected a grist mill with two runs of stone motivated by water power. This enabled the people of the vicinity to grind their grist at the Falls instead of at Canandaigua. In 1807 Peter became associated with Augustus in the milling business. At Niagara Falls the Porters also erected a rope works or "rope walk" which supplied rope for all lake navigation. A short time later they built a tannery and a saw mill which not only added to the diversification of industry at the Falls but also aided in procuring supplies

for the various needs of the community.

The creation of Porter, Barton and Company in 1805 was one of the greatest business ventures undertaken by the Porters. This was a forwarding company for transshipping goods and supplies from the Atlantic seaboard around Niagara Falls, to the west.

With the arrival of Augustus Porter in Niagara Falls and with the business enterprises of the Porters emerging in the wilderness, the development of Niagara Falls began to take place. It became industrially active. Tradesmen began to move into the area--carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, millers, and others equally necessary to a new community.

Although Peter was deeply engaged in various business ventures at Niagara Falls, he continued as a resident of Canandaigua where he was highly respected. In 1808 he was elected a member of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress. One of his first acts in Congress was a resolution to remove the customs house from Fort Niagara to Lewiston which was the northern terminus of Porter, Barton and Company, and from Buffalo to Black Rock, the southern terminus of the firm.¹⁰

¹⁰ Edward T. Williams, Niagara Queen of Wonders. Boston: Chapple Publishing Company, Ltd., 1916. p. 45.

Although Peter Porter was attempting to facilitate the activity of his company, it was true that all navigation at the source of the river on the United States side docked and started at Black Rock. Yet all entry and clearance papers had to be obtained at the Port of Entry at Buffalo Creek two miles away. The same situation existed at Lewiston. The Port of Entry was at Fort Niagara and the goods were unloaded at Lewiston, five miles away.

Erastus Granger, Collector of Customs at Buffalo Creek, was highly incensed over the bold action of the Congressman. Accordingly, he wrote to Albert Gallatin, Treasurer of the United States, protesting the proposed removal of the customs house to Black Rock. In his letter he spoke of that place as a town which would never amount to anything and whose total population consisted of "one white family and two black families".¹¹ By an Act of Congress, the decision of moving the Ports of Entry was left up to President Madison. He decided (March 2, 1811) that the Port of Entry at Fort Niagara should be moved to Lewiston. The President was dubious about Buffalo however, because both Peter B. Porter and Erastus Granger were staunch

¹¹ Frank H. Severance, Buffalo Historical Society Publications, Vol. XXVI. Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society. 1922. p. 200.

Republicans. Finally he ruled that from April first to December first the Port of Entry was to be at Black Rock and from December second to March thirty-first, at Buffalo Creek.¹² It was a greater victory for Porter than for Granger because Black Rock became the Port of Entry during the busy months of the navigation season.

The growth of Porter, Barton and Company made it necessary for Peter to move from Canandaigua to Black Rock. He was loathe to leave Canandaigua, his home for almost fifteen years, where he was well known, admired for his capabilities and honored as a brother by the Indians. Then too, Porter, considered the nucleus of the society of that village, had had many gay times there. To corroborate this, one need merely note that on September 19, 1807, he paid \$690.21 to George Buehler for a shipment of alcoholic spirits.¹³ Of course whiskey had many uses in those days but it would scarcely seem credible that the affable Mr. Porter and his friends did not use it for internal purposes as well.

In the spring of 1810 the people of Ontario County, to show their appreciation and esteem for Porter, reelected him to Congress. When Porter settled in Black Rock he gave

¹² Edward T. Williams, op. cit., p. 47-48.

¹³ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #102.048, September 19, 1807. B.H.S.

up his law practice and, except for his political duties, devoted his entire time to his commercial fortunes as a member of the firm of Porter, Barton and Company. Porter at this time was thirty seven years old, unmarried, handsome, stocky and dignified; in fact his entire demeanor marked him as being a gentleman of the old school.

To acquaint the reader with the town which Porter made famous throughout the United States, a brief history of Black Rock is necessary.

Black Rock derived its name from a large black rock which projected into the Niagara River at a point about fifteen hundred feet north of the present site of the Peace Bridge to Canada. It was of an irregular triangular shape, about one hundred feet in breadth at the north end and extended about three hundred feet to the south. The rock which rose four or five feet above the surface of the water formed an eddy into which boats could be landed without difficulty. From this point a ferry, used mostly by many immigrants, crossed to Canada.

It was the intention of the State of New York to survey the land in the immediate vicinity of the rock to lay out a town site. It was to comprise an area of one square mile. Each lot offered for sale could not exceed five acres. The Indian title to this particular area was extinguished by the State on August 20, 1802, and Black Rock was formally

laid out in 1804. The next year Porter, Barton and Company purchased large areas of land in Black Rock and the surrounding area.

There were about five families in Black Rock when Peter Porter arrived. With great determination he set about to make Black Rock an important center of trade. Situated off shore just north of the black rock, was a reef of rocks now known as Bird Island. Between this reef and the shore was a wide, secure expanse of water which formed a natural harbor. Porter began to improve this harbor site by installing greater facilities for shipping. Despite the fact that Porter, Barton and Company had a warehouse on the black rock, Peter built new warehouses and new docks nearby on Bird Island. To be near the scene of action, he built his home on the river front at the present foot of Breckenridge Street in Buffalo.

At Black Rock Porter, Barton and Company began to build ships to transport goods westward on the lakes. Some of these ships were sold to the United States during the War of 1812 and the federal government, made aware of the shipbuilding facilities in this village, maintained a shipyard at Black Rock during the war for the building of naval vessels to fight on the lakes. Thus, in a few years the struggling town of Black Rock had assumed a place of prominence due to the guidance of its master--Peter Porter.

Obviously then, the Porter family of America has been closely associated with the founding and growth of the United States. In the colonial era men of the first four generations of the family were well known merchants who became leaders in their particular areas. During the Revolutionary period Joshua Porter of the fifth generation distinguished himself as a soldier, physician and business man who contributed substantially to the cause of the American Independence.

It was Peter and Augustus Porter, sons of Joshua, who made the name of Porter illustrious in the annals of the Niagara Frontier. Augustus established himself early in the area by gaining high repute as a surveyor and much prestige as a man of property. When Peter arrived later, his knowledge of law, coupled with Augustus' fame, quickly enabled him to gain a prominent position in the new district. When the brothers moved to the extreme western end of the state, they lost no time in building industry by taking advantage of the natural facilities of the frontier. Augustus at Manchester and Peter at Black Rock both laid the foundations of villages of much importance.

At Black Rock Peter began to shape the future of the new village by leaving no stone unturned which would aid the growth of the town. His integrity, courage and fortitude made Black Rock known throughout the country,

brought fame and fortune to himself and brought industry and commerce to Black Rock. Fortunate indeed was the United States that John Porter came to America. More fortunate, however, was the Niagara Frontier that Augustus and Peter settled in the region.

CHAPTER II

PORTER, BARTON AND COMPANY

The portage route was the old trail used by the Indians to transport their canoes and goods from about the present site of the Carborundum Company at Niagara Falls, New York, to the lower Niagara River just below the heights of Lewiston. In this manner the falls and treacherous currents of the lower river were avoided. The route was seven miles in length. When the French occupied this region, they used the same route. Under Chabert Joncaire the Indian trail was widened for greater utility and ease in the transportation of men and materials to and from the upper lakes.

In 1759, after capturing Fort Niagara and driving the French from this area, the British hastened to occupy the small fort situated at the southern end of the portage. When they arrived at the spot they found nothing but smoldering ashes for the French had destroyed the structure to prevent its capture. Captain Schlosser, a German serving in the British army, was ordered to build a new fort at the upper end of the portage. The new fortification was named for its builder.

A year later, General Gage, the British commander,

gave a contract to John Stedman for improving and widening the old trail between Lewiston and Fort Schlosser. By 1763 Stedman had made the road wide enough for wagon traffic. The Indians formerly hired by the French and English to transport goods over the portage, were now replaced by ox-drawn carts. A few months later, the unemployed Indians, angry over their dismissal, ambushed a wagon train which Stedman was leading from Fort Schlosser to Fort Niagara. After throwing the wagons and supplies into the gorge, the savages began to massacre the people who comprised the group. John Stedman and one or two others escaped. This incident became known as the Devil's Hole Massacre.

The following year, Sir William Johnson, British Indian agent, called the Seneca Indians to account for this catastrophe. By treaty the Indians ceded to the English Crown a tract of land four miles in width on each side of the Niagara River extending from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. The land was to be used for transportation purposes only. In view of the fact that the grants to the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the Duke of York both included land in Western New York, a dispute arose between the state of Massachusetts and the State of New York regarding this property. A conference between these two states was called at Hartford in 1787 to settle the title of the land in question. At this meeting it was decided that the land

would be governed by New York State but that Massachusetts would withhold the right of sale of the pre-emption title of the Indians. At the same time it was agreed that the four mile strip would be cut to one mile and ceded to New York State. On the American side of the frontier this tract of land became known as the Mile Strip.

In 1802 the State of New York extinguished the Indian title to the Mile Strip and appointed Joseph Annin to survey it and cut into farm lots all that part of the strip which was north of Black Rock.¹ When the survey was completed, the land was offered for sale at public auction at the office of the state land commissioners at Albany.

The lots were numbered from one, which was near the mouth of the river, to number one hundred seven at Black Rock. Of these, lots number one to eighty-two inclusive are in Niagara County today.

There were certain lands in the Mile Strip, however, which were not for sale. These exemptions included some six hundred acres at the mouth of the river where Fort Niagara stands, a square mile of land at the foot of the portage at Lewiston, and the Stedman Farm, an irregularly

¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers. Box #2 Miscellaneous Folder. Buffalo Historical Society. This collection is the general source of information for this chapter.

shaped piece of property of about six hundred acres on the upper river at Fort Schlosser. The latter plot comprised the upper terminus of the portage. Simultaneously the state announced that it would lease the landing place at the ferry at Black Rock, the wharf at Lewiston which included transportation facilities, and the portage termini.

Peter B. Porter and his brother Augustus, convinced that a great industrial future awaited the frontier, were anxious to obtain the lease which would give them complete control of the portage route. Not having sufficient funds, they associated themselves with Benjamin Barton, Jr., who had been sheriff of Ontario County and Joseph Annin, Barton's uncle. These men formed the firm of Porter, Barton and Company, attended the sale at Albany in February 1805, and purchased the lease from the state.² In addition to this they purchased four lots adjacent to and above the falls.

Procurement of the lease meant that Porter, Barton and Company was to provide efficient transportation service; submit to state supervision of portage rates; erect warehouses, docks and workshops at each terminal; and transfer all improvements to the state upon completion of the thirteen

² Frank H. Severance, Buffalo Historical Society Publication, Vol. VII. Buffalo, 1904. B.H.S. p. 245.

year lease.³ This gave the company a virtual monopoly of the first transportation business to and from the west. As is usual in any instance of commercial monopoly the company was much maligned and sometimes abused. Nevertheless, it proved to be efficient, prompt and honorable in all its dealings.

When the firm began operations in 1807, Benjamin Barton moved to Lewiston to give his immediate attention to the management of the business at that point; Augustus Porter became manager of the terminus at Fort Schlosser; Peter B. Porter assumed control of the southern terminus at Black Rock; and Joseph Annin remained the silent partner. Near Black Rock the company bought eight hundred acres of land extending from Scajaquada Creek south to the present Lafayette Avenue. South of this purchase was a one hundred acre tract owned by the state, known as the Ferry lot. Still farther south was the town of Black Rock.⁴

Porter, Barton and Company was an important link in the circuitous route by which materials were forwarded from the Atlantic seaboard to the west. Shipments were taken up the Hudson River from New York to Albany by a firm connected with Porter, Barton and Company. At Albany they

³ Severance, op. cit., p. 245

⁴ Peter Emslie, Civil Engineer. A Deed Atlas of the County of Erie, N.Y., 1859. Plate #7. B.H.S.

were taken by wagon to Schenectady to the Jonathan Walton Company which forwarded the goods by boat to Oswego Falls, around the falls by portage, and then by boat to Oswego on Lake Ontario. There the Matthew McNair Company placed the goods on its boats for shipment to Lewiston; a trip which required two days. At Lewiston, Porter, Barton and Company unloaded the vessels and placed the materials in ox-drawn wagons for the trip around the cataract.⁵

The portage road led up the steep mountain ridge and then followed the river to the site of the present railroad bridges where it left the river until it arrived at Schlosser, well above the falls. The company improved the road and as business increased employed all teamsters who were available. Some of these men used horses that drew only half the load the ox teams did. Private teamsters were paid from two shillings to two shillings and six pence for each barrel of salt they hauled.

At Schlosser the freight was put into large Durham boats. This type of water craft was about eighty feet long by eight feet wide. It weighed about twenty-five tons but its draft was very shallow. Three men stood on each side of the boat and poled it up stream. To get the

⁵ Buffalo Historical Society Publication, Vol. I.
Buffalo: Bigelow Brothers, 1879. B.H.S. p. 94.

boats over the swift rapids at Black Rock an ingenious method called the "horn breeze" was used.⁶ This consisted of six to twelve yoke of oxen which towed the vessel by means of a hawser attached to the mast. The company owned four or five of these open boats which made the trip from Schlosser to Black Rock in a few hours. Going downstream the current propelled the ships and oars were used to guide them.

At Black Rock the shipments were either placed in the large warehouses on Bird Island or on lake vessels for transfer to the west. Of the few American owned vessels then running on Lake Erie, more than half were owned by Porter, Barton and Company. These were, before the war, the sloops Erie and Niagara and the schooners Tracy, Amelia, Ranger, Mary and Contractor.⁷ On Lake Ontario, sailing between Oswego and Lewiston, was the ninety ton schooner Ontario. Owned and built by the company at a cost of five thousand dollars, it was navigated by a captain and seven men. During the War of 1812 the Ontario was sold to the United States. The Niagare, a schooner fitted out by the company, was also used on the same route.

⁶ Buffalo Historical Society Publications, Vol. II. Bigelow Brothers, 1880. B.H.S. p. 22.

⁷ Albert H. Porter, Historical Sketch of Niagara, 1678-1876. B.H.S. p. 32-33.

Some of the freight at Black Rock went up the lake to Erie, Pennsylvania where it was placed on wagons and hauled to Waterford. Durhams boats took the materials from that village down French Creek and the Allegheny River to the western part of the state. (See Fig. 1) Return cargoes were made up of provisions such as flour, pork, furs and high proof spirits. Many of the settlers in western Pennsylvania were expert distillers who converted their grain into alcohol as the cheapest way of getting it to market. Although there was a road from Black Rock to Albany, the water route with its many transfers of cargo was preferred for shipments going east. The distance overland to the state capital was shorter but the road was corduroyed with logs and goods shipped over it were usually much the worse for wear and tear.

By contract with the United States Government, Porter, Barton and Company was to keep the army posts and commercial depots in the northwest as far as Mackinaw, Chicago and Fort Wayne supplied with provisions and military necessities. Farm machinery, manufactured goods and salt were also transported westward. This last item, salt, which came from the Onondaga region near Syracuse, was the most important product shipped. As Black Rock became the great salt exchange, ship captains from Pittsburgh and seamen from vessels which sailed westward congregated at Black Rock

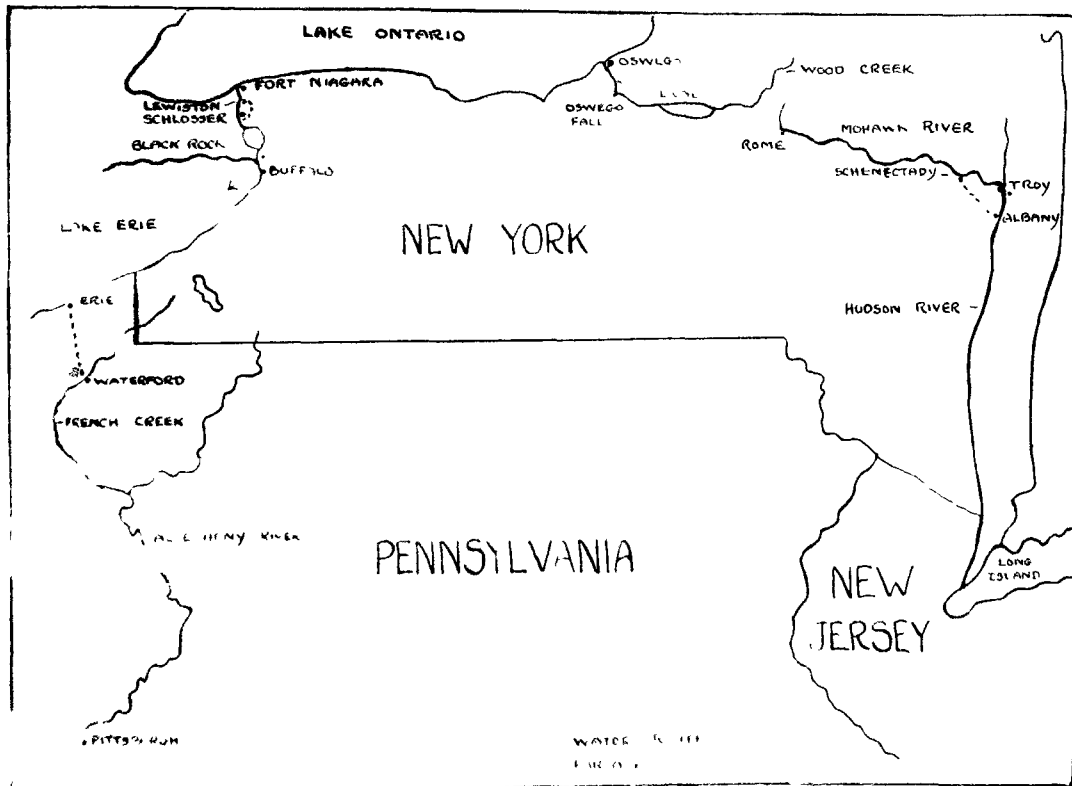


FIG 1. MAP OF THE ROUTE OF THE NIAGARA RIVER AND THE DELAWARE RIVER

to exchange views and news. Porter, Barton and Company charged seven shillings to ship a barrel of salt from Lewiston to Black Rock. In the year 1816 alone, sixteen hundred barrels of salt passed between these two points. The cost for shipping freight between Lewiston and Black Rock was six shillings per hundred weight and up.

Shipments going eastward consisted mostly of the goods of the great American fur companies and the important Indian traders. Among the regular clients of the company was John Jacob Astor who shipped his furs to New York and abroad. This gentleman often visited Peter and Augustus Porter on his way to or from the east coast. He would never use the bed offered him by his host but would wrap himself in a fur rug and sleep on the floor.⁸ The Porters, who considered Astor a close friend, gave his goods much attention. After 1810 the owners of the company quickly became wealthy for until that year most of the profits of the enterprise reverted to the building of ships, warehouses, roads and other necessities.

Everyday Peter was at the wharves or warehouses at Black Rock, diligently attending to the duties of his executive position. Whenever possible, the members of the

⁸ Interview with Augustus Granger Porter at his home at 127 Buffalo Avenue, Niagara Falls, N.Y., Oct. 18, 1948. He is the great grandson of Peter Porter's brother Augustus.

firm met to discuss the affairs of the company. These meetings were held at one of the three termini and, unless ill, each member was sure to be present.⁹

With the outbreak of hostilities on the frontier, the position of Porter, Barton and Company became precarious. Its manager at Black Rock, Peter B. Porter, resigned from Congress in order to fight in defense of the frontier. The Black Rock terminus was left without the intelligent leadership of the man upon whom it had leaned so heavily. In spite of the troubled times, Augustus Porter, in behalf of the firm contracted with the United States Army to supply the frontier posts from June 1, 1812 to May 31, 1813. After this contract was fulfilled, the quickened pace of the war's progress made it apparent that the firm could not continue doing business. When the British burned the Niagara Frontier in December 1813 in retaliation for the burning of Newark, Ontario, by the Americans, all commercial activity in the area came to a halt. The towns of Youngstown, Lewiston, Manchester, Black Rock and Buffalo were in ruins; the scene was horrible.

Peter Porter, who was in Albany at the time, heard of the devastation on the frontier from Nathaniel Sill of

⁹ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.28. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, September 29, 1815. B.H.S.

Lima, New York. He was informed by Mr. Sill that the American soldiers fled after about twenty minutes of combat and that the people themselves would have fought the British if they had had arms and ammunition.¹⁰

Porter, Barton and Company's losses were severe. All of the company's facilities at each of the portage termini were destroyed. The members of the company also suffered great losses. Peter Porter at Black Rock lost a stone house, a stone barn, utility sheds and his share in a brewery building and a frame house. All of these buildings were occupied by the militia. At Manchester, in addition to the loss of all the factories and mills owned by Augustus and Peter, the former's palatial home, which housed the office of the company, was burned. Benjamin Barton at Lewiston lost his home, office and barn.

The New York State Legislature immediately appropriated fifty thousand dollars for relief, forty thousand dollars to be used on the frontier, five thousand for the Tuscarora Indians and five thousand for the Canadians who had taken refuge in New York State.¹¹ Among the subscribers of New York City, where three thousand dollars was raised,

¹⁰ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2. Miscellaneous Folder, Nathaniel Sill to Peter Porter, Jan. 3, 1814.

¹¹ Louis L. Babcock, Buffalo Historical Society Publications, Vol. XXIX. B.H.S. 1927. P. 266.

was Robert Fulton of steamboat fame who contributed one hundred dollars.¹² In Albany one thousand dollars was subscribed. The noblest gesture, however, came from Canandaigua where the people formed a group known as the Canandaigua Committee of Safety and Relief on January 8, 1814.¹³ This organization not only raised the funds for Niagara sufferers but also sent one of their number, Thomas Beals, to Batavia and points west of Canandaigua to ascertain the names of the victims of war. He spent eight days touring the frontier. From February second to August 31, 1814, the committee disbursed the funds it had collected.¹⁴

The name Porter did not appear in the Minute Book of the Canandaigua Committee of Safety and Relief as having received aid. Peter said he was not in need but that the money should be given to those who were in dire circumstances. His brother Augustus was of the same opinion. Nevertheless, an act of Congress on April 9, 1816, made it possible for the residents on the frontier to apply to the National Government for losses incurred during the war

12 Original New York City Subscription List, Relief Committee of War of 1812. Envelope #489. B.H.S.

13 Minutes of the Canandaigua Committee of Safety and Relief. B.H.S.

14 Ibid.

Under the new law President James Madison appointed Richard Bland Lee as Commissioner to carry out the provisions of the law. Mr. Lee appointed deputies to act in his behalf on the frontier.

Six months later Porter appeared before the deputies to apply for his personal losses and for those of Porter, Barton and Company.¹⁵ It was not until ten years later that he received notification from the Treasury Department at Washington advising him that he had been awarded four thousand dollars for his personal war losses.¹⁶ This small sum was his payment in full from a nation which owed him so much.

Before the war the business of the portage had been the main source of support of the residents of the frontier. To aid them and to make up for the war years during which the portage was useless, the State of New York agreed to extend the original portage lease for four years. The state stipulated however, that Porter, Barton and Company had to rebuild warehouses, docks, workshops and other facilities. As Black Rock had the only harbor in the vicinity, and since not a ship was built or sailed from

¹⁵ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.011. Oct. 15, 1816. B.H.S.

¹⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #140. Peter Hagner to Peter Porter, April 7, 1826. B.H.S.

any other American port within a hundred miles, the portage company decided to accept the state's offer. Another great incentive, which caused the firm to resume its old trade in salt and other commodities, was that portaging was a very lucrative business.

The lease of Porter, Barton and Company expired in February 1822. However, the company was in business as late as October 21, 1829; therefore it is quite reasonable to believe that the state either renewed the old lease or granted the company a new one.¹⁷ With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 the trade of Porter, Barton and Company dwindled rapidly and eventually ceased.

Although Porter, Barton and Company had a monopoly on the portage route, the lakes were open to all. Other forwarding companies arose. Among them was Townsend, Bronson and Company, 1810. There were three men in this firm: Jacob Townsend, Alvin Bronson and Sheldon Thompson. The combined capital of this firm was fourteen thousand dollars of which Townsend furnished seven thousand dollars, Bronson four thousand dollars and Thompson three thousand dollars.

The purpose of the company was to transact business in New York State and elsewhere of a mercantile nature in

¹⁷ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #200.033. List of debts due to Porter, Barton and Company at time of settlement, October 21, 1829. B.H.S.

the various branches of selling goods, ship building and coastwise trade on Lakes Erie and Ontario. Under the supervision of Mr. Townsend, two ships were built. One was the one hundred ton ship the Charles and Anne built at Oswego; the other was the schooner Catherine constructed at Cayuga Creek above Niagara Falls.

The firm had a store at Lewiston managed by Mr. Townsend and Mr. Thompson and one at Oswego guided by Mr. Bronson. The routes of Townsend, Bronson and Company and Porter, Barton and Company were the same; but for a stipulated charge the latter carried the freight of the former over the portage. In 1816, Porter, Barton and Company and Townsend, Bronson and Company established a branch firm at Black Rock under the name of Sill, Thompson and Company.¹⁸ This company built two ships, the Michigan and the Red Jacket. At the launching of the latter the old Seneca Chief himself was present. Townsend, Bronson and Company was dissolved in 1821. Sill, Thompson and Company closed its doors in 1824.

The old portage trail around Niagara Falls used by the Indians, French and English was destined to become an indispensable link in the shipment of freight from east to

¹⁸ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #200.052. Sill, Thompson and Company. Articles of Association, March 22, 1816. B.H.S.

west. By leasing this route from the state, Porter, Barton and Company became the first regular, connected line on the American side of the Niagara River to do business from the eastern seacoast to the upper lakes. The company exerted an important influence on the westward movement in the United States, for, as the steady flow of supplies reached the northwest army posts, the western frontier was made safer and emigration to the region increased. Not only was the growth of the west affected but also that of the Niagara Frontier. As the trade of Porter, Barton and Company became greater, sizeable towns arose at each of its termini, creating much commercial and industrial activity. Many people from the seaboard, anxious to take advantage of the opportunities on the Niagara Frontier, came to this region to settle. Porter, Barton and Company was of inestimable aid to the progress of the American nation in its march to the Pacific.

CHAPTER III

THE ERIE CANAL

The previous chapter described the circuitous route by which goods reached the Great Lakes from the Atlantic seaboard. This chapter will narrate the role of Peter B. Porter in the elimination of this devious route by the digging of a canal from Albany to Buffalo. It will show also how Porter's activities caused two harbors to be built at the western end of the state and the industrial foundations of the area to be laid. As a general source of information for this chapter, the Black Rock Harbor Papers of the General Peter B. Porter Collection in the Buffal Historical Society were used.

For many years the people of New York State had felt that its inland system of waterways should be improved in order to connect the Atlantic Ocean with the Great Lakes, increase the importance of the state and stimulate greatly its commercial activity. One great link of this proposed waterway, the Hudson River, had been provided by nature. This outlet to the sea extended far into the interior of the state. Westward from this body of water were many unconnected natural waterways which allowed ingress into the western part of the state as far as the Great Lakes.

The first official action which sought the improvement of inland navigation was a message sent by Governor Moore to the General Assembly on December 16, 1768. Dissension within the Assembly, however, forced the governor to dissolve that body, thereby delaying action on improved navigation until after the Revolutionary War. The next official mention is found in the Assembly Journal of November 3, 1784.¹ This was a petition from Christopher Colles, an Irish engineer, who had lectured in New York City on the subject of canals as early as 1773. His plan of inland navigation on the Mohawk River was endorsed by the New York City Chamber of Commerce. The petition was referred to a committee which approved the idea but did not feel that the undertaking should be financed with public funds. Mr. Colles tried again and again to put his plan into practice, but lacking the support of influential men, he failed.

It was not until seven years later that Governor George Clinton recommended the improvement of inland navigation to the legislature. The following month, at the proposal of General Philip Schuyler, a member of the New York State Senate, a joint committee was appointed to investigate the construction of artificial waterways. As a

¹ Alexander C. Flick, History of New York State, Vol. V. New York: Columbia University Press. 1934. P. 301.

result of this committee's report, the legislature passed an act on March 30, 1792 which incorporated two companies.² One, the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company, was to open a lock navigation from the Hudson River to Lake Ontario. The other, the Northern Inland Lock Navigation Company, was to connect the Hudson River to Lake Champlain by a system of lock navigation. Little was accomplished by the latter company.

General Philip Schuyler, president of both groups, organized a stock company and began work at once. Since money thus obtained by public subscription was insufficient, aid from the state was obtained many times. Although short stretches of canal at portages and around falls or rapids were built, no continuous waterway to Lake Erie was secured. The Western Company built three canals. One canal, about one mile in length, carried boats around Little Falls; it had five locks. The second, at the town of German Flatts, was one and one-quarter miles long and had two locks. The third extended from Rome, New York, on the Mohawk River, to Wood Creek, a distance of about one and three-fourths miles. It had two locks to regulate changing water levels.³

² General Dwight H. Bruce, editor, The Empire State in Three Centuries, Vol. II. New York: The Century History Co. n.d. P. 55.

³ Buffalo Historical Publication, Vol. II. Buffalo: Bigelow Brothers, 1880. P. 21.

The amount spent on the western canal was four hundred eighty thousand dollars. From Schenectady freight could be taken in boats up the Mohawk River and its canals to Rome, by canal to Wood Creek, down this stream to Oneida Lake, and through Oneida Creek into the Oswego River to Lake Ontario. However, to get freight to Lake Erie, the Niagara Portage had to be used.

Not everyone was satisfied with access to Lake Erie by way of Lake Ontario. Some people were convinced that the canal requirement would not be properly met until there was a direct water route from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. Proponents of this idea pointed out that such a route would be not only shorter, but would provide also an efficient military highway to the west. They felt that if all the trade of the Great Lakes had to go to Lake Ontario to reach Oswego and the inland waters of New York State, some of the commerce might be diverted to the sea by way of the St. Lawrence instead of the Hudson.⁴

When it became evident that the waterway was not adequate, Joshua Forman, member of the Assembly, made a resolution to the effect that a route from the Hudson River to Lake Erie be surveyed for a proposed canal. James

⁴ Henry W. Hill, Municipality of Buffalo, New York, Vol. I. New York: Lewis Historical Publication Company, Inc., 1923. P. 175.

Geddes who was appointed to make surveys checked three routes: one from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie around Niagara Falls; one from the interior to Lake Ontario; and another through the western part of the state to Lake Erie.

New York State hoped that the Federal Government would lend its aid to the project but when Joshua Forman spoke to President Jefferson about the canal, the executive said it was little short of madness to think of it.⁵ On February 8, 1810, Congressman Peter B. Porter of Black Rock proposed a resolution in the House of Representatives which asked for an appropriation of public lands in aid of the construction of roads and canals. As a result of this action, Porter was made chairman of a Congressional committee of twenty men to consider the expediency of opening canals in the nation. The report of this committee recommended two New York State canals: one from the Hudson River to Lake Ontario, and one around the Falls of Niagara.

Since it would aid the firm of Porter, Barton and Company, Peter Porter favored the route from the Hudson to Lake Ontario with a thirty mile canal connecting Lake Oneida to Lake Ontario. To circumvent the falls, he envisioned a canal from Lewiston to Schlosser. (See Figure 2.) This "Schlosser Canal" would have had to be cut through nineteen feet of solid rock or thirty-five feet of loam and rocks.

⁵ Alexander C. Flick, op. cit., p. 307.

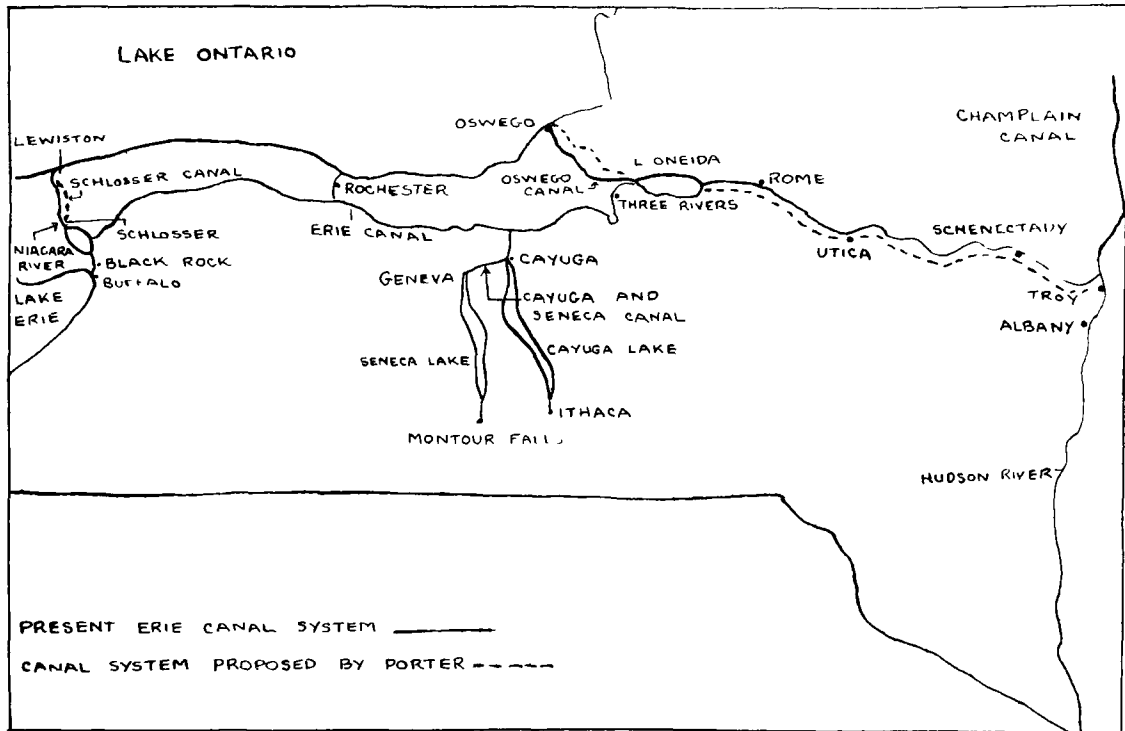


FIG 2 PORTER'S PROPOSAL FOR NEW YORK STATE CANAL SYSTEM (1810) COMPARED WITH THE CANAL BUILT IN 1825

The cost of such a canal sixteen feet wide and four and one-half feet deep would have been \$1,632,000; a width of thirty-three feet would have raised the price to \$3,624,000. Opposition to Porter's plan was voiced by Joseph Ellicott, land agent for the Holland Land Company, who stated that his own investigation two years previous showed that a canal thirty-three feet wide by four and one-half feet deep, from the Niagara River to the Onondaga River would cost only \$701,760. This route would accomplish the same purpose as the Schlosser Canal to Lake Ontario and would save the state \$3,000,000.⁶ In spite of this startling revelation, Porter continued his efforts to influence Governor Daniel D. Tompkins of New York State in favor of the Ontario route.

While the relative values of the two routes were under discussion, Jonas Platt of the New York State Senate introduced a resolution, March 3, 1810, providing for a commission to explore canal routes from the Hudson River to Lake Ontario and from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The resolution, passed unanimously by the legislature, named as Canal Commissioners Gouverneur Morris (chairman), Stephen Van Rensselaer, DeWitt Clinton, Simeon DeWitt, William North, Thomas Eddy and Peter B. Porter.

⁶ Holland Land Company Papers, Vol. 8, #122. Ellicott to Geddes, July 30, 1808. B.H.S.

The Canal Commissioners left Schenectady on July 4, 1810. These men, with the exception of Morris and Van Renssalaer who traveled on horseback, went up the Mohawk River in boats. As they proceeded they made notations regarding the river and surrounding terrain. At Utica they met James Geddes who accompanied the Commissioners in order to show them the route he had surveyed the previous year. At Rome, New York, the dividing point of the routes to Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, the Commissioners made final arrangements for the exploration. After the group arranged to meet at Geneva, Stephen Van Renssalaer and Gouverneur Morris continued overland while the rest of the party resumed the journey by boat. The latter group, after visiting Oswego and Three River Point, went up the Seneca River to Lakes Cayuga and Seneca. They arrived at Geneva on July 24th after a twelve day journey.

At this season of the year, the trip was a hazardous one since malaria was prevalent everywhere in the swamps. One or two in the party suffered much harm from the deadly fever. Peter Porter who was one of these endured the recurrent ill effects of fever the rest of his life.⁷ At Geneva the boats were sold and the group proceeded in

⁷ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.28. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, Sept. 29, 1815. B.H.S.

carriages to Mud Creek and the Canandaigua Outlet. On July 27th the men reached the Genesee River where the city of Rochester now stands. From this point they traveled westward along the Ridge Road to Lewiston where they arrived at the end of the month. On the second day of August they were joined by Morris and Van Renssalaer. The next day, at a meeting held at Chippewa, Ontario, Mr. Geddes received instructions regarding new surveys from the Commissioners who then adjourned to meet in New York City. At Black Rock, after accepting the hospitality of Porter, the group dispersed, leaving Mr. Geddes to commence his surveys.

The Commission's report of March 1811, recommended a direct route from Lake Erie to the Hudson River for the proposed \$5,000,000 canal. The Commission voiced the opinion that private individuals or companies be barred from owning the canal in order that cheap transportation might be assured. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Clinton introduced a bill providing for the internal navigation of the state. When the bill became law, the same Commissioners, with the addition of Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton, were appointed.

The Commission's second report on March 14, 1812, stated that the National Government having refused to aid the enterprise, the state would have to pay for the cost of the canal. Three months later the New York State

Legislature gave the Commission permission to raise the money with which to buy all the facilities of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company and to secure voluntary cessions or grants of lands. Because the war with England intervened, the next report of the Commission was not made until March 8, 1814. This report revealed that the Holland Land Company had offered to cede to the state 100,632 acres of land which was in Cattaraugus County in aid of the canal. Because it was poor land, highly taxed and unlikely to be settled, the Holland Land Company was anxious to get rid of this tract.⁸ In 1819 the state accepted this offer. The last report of the Commission, made on March 8, 1816, urged the state to begin the work of construction at once.

By a law passed April 17, 1816, a new Commission was created which eliminated General Porter and two others from the group. The feelings of the general were not hurt for he had been appointed United States Commissioner to determine the Canadian-American boundary under the sixth, seventh and eighth articles of the Treaty of Ghent. He remained a strong advocate of the canal, however, and was partly responsible for pushing it through the legislature. Finally, on April 15, 1817 the New York State Legislature passed an act authorizing construction of the Erie Canal

⁸ Joseph Ellicott's Letter Book 1814-1821. Joseph Ellicott to Paul Busti, December 13, 1819. B.H.S.

from the Hudson River to Lake Erie and the Champlain Canal to connect the Hudson River to Lake Champlain. Actual construction began at Rome, New York on July 4, 1817. The canal was to be twenty-eight feet wide at the bottom, forty feet wide at the surface, and four feet in depth.⁹

Although there did not seem to be enough commerce to justify a canal from the Hudson to Lake Erie, the people felt it was necessary to the future growth of the state. Like almost everything else, the canal question found its way into politics. In Western New York, where the desire for a canal was widespread, any political candidate who opposed the canal was certain to be defeated at the polls.

Almost immediately the question arose as to the western terminus of the canal. Was it to be at Buffalo or at Black Rock? At the latter place there was a small harbor built by Peter Porter and at Bird Island, Porter, Barton and Company had great warehouses. The water here being of sufficient depth to float the largest vessel then on the lakes, all the commerce of the western lakes was carried on from this island and from Fort Erie in Canada. All freight going east or west was stored at one of the two places.

Buffalo, two miles south of Black Rock, had no harbor.

⁹ State of New York Department of Public Works Official Map showing state canals and waterways, 1946.

Across the mouth of Buffalo Creek, which seemed the most logical place for a harbor, there was a formidable sand bar which made it impossible for boats to pass into the upper part of the creek during the navigation season. This stunted the growth of the village for ships went on to Black Rock instead. The few ships which docked at Buffalo belonged to the companies located there. Since Black Rock had the only harbor in the vicinity it seemed likely that the terminus would be at that place.

An intense rivalry arose between Buffalo and Black Rock. The people of Buffalo charged that Peter Porter wanted the terminus of the canal to be at Black Rock to enhance his own interests; that he was willing to sacrifice his party in the advancement of his own interests; and that he wanted his property to rise in value regardless of the good of the people.¹⁰ In reply to these accusations, Porter and his friends said that it was sheer folly to have the canal end at Buffalo because that town had nothing to offer the expected trade boom of Western New York.

Everything the people of Black Rock said was true. Buffalo's only salvation lay in constructing a harbor at Buffalo Creek. An appeal to the state in April 1818 caused the legislature to authorize a survey of Buffalo Creek at

¹⁰ Holland Land Company Papers. Charles E. Evans to Heman I. Redfield, March 2, 1825. B.H.S.

the expense of Niagara County. William Peacock who made the survey called for a pier nine hundred and ninety feet long at an estimated cost of \$12,787 for stone, or \$10,000 if built of wood. This the people of Buffalo felt was within their means. At a public meeting held early in 1819, nine leading citizens agreed to act as applicants for a loan from the state, and incorporated themselves as the Buffalo Harbor Company.¹¹ In April of the same year, the legislature agreed to lend these men twelve thousand dollars, provided they could give bonds and mortgages to double the amount borrowed, with unencumbered real estate as security. The loan was payable at the end of ten years and interest was to begin after five years.

The state stipulated that if the Canal Commissioners approved the harbor when completed, the state would have the privilege of taking it and cancelling the debt; if not, the company would have to pay the bonds and reimburse itself by charging tolls. These hard terms caused all but Charles Townsend and Oliver Forward to withdraw from the Buffalo Harbor Company. These two men appealed to Samuel Wilkeson, a prominent Buffalo business man, for aid. Wilkeson agreed to help and each man put up a bond of \$8,000. Early in 1820, the state, after receiving the

¹¹ Merton M. Wilner, History of the Niagara Frontier, Vol. I. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1931. P. 301.

report of the Buffalo Harbor survey by David Thomas, principal engineer on the Erie Canal west of the Genesee, gave the three men \$12,000 with which to build a harbor.

Since the only obstacle in Buffalo Creek was the sand bar, it was decided to erect a pier to remedy the situation. The residents of Black Rock ridiculed the Buffalo Harbor Company, saying that the first storm would destroy the pier; that the harbor would be too dangerous to enter in bad weather; that it was too small; and that the money was insufficient. To save money, Wilkeson was made superintendent of construction of the harbor. The man had never seen a harbor but he knew how to handle men.

Under Wilkeson's direction three cribs were laid down the first day and filled with stones gathered from the American and Canadian shores. On the second night a heavy swell which forced sand under them, threw two of the structures out of line. A little brush left by accident on the windward side of the third crib caught the sand and preserved the crib from harm. Mr. Wilkeson grasped the idea at once and after that all the cribs were placed in thick beds of brush. By the fall of 1820, a pier nine hundred feet long extended into the lake. Since the pier withstood the winter's ice, work was resumed in May 1821. A north pier was then constructed but the money began to give out. An appeal made by the harbor builders brought

forth one thousand dollars from the villagers which gave the latter a pro-rata interest in the project. Because the water at the north pier was about twelve feet deep, it was difficult to drive piles into the bottom. Nevertheless, about two hundred feet of crib pier was laid down opposite the south pier. When the Buffalo Harbor was completed in 1821, the citizens of Buffalo looked forward to having the canal end at Buffalo.

Meanwhile plans for a canal terminus at Black Rock were very ambitious. One plan was to dam the Niagara River at Tonawanda and run a longitudinal dam from Bird Island to Grand Island raising the level of the enclosed basin to that of Lake Erie. Another plan called for making Grand Island the site of a proposed new city, which should be called Erie. The most practical idea was to build a dam between Squaw Island and the American shore with a pier extending into Lake Erie.

However, David Thomas, who was directed by the Canal Commission to survey the Black Rock Harbor, recommended that the canal terminate at Buffalo. Porter and his friends protested and in one of his pamphlets written in 1822, Porter excoriated Thomas saying the engineer was prejudiced. Thomas' reply tore down one by one the nine points of advantage which Porter had advanced in favor of terminating the canal at Black Rock. He deplored the

intemperate language of the pamphlet and explained his surveys of both harbors. Thomas believed the Buffalo location would be best since it would be away from Canadian aggression and would have ample room for ships. He concluded his reply by stating that Porter was the ringleader of the Black Rock Harbor group.¹²

Because of Black Rock's objections to Thomas' findings the Canal Commission directed James Geddes, another experienced canal engineer, to make a further study of the Black Rock Harbor. Declaring that a harbor at Buffalo was not practical, Geddes suggested that the canal end at Black Rock at the lower end of Squaw Island. He approved, with some modifications, the dam and mole to raise the harbor to lake level. According to Geddes' calculations, the harbor at Black Rock had an area of one hundred thirty-six acres; that at Buffalo, thirty acres.

In order to prove further that the canal should terminate at his village, Peter Porter hired Nathan S. Roberts, who was then attached to the Canal Commission, to make surveys of the Buffalo and Black Rock Harbors. His decision was a foregone conclusion since he was being paid by Porter. Roberts agreed with Porter on all matters, even

¹² Black Rock Harbor Papers--David Thomas' Report relative to Harbors at Black Rock and Buffalo. B.H.S.

to aiding the general in having Myron Holley and DeWitt Clinton, Canal Commissioners, dismissed because they opposed Porter's plans.¹³

A great clamor arose in Black Rock in February 1822 when a board of four engineers checked both harbor sites and reported in favor of terminating the canal at Buffalo. Desiring to be fair, the New York State Legislature, by a law passed on April 17, 1822, offered to negotiate a contract with responsible citizens of Black Rock who would be willing to build a harbor between Bird Island and Squaw Island according to the plan of James Geddes. The state was willing to pay twelve thousand dollars beyond the estimated cost of constructing a boat canal along the shore of said harbor, but stipulated that the harbor be completed by June 1, 1823.

The day after the law was passed Peter Porter who happened to be in Albany, wrote a letter to DeWitt Clinton, President of the Board of Canal Commissioners, which he delivered personally to Clinton's home. The letter stated that in behalf of himself and his associates, Augustus Porter, Benjamin Barton and Sheldon Thompson, he was ready to draw up a contract with the state to build the Black Rock Harbor.¹⁴ On May 22, 1822, having obtained the contract,

¹³ Frank Severance, Holland Land Company. Buffalo Historical Publication, Vol. XIV. P. 172.

¹⁴ Black Rock Harbor Papers. Porter to Clinton. April 18, 1822. B.H.S.

these men formed the Black Rock Harbor Company.¹⁵

This sequence of events intensified greatly the rivalry between Black Rock and Buffalo. Porter, in order to influence the legislature favorably, began to write many pamphlets extolling Black Rock as the most logical place to end the canal. One of these entitled, Documents relating to the western terminus of the Erie Canal; with explanations and remarks, was published under the direction of the Black Rock Harbor Company. To aid him in his fight against Buffalo, Porter established the Black Rock Beacon in 1822. Although this newspaper always championed him, its scurrilous remarks about Buffalo could not always be attributed to General Porter.¹⁶

The strongest opposition to Porter was given by the Buffalo Journal, a Buffalo newspaper. This publication attacked Black Rock unmercifully by making charges against Porter and his associates. The latter group answered these allegations in a long public statement in which they accused the Buffalo Journal of seeking to force the Canal Commissioners to abandon a village (Black Rock) which was still largely owned by the state. The Black Rock residents

¹⁵ Black Rock Harbor Papers, Articles of Association and Minutes of the Black Rock Harbor Company. B.H.S.

¹⁶ Black Rock Beacon, Thursday, April 17, 1823. P. 2, Col. 5. B.H.S.

declared confidently that their harbor would dwarf that at Buffalo.

The Buffalo Journal retaliated not only by impugning the character of Porter but also by intimating that he had plundered the defenseless inhabitants of the Canadian Frontier of a large amount of private property during the War of 1812. He was also accused of being against a canal in Western New York because it would ruin his portage business. These accusations were vigorously denied in the Black Rock Beacon by Porter who brought a libel suit against the Buffalo Journal on May 1, 1823.¹⁷ Another newspaper, the Buffalo Patriot, joined the Buffalo Journal in its vituperations against Porter.

The Canal Board, hoping to settle the argument between the two villages, decided to hold a hearing in Buffalo to determine the canal terminus. Samuel Wilkeson began to prepare maps of the Buffalo Harbor, the lake, and the river in preparation for the hearing. The leader of the Black Rock faction, Peter B. Porter, began to arrange his affairs so as to be able to attend the hearing for at this time he was serving on the Boundary Commission. In a letter to Anthony Barclay, British Boundary Commissioner at New York

17 Black Rock Beacon, May 1, 1823. P. 3. B.H.S.

City, Porter stated that he could not attend the Boundary Commission meeting on June 3rd because the Canal Commission would be in Buffalo on June 6th. All the members of the Canal Board, the principal engineers and the exponents of Black Rock and Buffalo had been requested to attend the Canal Board hearing. Porter elaborated by saying:

.....This question involves considerations of great moment to the public at large, to the village in which I reside and to me personally. Indeed I do not know of a question that could affect my individual interests so seriously that I am extremely anxious to be present when it is agitated and decided as I have paid great attention to the subject for several years past and believe it to be in my power to impart much information which the Commissioners could hardly obtain from any other quarter..... 18

When the Canal Board met in Buffalo, it heard Samuel Wilkeson speak for Buffalo and Peter B. Porter for Black Rock. An elaborate project for a harbor was presented by the Black Rock Harbor Company. This organization proposed building a wall two miles long connecting Bird and Squaw Islands with a dam at the lower end. After hearing both sides, the Canal Board decided in favor of Buffalo because more water could be drawn from the lake at a higher elevation than from the river at Black Rock.¹⁹ To appease the

¹⁸ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #181. Porter to Barclay, May 12, 1822. B.H.S.

¹⁹ John T. Horton, Edward T. Williams and Henry S. Douglass, History of Northwestern New York, Vol. I. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1947. P. 64.

residents of the latter village, the Canal Board adopted a resolution to the effect that the Black Rock Harbor Company should build a pier ten rods long as an experiment. If by the following June the pier should be found to be in good condition, the state would refund the cost of construction and complete the project. At the same time the extension of the canal along the river bank to Buffalo was ordered to be put under contract.

The men at the Rock now went to work with great enthusiasm with Porter urging them on. He possessed an indomitable spirit and still was inspired by the hope of having a "cutoff" which would give his town the actual terminus of the canal. He began by placing a wooden crib in the river rapids and filling it with stone. By July the wall was well under way. It was, in the narrowest and swiftest part of the river, about fifteen rods from shore where the water was twelve feet deep and the current six to seven miles per hour.²⁰ By the end of July the ten rods of wall were completed. Before the season was over almost twenty rods of wall could be seen jutting out of the river at Black Rock.²¹

20 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #182.
Porter to N. Howell, July 31, 1822. B.H.S.

21 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box # 2,
Miscellaneous Folder. Porter to James Ferguson, July 31,
1822. B.H.S.

The people of Buffalo were very much interested in the work in which Porter was engaged. Delegations from Buffalo went to Black Rock to inspect the wall, the depth of the water, the speed of the current, and the distance from shore. To avoid conflicting statements, the Buffalo delegations, whenever they inspected Porter's work, desired his presence or that of his representative in order that all findings be verified.²²

Because Porter was engaged in building the experimental pier, the Black Rock Harbor Company realized it could not complete the harbor at Black Rock by the June 1, 1823 deadline. Therefore Porter applied to the Canal Commission for an extension of time. This action infuriated Samuel Wilkeson who addressed a memorial to the State Assembly decrying the Act of April 17, 1822. He claimed that the Black Rock Harbor Company had not carried out its contract and therefore should not be granted an extension. He also stated that the lower end of the proposed dam rested on land owned by Porter. In an angry mood, Wilkeson accused the New York Legislature of being influenced by Porter and his friends. "Why," asked Wilkeson pointedly, should Black Rock become the favorite protegee of legislative liberality to the

²² Black Rock Harbor Papers. Samuel Wilkeson to Peter Porter, January 7, 1823. B.H.S.

destruction of Buffalo, and to the injury of the interests of the state?"²³

Unperturbed by Wilkeson's outburst Porter informed the Canal Commission that he was ready to procure a responsible company which would construct a harbor at Black Rock by December 1, 1824 and keep it in constant repair. In this way the state would be saved the expense of building four and one-half miles of canal from Black Rock to Buffalo and also the trouble and expense of building harbors at both places. Porter made certain stipulations. The first was that the state grant to the company for building warehouses, one-half of the narrow strip of land between Main Street (now Niagara Street) and the river. The second was that the state should allow the company to charge a reasonable port or harbor fee to all vessels using the harbor. Third, that the exclusive right to use the water of the harbor for hydraulic purposes, in such a manner as not to injure navigation, be granted to the company. Fourth, that the state should not, at its own expense, construct a free harbor in the neighborhood of Black Rock, although it was all right for a private company composed of either the citizens of Buffalo or any other persons to construct a free or toll

²³ Black Rock Harbor Papers, #141, Memorial to State Assembly, March 6, 1823. B.H.S.

harbor.²⁴

The Canal Commission gave Porter no reply until June 16, 1823 when it held a meeting at Buffalo. That day, after examining the Black Rock pier and noting that the ice had not harmed it, it adopted a resolution which stated that it was satisfied that the Black Rock Harbor could be built according to the Geddes plan. The Commission was now ready to make a contract with any one who wished to build the harbor. The work had to be completed by December 1, 1824. The contract price for this work was \$83,819 which was the estimated cost of building a boat canal along the shore of the river without using the harbor as part of the channel. This amount was in addition to the \$12,000 already granted.

At the same meeting, the Commission adopted a resolution to the effect that since unexpected difficulties had been encountered on the Buffalo to Black Rock extension of the canal, work on that project would have to be suspended. The people of Buffalo now began to raise money by popular subscription in order to dig the canal themselves. A group from Buffalo hurried to Lockport to interview the Commission again and said they would build the canal for \$30,000, a saving of \$65,000 on the Black Rock plan.

²⁴ Black Rock Harbor Papers. Porter to Seaman, March 22, 1823. B.H.S.

The Commission, turning a deaf ear to the Buffalo delegation, confirmed the Black Rock plan. On July 24, 1823, Peter Porter and Sheldon Thompson entered into a contract with the state. The contract called for a dam from Squaw Island to the mainland; a pier five hundred and thirty rods long, sixteen feet high and eighteen feet wide, connecting Bird and Squaw Islands; an embankment along the eastern shore of Squaw Island, two hundred sixty rods in length, thirty feet wide at the base and six feet wide at the top; a towpath over two miles long on the easterly side of the harbor, and a lock between the harbor and the river.²⁵ The sum of \$83,819 was to be paid as the work progressed. The company agreed to abide by the decisions of the state inspectors while the work was being done, to work according to specifications and to keep the harbor in repair for five years after its completion.

By this time, most of the newspapers of the state made headline news of the affairs on the frontier. The economy of the Buffalo proposal made a strong impression on everyone. Finally, overwhelmed by public opinion, the Canal Commission decided to build the canal extension from Black Rock to Buffalo. Work was begun at Commercial Street on August 9, 1824. Of course there was a celebration. The contractor

²⁵ Memorial of Samuel Wilkeson to the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress, January 1836. Black Rock Harbor Papers. B.H.S.

furnished the beverage and a good time was had by everyone. The same year the state authorized the construction of a canal along the Black Rock Basin as the original Buffalo plan had specified.

On June 2, 1825 when the branch of the Erie Canal from Tonawanda Creek to Black Rock was completed, the lock at the foot of the harbor was opened allowing the water from Lake Erie to rush into the excavation to a depth of three and one-half feet.²⁶ The next day a big celebration took place. A Black Rock committee, accompanied by Canal Commissioner Bouck and about fifty ladies and gentlemen, boarded the steamer Superior in the Niagara River, went downstream ten miles to Tonawanda Creek and entered the lock into the canal. The Superior was greeted at Tonawanda by citizens of Lockport, Pendleton and Tonawanda. After a brief stay the entourage of five boats departed by canal for Black Rock where they were joined by four new barges filled with jubilant Black Rock residents. A battery roared a salute as the flotilla went about a mile up the harbor to land at Nathaniel Sill's wharf. A procession was formed and the celebrants marched to the Steamboat Hotel where dinner was served for one hundred and fifty people. Peter Porter, officiating as chairman of the festivities, gave a toast prophesizing a wealthy future to

26 Black Rock Gazette, June 7, 1825. P. 3. B.H.S.

be brought to Black Rock by the canal.²⁷ Late that evening after a riotous day of hilarity the tired citizens of Black Rock went to bed and probably dreamed of a harbor filled with boats from the four corners of the world.

The day for the formal opening of the Erie Canal was set for October 26, 1825. Lavish preparations had been made by the residents of Buffalo and Western New York. When the day came, many notables were in attendance, among whom was DeWitt Clinton, Governor of New York State. Samuel Wilkeson was given a prominent place in the festivities of the occasion. Black Rock, though invited, did not join in the ceremonies at Buffalo. Instead a group of leading Black Rock citizens, chartered the boat Niagara at a cost of one hundred fifteen dollars and went to Lockport.²⁸ When the canal boat Seneca Chief with Governor Clinton and the celebrants from Buffalo aboard arrived at Lockport, the Niagara fell in behind her and accompanied the group to Albany where Peter Porter, one of its passengers, had business appointments.

At about the time the Erie Canal was formally opened, the Black Rock Harbor Company completed its contract. The

27 Black Rock Gazette, June 7, 1825. B.H.S.

28 Lease of the boat Niagara by its owner Josiah Beardsley to the village of Black Rock, October 25, 1825. Manuscript Collection. B.H.S.

work had extended ten months beyond the time allowed. The company had not received any money although payment was to have been made as the work progressed. Due to alterations demanded by the state engineers, the cost of the project exceeded the \$83,819 allotted for the harbor. In a petition presented to the New York State Assembly on January 30, 1826, the company asked only for the stipulated amount. However, it expressed the desire that the state pay the entire cost.²⁹ On the same day, in a report to the Assembly, the Canal Commission expressed the sentiment that the company should be paid the extra cost incurred.

In the spring of 1826 and again in 1827 the ice in the river damaged the pier in the Black Rock Harbor. This prompted the company, on June 20, 1827, to ask the Canal Commission for the difference in the amount expended by it to build the harbor and the sum paid to it by the state. If it received the money, the damaged pier would be repaired; if not the company asked that the state free them from their obligation.³⁰ The state refused to pay the funds or cancel the contract. The Commission reported to the

²⁹ Black Rock Harbor Papers, Petition of Augustus Porter and others in behalf of the Black Rock Harbor Company, to New York State Assembly, January 30, 1826. B.H.S.

³⁰ Black Rock Harbor Papers, Petition to Canal Commissioners by Black Rock Harbor Company, June 20, 1827. B.H.S.

Assembly in March 1828 that the Black Rock Harbor Company had no intention of expending more in repairs than was necessary to keep the harbor up until the expiration of the guarantee. Since the harbor was an appendage of the Erie Canal, the Commissioners felt it should be under their control.³¹ Just eight days later the Assembly stated that if it was found that the company had really used on the harbor all the money given it by the state, the Canal Commission had the authority to release the company from its contract and take over the control of the harbor.

Before this could be acted on, Peter Porter who had become Secretary of War, managed to secure from Congress, an appropriation of thirty thousand dollars with which to repair the damaged harbor. This grant, plus others, enabled Peter to continue work on the harbor.³² The work proceeded throughout 1829, but as in the case of most harbors, it was never actually completed since there were constant repairs and alterations to be made.

Black Rock, though it now possessed a harbor, could not adequately compete with Buffalo. The harbor at the latter location was spacious and easily accessible to lake

³¹ Black Rock Harbor Papers. Report of the Canal Commissioners to the Assembly. March 1828. B.H.S.

³² Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.37. Peter to Augustus Porter, April 22, 1829. B.H.S.

shipping. The waters of the Niagara River in the vicinity of Bird Island and the Black Rock Harbor were very rapid. This condition made navigation somewhat difficult and dangerous. When the Welland Canal was built in 1829, Black Rock regained some of its trade but it was not a permanent business increase.

The Erie Canal transferred the path of commercial traffic at that time from its western to its eastern boundary. At first it did not bring great business. Little grain came down the lake and for several years the loads were light. A large part of the business of the canal was the carrying of passengers in packet boats; a business which, though quite extensive, did not curtail travel by stagecoach to any great degree. In time Buffalo absorbed an increasing amount of the trade of the countryside. Since there were no railroads all produce went through the Erie Canal. Great fleets transferred their cargoes of grain from the lake to the canal at Buffalo and the area swarmed with thousands of laborers. The Erie Canal made the western lake ports more accessible and accelerated their settlement. When the fertile lands of Michigan, northern Indiana, Illinois and other parts of the west were settled, their products began to find their way to the Erie Canal. Canal boats delivering their cargoes at the seacoast, returned with many immigrants most of whom went farther west, but many of whom remained in and around Buffalo.

Towns like Lockport and Tonawanda quickly grew along the canal route. Though the new water route passed through Niagara County, it did not touch Manchester. This circumstance plus the fact that the portage route was now rendered useless, checked temporarily the industry and growth of the village. Lewiston, where all the freight from Lake Ontario was unloaded for transport over the portage, began to fade as a commercial center as activity dwindled to a standstill.

Of the three portage termini, Black Rock was the only one which benefited by the construction of the canal. Though the village did not obtain the terminus of the canal, it found that the canal and harbor works had created a practical water power which was promptly utilized. The use of hydro-power caused mills to arise, industry to flourish and the appearance of the town to change. Wharves and warehouses lined the river and harbor. As more people moved into the community, new homes were built and new stores opened. The great black rock which gave its name to the vicinity became a victim of progress when it was blown up to make way for the canal.

Black Rock prospered but did not grow as rapidly as Buffalo. The village, though it was made a part of Buffalo in 1853, never lost its identity. Today Black Rock is an

important industrial and residential section of Buffalo ³³
Its harbor, now controlled by the Federal Government, is still in use though the canal, having outlived its importance, has long since been filled in.

The Erie Canal occupied Peter Porter from its inception in 1810, when he aided in mapping its route, to 1825 when the work was completed. His efforts to secure permanency for Black Rock, made everyone in the nation aware of the importance and potentialities of the Niagara Frontier. Because Black Rock had a harbor, Peter Porter felt the canal should terminate there. The people of Buffalo wanted the canal terminus to be located in their village. A great rivalry arose between the two places. In the struggle, the Black Rock faction was ably led by Peter Porter; that of Buffalo by Samuel Wilkeson. A result of this competition was that the canal went through Black Rock but terminated at Buffalo.

Although he was not successful in obtaining his primary objective Porter caused two harbors to be built. Thus the credit for laying the foundations for the great commercial and industrial future of the Niagara Frontier must be given to the strong willed and ambitious Peter B. Porter.

³³ Today in Buffalo, the area along the Niagara River from Ferry to Amherst St. and east to Grant St. is still known as Black Rock. Many business houses in that area use the name of Black Rock on order sheets for merchandise which is received by them at the Black Rock Railroad Station on Tonawanda St., Buffalo.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL LIFE OF PETER B. PORTER

The completion of the Erie Canal opened transportation between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Erie. The facilities offered by this navigation to the western part of New York encouraged people from the eastern seaboard to seek the opportunities offered by that region. As that part of the state became more populated, the settlers clamored for a voice in the political affairs of the state and the nation. To satisfy their demands, the New York State Legislature created the County of Ontario on January 27, 1789. Canandaigua was made the county seat. The vast terrain of the new county occupied all the land of the state west of Seneca Lake, an area of over ten thousand square miles. Ontario County soon played a leading role in the political intrigues of the state because many of its residents had come from New England and were well acquainted with the intricacies of politics.

To this county, shortly after its origin, came Peter B. Porter in 1795. His genial personality and innate ability of leadership won for him many friends. In a short time his popularity with both Indians and whites, and his interest in politics resulted in his appointment as Clerk

of Ontario County. The efficiency with which he performed the functions of this office led to his election as a Member of the New York State Assembly in 1801.¹

At the close of the legislative term he returned to his duties as County Clerk. He served in this capacity until 1805. At that time he was removed from office by the recently elected Governor Morgan Lewis because Porter had supported Aaron Burr for the governorship of New York State. This action caused loud reverberations in Albany for Porter was a powerful figure in state political circles. A split resulted in his party (Burrite Party). Those who favored Porter, joined the politically powerful Clinton family of Albany; those who opposed him joined the influential Livingston family of the state capital. In the election of 1807, the Burr-Clinton faction succeeded in unseating Porter's enemy Morgan Lewis and placing Daniel D. Tompkins in the gubernatorial office.²

1 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, Goodyear Folder - Certification of election of Members of Assembly for Ontario and Steuben Counties, May 20, 1801. Buffalo Historical Society. This collection together with the recently acquired Clay-Porter Correspondence were used as general sources for the writing of this chapter. The author is the first in this area to whom the Clay-Porter Correspondence has been made available.

2 Alexander C. Flick, History of New York State, Vol. V. New York: Columbia University Press, 1934. P. 173.

Porter, however, was destined for greater political offices than that of Clerk of Ontario County. At a meeting in Canandaigua of the Republican Party of Ontario County in 1808, he was nominated unanimously for the office of Representative to Congress. Porter who was not present at the meeting was notified of his nomination on his return to Canandaigua.³

His success in the ensuing election made Porter a member of the eleventh Congress, in which he served from March 4, 1809 to March 4, 1811. Much of his activity in that body centered around the problem of transportation within the United States. In urging better means of transportation, Porter, speaking before the Congress in 1810, said that the people of the frontier suffered in many ways because of the difficulty and expense of transporting their products to Atlantic ports. Since the frontiersmen produced only enough for their own use and the fertility of the soil was such that very little labor was needed to produce all of their wants, they had much time to spend in idleness and dissipation.⁴

Even though Porter knew that better transportation

³ Joseph Ellicott Letterbooks, Vol. VII, No. 147. Porter to Ellicott, April 17, 1808. B.H.S.

⁴ Alexander C. Flick, op. cit., P. 48.

facilities would detract from the success of his forwarding business, his patriotic zeal to see the United States fulfill its "Manifest Destiny" urged him to advocate better routes for transportation purposes. As a business man who did much traveling, his cognizance of the stifling effect which lack of roads had on commerce and manufacture, made him ever ready to initiate that which meant progress and prosperity not only for himself but for the nation as a whole.

Re-elected to Congress in 1810, Porter occupied the important post of chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations of the twelfth Congress. His aides were John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Felix Grundy of Tennessee but actually the committee received its dictation from James Monroe who later became president of the United States.

Late in November 1811; Porter brought forth a set of resolutions authorizing immediate and active preparations for war with Great Britain. The following month he justified the propriety and necessity of his action by stating that further negotiation was useless. It was the greatest political act of his life. In a stirring speech before Congress he said:

.....the people of the United States occupying half a continent, have a right to navigate the seas without being molested by the inhabitants of the

little island of Great Britain.

5

After recounting the wrongs that Great Britain had inflicted on the United States and her refusal to make reparations, he assured all that his committee would recommend open war if reparations continued to be withheld. Nevertheless, he said that common sense and discretion forbade them to plunge headlong into war with a powerful nation, when the military manpower of the United States was at such low ebb.

The group in Congress led by Peter B. Porter, became known as the "War Hawk Party" because it favored war. This faction decided to build the army both in personnel and armament. Porter proposed a bill which would put the nation on a war footing by providing for the enlistment of twenty five thousand men in the regular army, the repairing, equipping and building of naval vessels, and the services of one hundred thousand volunteers.

This bill which called for rearmament aroused a very excited debate in Congress. Those who were opposed to war said that not only were we wholly unprepared for war but that it was unfair to go to war with England while she was fighting for her very existence against Napoleon. They pointed out that it was strictly a war of conquest with the ridiculous idea of taking Canada and that while we were

5 Louis M. Hacker, The Shaping of the American Tradition. New York: Columbia Press, 1947. P. 322.

attacking Canada, England would ravage our coast.

The "War Hawks" countered these arguments by stating that if England's existence depended on our destruction, then we should aid in destroying her. They accused England of inciting the Indians to their merciless warfare on our northwestern frontier. The "War Hawks" produced figures which showed that England's actions had decreased our annual revenue from sixteen to six million dollars. They shouted that being surrounded by England was the same as being invaded by her. The bill passed the House by a vote of forty-four to thirty-four.⁶

The war like tone of the twelfth Congress which he had called one month before the regular date, caused President Madison to worry not a little. He did not want war and hoped it could be avoided, but the Democrats who were powerful in Congress soon made him understand that the government had determined on action. Madison was informed also that, unless he acceded to the declaration of war, neither his nomination nor his re-election to the presidency would be assured. Reluctantly, he agreed to war.

In March 1812, Madison transmitted to Congress a special message accompanied by certain documents which were placed in charge of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

⁶ J.T.Headley, The Second War with England, Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner Co., 1853. P. 48.

These papers of vital importance were part of the communications of John Henry, an Irishman, who had been sent by the Governor of Canada, Sir James Craig, to attempt to form some connection with the leading Federalists of the disaffected New England States for the purpose of disrupting the Union.⁷ This revelation shocked the country.

John Henry was an adventurer of commanding personality and most engaging conversation. At one time he was editor of a paper and afterwards a wine dealer in Philadelphia. In 1798 he was appointed captain in the United States Army and stationed at Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island. Later, he was transferred to Boston, where he became part of the fashionable society of that city. However, he soon tired of military life, bought land in Vermont, and settled down as a farmer. Finding himself not suited to this occupation, he moved to Montreal and studied law for several years. After failing to obtain political office in that city, he undertook the task of seducing the New England States from the Union.

Accordingly, John Henry took up residence in Boston and kept in constant communication with the secretary of Sir James Craig to whom he asserted that Massachusetts, in case of war, would separate from the Union and probably ally herself with England. Henry, having performed his

7 J.T.Headley, op. cit., P. 49.

mission to his satisfaction, sailed for England, sought out the proper officials, acquainted them with his accomplishments and asked payment for a job well done. The Home Government refused to comply with his request and sent him to Sir James Craig.⁸ Mr. Henry became quite provoked, returned to Boston and secured from his friend Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, a letter of introduction to President Madison.

Approaching the President, John Henry acquainted him with the priceless package of documents in his possession. In addition to offering him fifty thousand dollars, Madison promised not to reveal the contents until Henry was safely on the ocean. The President secured the money from the Treasury for the account of the Secret Service fund and gave it to Henry who immediately sailed for France aboard the United States sloop of war, the Wasp.⁹

The publication of the papers placed Sir James Craig in an unenviable position and made President Madison appear somewhat foolish. The most undesirable effect of the whole affair was that it increased the hatred both against the Federalists and the English nation.

⁸ J.T.Headley, op. cit., P. 49.

⁹ National Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. V. New York: James T. White and Company, 1894. P. 82.

The Committee on Foreign Relations, in making their report on the John Henry intrigue said:

In the transaction disclosed by the President's message, the committee beholds with mingled emotions of surprise and indignation, conclusive evidence that the British government, at a period of peace and friendly professions have been deliberately and perfidiously pursuing measures to divide these States and to involve their citizens in all the guilt of treason and the horrors of a civil war. 10

Henry Clay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, together with Peter Porter roused the members of the House with their eloquence. In the Senate too, the "War Hawks" made much headway. Before long they had secured such an impressive following that a vote on a declaration of war could be easily carried.

While the war party was slowly weakening the opposition, Jonathon Russell of Rhode Island, who had been appointed charge d'affaires to the English court, informed the President that there was no chance that England would revoke its Orders in Council. In view of this news, President Madison on April 1, 1812 recommended that a sixty day embargo be laid on all vessels in port or which would arrive in port. When Peter Porter, in accordance with the recommendation, brought in a bill to enact this embargo there was much excitement in the House. Asked by a member of Congress whether the bill before them was a peace measure or one

10 Peter A. Porter Collection, #A-3. February 20, 1812. B.H.S.

preparatory to war, Mr. Grundy of the Foreign Relations Committee said, "it is a war measure, and it is meant that it shall lead directly to it".¹¹ The bill was passed by the House and the Senate.

Because of the accumulation of events, Madison delivered a warlike message to Congress on June 1, 1812. This statement was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations, which, after deliberating for ten days behind closed doors, reported in favor of an immediate declaration of war. A bill declaring war to exist between Great Britain and the United States was quickly pushed through the House by a vote of seventy-nine to forty-nine. In the Senate, since the bill was met not only by the opposition of the Federalists but by the friends of DeWitt Clinton who voted with them, it passed by a majority of only six votes, nineteen to thirteen. The Congress then adjourned after passing an act which granted letters of marque, regulated prizes and prize goods, authorized the issue of Treasury notes to the amount of five million dollars and placed a one hundred per cent additional duty on imports. In accordance with a resolution of Congress, the President appointed a day of public humiliation and prayer in view of the impending

¹¹ J.T.Headley, op. cit., P. 50.

conflict.¹² Thus on June 18, 1812, the United States was once again at war with England.

In the vote on the declaration of war itself, the members of the House and Senate were quite evenly divided and party lines meant nothing to the Congressmen on this vital issue. Public sentiment on the war was divided. The West was definitely in favor of hostilities since it felt that the Indian power in that section would be broken by the events of war. Their theory proved to be correct. The South, because of an ardent expansionist sentiment, favored the conflict. It was believed that war with Great Britain would mean war with Spain and that the Floridas and other Spanish lands to the southwest could be annexed to the United States for the advantage of the South.¹³ The New England states were bitterly opposed to it because they knew their trade would suffer. These states went into mourning when war was declared and put their flags at half mast. Before the end of the war, this section was giving much aid to the Canadians.¹⁴

¹² J.T.Headley, op. cit., P. 57.

¹³ Julius W. Pratt, Expansionists of 1812. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925. P. 11.

¹⁴ Samuel Flagg Bemis, A Diplomatic History of the United States. New York: Henry Holt Co., 1942. P. 160.

Even the Niagara Frontier was deeply divided in sentiment. There, pleasant relations had always existed between the inhabitants of both sides of the river. Consequently the people were opposed to commercial restrictions and to war. This feeling may have been, in part, imported from New England whence came many of the inhabitants of the frontier, but much of it sprang from the interest of trade. It soon became apparent that it was not a war for trade but a war of imperialism. There was no doubt that the desire of the United States was to dominate the whole continent in order to fulfill her "Manifest Destiny".¹⁵

Like most men of political prominence Peter Porter was severely criticized for his actions in Congress. Among his more serious critics was Solomon Van Rensselaer of Albany. This man had always been an enemy of Porter's even before the precipitation of war. Porter's friends urged him to pay no attention to the false statements of Van Rensselaer since he was too far beneath him for Porter to be concerned.¹⁶

When Peter Porter told Congress he would be glad to fight if war were declared, he was not making an idle boast. He resigned from Congress and entered the military

¹⁵ Louis M. Hacker, op. cit., P. 323.

¹⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #236. Spencer to Porter, Feb. 23, 1812. B.H.S.

service as Quarter-master General of New York State with the title of Brigadier-General. In this capacity he served both the militia and the regulars on the frontier. It was a difficult task not only because of the poor transportation facilities in this area but also because our army, should it invade Canada, would have to be supplied by the Quarter-master General. On June 27, 1812 he returned to Black Rock to view the scene of action and to ascertain the necessities of the troops. Porter, who was not satisfied with his position because it offered no battle action, was jubilant when in October of 1812 he was succeeded by a Deputy Quarter-master of the United States Army. Porter was placed under General Alexander Smyth, commander of the American Army on the frontier, and given command of a group composed of volunteers, state militia and Indians.

General Smyth made elaborate preparations for the invasion of Canada. Several times he ordered his soldiers to embark for Canada but each time, upon one pretense or another, they were ordered to disembark. The officers, becoming disgusted, broke their swords and the disgruntled soldiers deserted by the hundreds. Peter Porter, in a published statement in the Buffalo Gazette of December 8, 1812, accused General Smyth of cowardice. Smyth challenged Porter to a duel. On the afternoon of December 15, 1812, Smyth accompanied by his second, Colonel Winder, and Porter

with Lieutenant Angus who served him in like capacity, met at a tavern below Black Rock. From this point they were ferried to a dueling ground on Grand Island.

After the proper formalities, each man fired one shot but both bullets went astray. Colonel Winder stepped in and arranged a truce after which a consultation resulted in various explanations. Porter apologized; Smyth retracted some uncomplimentary statements and both shook hands.¹⁷ Upon his return to Black Rock, Smyth's men who hated him bitterly threatened his life. He was repeatedly fired at in the streets and the belt of his aid-de-camp was shot off by the soldiers who had become unruly and contemptuous of their commander.¹⁸

After the Battle of Lundy's Lane, July 25, 1814, Porter was brevetted a Major-General of Volunteers. Porter, however, requested Governor Daniel Tompkins that he be permitted to retire from the service, but the Governor begged him to retain his command.¹⁹ Porter wished to leave because there was much jealousy between the officers of the volunteers and those of the regular army. Especially

17 Buffalo Gazette, Tuesday, December 15, 1812. P. 1.

18 Ernest Cruikshank, Documentary History of the Campaign upon the Niagara Frontier, Part 5, Printed at the Tribune Office, Welland, 1902. P. 18.

19 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #244. Tompkins to Porter, August 13, 1814. B.H.S.

envious of Porter, the regular army officers always addressed him as "Mister Porter", instead of General Porter. This was particularly true of General Smyth.²⁰ To obviate this, Porter sought to resign from the volunteers in order to obtain a general's commission in the regular army. He did not realize this ambition during the war, but President Madison appointed him a Major-General in the United States Army in 1815.

Although he was still a member of the armed forces, Porter maintained his political prominence in Western New York. Even though the people of this district did not know whether or not he would survive the war, they elected him, on the Democratic ticket, to represent them in Congress. Before the fourteenth Congress met, his old friend Governor Daniel D. Tompkins, asked him to become Secretary of State of New York. Porter deemed this a singular honor. Since it placed him closer to home where his business interests lay, he resigned as Congressman, accepted Tompkins' offer, and was sworn in on February 16, 1815.²¹ At Albany his proximity to the governor enabled Porter to advance the needs of the people on the frontier. His sagacity in the

²⁰ Buffalo Gazette, Tuesday, December 8, 1812. B.H.S.

²¹ Peter A. Porter Collection. People of the State of New York to Peter Porter. Commission of Peter B. Porter as Secretary of the State of New York, February 16, 1815. B.H.S.

intricacies of politics made him recognized at the capital as the dean of Western New York politicians. To those who consulted him he gave sound political advice which showed clearly that though he was a crafty politician he was just, fair, unafraid to assume responsibility and not easily influenced by friends.²²

On February 12, 1816, after he had notably conducted the office of Secretary of State of New York for a year, he resigned to accept an appointment as United States Boundary Commissioner under the Treaty of Ghent.

In 1816 Tompkins was re-elected to the governorship and also elected to the vice-presidency of the United States. The efforts of his party to have him retain both positions caused much wrangling in the political arena of New York State. Since the state constitution stipulated that the lieutenant governor could perform the duties of the chief executive only until the next succeeding election, a law providing for a special gubernatorial election was passed.

Peter Porter was nominated by Tammany and DeWitt Clinton was selected to oppose him. In the April 1817 election Clinton won almost unanimously by receiving 43,310 votes to Porter's 1,479. Nevertheless, Porter's party

²² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, A.C. Goodyear Folder. Porter to Hopkins, March 25, 1815. B.H.S.

succeeded in obtaining control of the Canal Commission with its lucrative contracts and countless jobs.²³

Unabashed by his crushing defeat, Porter remained a very active, influential figure in the political affairs of the state and the nation.²⁴ In 1824 at Albany he worked feverishly to secure the votes of New York State for his friend Henry Clay who was running for president of the United States. Porter planned to take advantage of the political turmoil in the city by drawing many members of the opposition over to Clay. In this effort he was impeded by the state office holders at Albany who were known as the Albany Regency.

Although Porter was altruistic in his efforts in Clay's behalf, he received the following letter from the presidential candidate:

The affair of the Vice-Presidency becomes of much interest as time elapses. My friends are desirous of running someone from your state. Mr. Thompson, yourself and Mr. Young have been thought of. Your unfortunate deafness forms an objection to you, and besides there is another place in which I think you can render more service to the public. Will you turn this matter over in your mind and advise us?..... 25

23 Alexander C. Flick, op. cit., Vol. VI. P. 51.

24 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #93. Delafield to Fraser, March 12, 1821. B.H.S.

25 Clay-Porter Correspondence, Clay to Porter, March 3, 1824. B.H.S.

Clay was not able to offer a position to his friend because in the election of 1824, Clay received the smallest number of votes cast for any of the candidates. Since none of the other candidates received a majority of the votes of the electoral college, the election of the president, as provided in the constitution, was to be made by the House of Representatives. Clay was a member of that body. When the election centered around John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, Clay cast the deciding ballot in favor of Adams instead of Jackson for whom he had been instructed to vote. For this act, Adams made him Secretary of State in his cabinet.

Though the election of 1824 did not result in an office for General Porter, he did not lack opportunities to obtain one for in spite of the fact that he always declined, his friends continually urged him to run for public office. In 1827 he declined to be a candidate for the United States Senate not only because he felt that the office of Senator was not compatible with that of Boundary Commissioner, but also because his duties in the latter capacity would not be terminated before the Senatorial term began.²⁶ However, in the same year, Porter who believed he could aid the people in their fight against the Holland

²⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #218. Porter to Smith, January 28, 1827. B.H.S.

Land Company offered himself as a candidate for the State Assembly and was almost unanimously elected. Thus the statesman who could have obtained a high federal office chose an inferior one so that he might be of use to his neighbors. He did not delve into politics for personal honor and gratification, but to obtain the opportunity to wield the sword of justice in favor of the residents of his beloved Niagara Frontier.

In 1828, the appointment of Secretary of War James Barbour as Minister to England, created a vacancy in the cabinet of President Adams. Henry Clay, backed by the other members of the cabinet, succeeded in convincing Adams to appoint Peter Porter to the position. Mr. Clay immediately informed Porter of the events taking place in Washington. As soon as the Senate confirmed the appointment, Clay sent Porter his commission as Secretary of War.²⁷

Shortly after receiving Clay's letter, Porter was notified of his appointment by President Adams who expressed the hope that he would accept the cabinet post. Without delay, Porter requested his brother Augustus to come to Black Rock to talk over the appointment. He explained to Augustus that whether or not he accepted he had to see Clay on business. Therefore, he decided to write to Adams

²⁷ Clay-Porter Correspondence, Clay to Porter, May 26, 1828. B.H.S.

immediately to inform the Chief Executive that since he had to be in Washington on business he would decide on acceptance when he arrived. It was Porter's plan to leave by swift stage coach and for his wife to follow him shortly in the canal packet boat Niagara.²⁸

Though he was noncommittal in his reply to Adams he had made up his mind to accept, for he resigned as Assemblyman in the New York State Legislature before he went to Washington. At the capital he was cordially welcomed by Adams together with the members of the cabinet who expressed their pleasure that Porter had not declined the position. On June 21, 1828, shortly after his arrival in Washington, he was sworn into the office of Secretary of War. Thus Peter Porter became the twelfth Secretary of War of the United States and the first cabinet member from Western New York.

For the first few weeks, he felt a little awkward in his new position but determined to do his job well, he employed himself sedulously from "day light to bed time" in order to acquire a knowledge of the business of the office. Despite the fact that he was deeply engrossed in the duties of his new position, Porter found time to keep in touch with the affairs on the frontier.²⁹

²⁸ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.09. Porter to Augustus, June 3, 1828, and #100.57, June 4, 1828. B.H.S.

²⁹ Ibid., #600.007, July 6, 1828.

The chief problem which confronted the Secretary of War during his term of office was the Indian situation of the eastern states. He advocated removal beyond the Mississippi River of all Indians who could be persuaded to emigrate and subjection of all others to state law. Before Porter entered the cabinet, the abandonment of many old western army posts had resulted in renewed Indian hostilities on the whites in those vicinities. The new Secretary ordered these posts to be regarrisoned immediately and additional ones built. For the greater security of the settlers he insisted that an active chain of forts be erected along the Mississippi and the Great Lakes.³⁰

Porter condemned the idea of establishing army posts deep in Indian territory far ahead of the regular advances of the settlers. Instead of protecting frontier inhabitants against the incursions of the Indians, these isolated garrisons, in the event of serious Indian war, became the first objects of the fury of the savages. Then too, these garrisons served to encourage adventurers to enter the Indian lands and irritate the natives after which the government, at much expense, sent out military expeditions to vindicate the rights of these traders. Abandonment of

³⁰ Asbury Dickens and John W. Forney, editors, American State Papers-Military Affairs, Vol. IV. Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1860. P. 1.

these more remote garrisons, Porter felt, would free more men for the protection of the northwest frontier. In this way a line of defense would be formed making each garrison dependent on the other. No Indian would dare to venture within this line; neither would any white be allowed to go beyond it unless he was protected by a military escort or unless he had secured a license to trade with the Indians. In the meantime, the Secretary ordered that part of the men of each remote garrison in the Indian country be mounted to facilitate their mobility.³¹

Another condition which plagued the Department of War was the trouble on the northeast frontier between the people of Maine and the people of Canada. Secretary of War Porter recommended that the disagreement, which arose over conflicting claims of property and jurisdiction, be promptly repressed lest the local authorities of the two countries become involved in serious difficulties. By keeping a watchful eye on this district, he successfully abated the heat of the issue for the duration of his term of office.

There was one phase of his work, however, which placed Porter on familiar ground. This was the task of surveying inlets, bays, rivers, harbors, military highways, roadways, sites for the erection of army buildings, and canal routes.

³¹ Asbury Dickens and John W. Forney, op. cit., P. 1.

In 1828 there were no less than ten canal routes in the process of being surveyed. Among these was a survey in the state of Indiana for a route to connect the waters of Lakes Erie and Michigan with that of the Ohio River. Another survey was for a permanent ship canal in North Carolina from Albemarle Sound to the Atlantic Ocean. In addition to these, surveys for canals were in progress in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Florida. In the latter state the army planned to join the Gulf of Mexico with the Atlantic Ocean. The success of the Erie Canal had made the nation "canal minded" and before the feeling disappeared, the eastern part of the United States was well criss-crossed by canals.³²

To facilitate commerce, the War Department improved the navigation of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and removed obstructions to navigation in many other rivers throughout the east. At the same time harbors at Cleveland, Ohio, Buffalo, Sackett's Harbor and Oswego in New York State and others in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Alabama were improved.

To aid the emigration of people to the west, the War Department in 1828-29 extended the Cumberland road from

³² Asbury Dickens and John W. Forney, op. cit., P. 16-17.

the Ohio River to Zanesville, Ohio. As an additional aid, Porter was anxious to construct a highway from Detroit to Chicago. However, at the completion of his term of office, only fifty-one miles of this road had been finished.

Another of Porter's interests was the United States Military Academy at West Point, the supervision of which was one of the duties of the Secretary of War. He was quite perturbed when the House of Representatives made a resolution that West Point graduates should remain in the United States Army for a period longer than the five years demanded. His reply to the resolution was read in the House of Representatives on December 31, 1828. Porter's communication stated that an extension of the term of compulsory service for West Point graduates would not be expedient. The records proved that very few men resigned before the five year period. Those that did resign did so because of illness rather than inclination. If a man did not become an accomplished officer in five years, it was doubtful that a longer term would be of any aid. Furthermore, continued Porter, men kept in the service against their wills became burdens on the public.

He recommended that the number of cadets at the Academy should not be increased beyond the number of vacancies which occurred annually in the army. This would make possible the commissioning of most of the graduates in a short space of time.

In view of these reasons, Porter felt that nothing could be done to improve the system which at the time functioned so well.³³ His reasoning was approved by the House of Representatives and the West Point graduates were not molested.

Having had some experience in administering to the needs of the army during the War of 1812, Porter reorganized the Subsistence Department of the United States Army in order to save money and insure greater efficiency in that department. He sought to relieve the commissary general from the obligation of making contracts for provisions because the failure of many contractors to deliver necessary materials caused much suffering in the army posts. Buying provisions wherever the price was lower or a better grade of food available would not only result in great savings but would eliminate unnecessary inconvenience.

In addition to the routine business of his office, Peter Porter found that difficult situations sometimes arose which caused him much anxiety. One of these was the peculiar controversy concerned with the rank of General Winfield Scott, companion in arms to Porter during the activities on the Niagara Frontier in 1812. President Adams had appointed General Macomb as Major-General of the army upon the death

³³ Asbury Dickens and John W. Forney, op. cit., P. 40.

of Major-General Brown. Scott felt that this was a great injustice since he had been brevetted major-general on July 25, 1814 long before General Macomb had received that distinction. Therefore Scott contended that brevet commission gave actual rank and that he was the senior officer who should have received Adams' appointment.³⁴

After petitioning Congress to make a statement concerning the point at issue, Scott presented his claim to Porter and asked for a furlough of nine months in order to secure Congressional action against the decision of Adams. The President considered this a gross insult. At a meeting of his cabinet he told the members that because of Scott's insubordinate and disrespectful conduct he should be dismissed from the army.

As Secretary of War it was up to Porter to silence Scott. In his communication to General Scott, Porter, with much patience, skill and flattery attempted to point out to him that it was the prerogative of Adams as commander-in-chief of the army to make appointments which he felt were for the best interests of the nation. Scott was told that brevet rank and actual commission were not the same for,

³⁴ Edward D. Mansfield, Life of General Winfield Scott. New Haven: H. Mansfield, 1852. P. 193.

although a Brevet Major-General had all the privileges of a Major-General, he did not have the commission itself, nor did he receive the pay of a Major-General.

The Secretary made it clear that the case could not be brought up before a court or board of officers because it would be impossible to assemble a disinterested tribunal composed of army men. If such a court were assembled, General Macomb would have to preside over it and Scott's enemy General Gaines, by virtue of his rank, would also be a member of the board. Of course it would be impossible to have any men of brevet rank act in the court for they would be too prejudiced. In his own way, the Executive of the War Department explained that President Adams was unwilling to submit the question to a board because too much excitement had already been produced over the subject of brevet rank. Furthermore, the President hoped that Scott would reconsider and cheerfully obey all orders of General Macomb in order that Scott might continue to serve the United States meritoriously. In conclusion Porter informed Scott that his request for a furlough could not be granted.

Nevertheless, General Scott continued his agitation against the President who now ordered Porter to suspend Scott from his command. It was a painful duty for the Secretary because he knew Scott to be an excellent officer and a credit to the army. Scott was released from the

command of the Western Department of the Army until Adams decided what should be done.³⁵ In April 1829 Scott, granted a furlough, visited Europe. Upon his return he apologized for his actions and was returned to duty on November 20, 1829. It was not until the death of General Macomb on June 25, 1841 that Scott became Major-General of the Army.

As in the case of many men in high government office, Porter was deluged with requests for favors. While many asked for positions with the government, the bulk of them concerned appointments to the United States Military Academy. One unusual request from a West Point Cadet who had been released from the academy for deficiency in his studies, asked the Secretary of War to secure his reinstatement to "save me from an overwhelming degradation".³⁶ Evidently Porter did not reinstate the cadet because the latter's name does not appear in any list of graduates from West Point.³⁷

Had John Quincy Adams been re-elected to the presidency

³⁵ Buffalo Emporium, January 3, 1829. Copy of Peter Porter's letter to General Scott, November 26, 1828. B.H.S.

³⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #120. John Drake to Peter Porter, July 1, 1828. B.H.S.

³⁷ Bvt. Major General George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, 1802-1867, Vol. I. New York: James Mitler Publishing Company, 1879.

in 1828, Peter Porter undoubtedly would have completed the task of making his department the most efficient in the government. However, the victory of Andrew Jackson caused Porter to tender his resignation on the day before the inauguration of the new president.³⁸ Thus Peter Porter, late of Washington, returned to his home in Black Rock. His term in the cabinet had been short but he had accomplished much toward the improvement of the Department of War. Once more he became a familiar figure on the frontier as he resumed his business affairs which he had neglected while serving his country.

Although his public career was terminated by his resignation from the cabinet, Porter remained active in political affairs. Much of his time was devoted to the advancement of the cause of the Whig Party of which he was a member. Inasmuch as Henry Clay had always had a yearning for the presidency and expected the Whig nomination in 1840, he and Porter, by means of correspondence and occasional meetings, formulated plans which they hoped would obtain this objective. Again it became Porter's task to secure New York State for Clay because the votes of this state would do much toward securing the coveted nomination.

³⁸ Peter A. Porter Collection. Peter Porter to John Quincy Adams. Resignation of office of the Secretary of War. March 3, 1829. B.H.S.

As early as January 20, 1839, Porter began the campaign for his friend's nomination by an arrangement with the Buffalo Journal to headline Clay in its editions. The Anti-Masons, however, who wanted General William Henry Harrison as the Whig presidential candidate, had secured the services of the Buffalo Commercial Advertiser some two or three months previous.³⁹ This did not disturb Porter as much as the rumor that General Winfield Scott sought the presidential nomination. In August 1839 when the doughty warrior returned from the Arcostock Valley, where he had prevented the precipitation of a war between England and the United States, he stopped at Niagara Falls on business. Porter, who lost no time in asking the general about the rumors, was relieved to hear Scott say that they were false and that he would support Clay. Of course this news was relayed to Clay.⁴⁰

Though Porter worked persistently for many months, Clay did not receive the nomination in 1840. A new schemer, Thurlow Weed, who was a prominent figure on the American political scene, maneuvered the Harrisburg Whig Convention so deftly that he was able to secure the nomination for William Henry Harrison. Unquestionably, Peter Porter was

³⁹ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Porter to Clay, Jan. 20, 1839. B.H.S.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Porter to Clay, August 9, 1839.

deeply disappointed but he continued to serve his party. By his shrewd political ability, Porter succeeded in securing New York State for Harrison by a majority of fifteen thousand three hundred votes. Even Henry Clay congratulated Porter on the remarkable showing of New York State which had figured so prominently in placing Harrison in the White House.⁴¹

Peter Porter was made a Whig Presidential Elector in 1840. On his way to Albany to cast his vote in the Electoral College, he stopped at Saratoga Springs to avail himself of the healthful baths at that resort. Taking advantage of his sudden leisure, he wrote a letter to Henry Clay in which he expressed the desire that Clay remain out of Harrison's cabinet in order to keep his political reputation unimpaired.⁴²

This advice was not necessary since Clay, before receiving Porter's letter, had dined with Harrison and had made it clear to the president-elect that he did not wish to leave the Senate for any other position.⁴³ In 1842, after some difficulty with President Tyler who had succeeded Harrison when the latter had died one month after taking

⁴¹ Clay-Porter Correspondence, Clay to Porter, Nov. 13, 1840. B.H.S.

⁴² Ibid., Porter to Clay, Nov. 29, 1840.

⁴³ Ibid., Clay to Porter, Dec. 8, 1840.

office, Henry Clay resigned from the Senate.

Almost immediately various states began to nominate him for president though the election was two years away. For the third time Porter was assigned to secure New York. Clay was nominated in 1844 but Porter passed away before the election. Had he lived he would have seen his many efforts and hopes go to naught for in November of 1844 Clay lost the presidency, this time to James Polk of Tennessee.

Porter's political career, though long and varied, was above reproach. He entered politics solely for altruistic reasons. Porter felt that through the medium of political office he could effect beneficial changes for his fellow citizens.

Few men in the annals of our nation have held as many political positions as did Peter Porter. In each he served efficiently and notably. The service of this statesman to his community, his state and his country has rarely been equalled. It would be well for the politicians of today to emulate the altruism of Peter Buell Porter of Black Rock.

CHAPTER V

PETER B. PORTER AND THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

As we have seen by the previous chapter, Porter had firmly established himself as a political figure of marked ability and one who had a thorough knowledge of the northern frontier. It was thus only natural that he should be chosen as one of the Commissioners to settle that boundary as stipulated under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent. Although his commission was dated January 16, 1816, he did not take the oath of office until the middle of February because there were a few members in Congress who questioned the constitutionality of his appointment. There were two reasons for this: first, Porter was a government contractor who supplied American army posts through the firm of Porter, Barton and Company; second, Peter and his brother Augustus had acquired the islands at the brink of Niagara Falls which, being on the American-Canadian border, would be under discussion by the Boundary Commission.

The House of Representatives, because the appointment had been questioned, granted an inquiry into the matter in order to avoid the imputation of suppressing investigation. Actually, however, all the men in the Senate, with the

exception of about twelve, were in favor of Porter.¹ As soon as Porter was certified he resigned as Secretary of State of New York and took the oath of office as Commissioner before Chief Justice Smith Thompson of New York.

The Commissioner for Great Britain was John Ogilvy, a prominent member of the Northwest Fur Company. After he received his commission on June 13, 1816, he was sworn in before Jonathan Sewell, Chief Justice of Lower Canada.²

Under the eighth article of the treaty, the Commissioners were authorized to appoint secretaries, surveyors and other necessary personnel. Accordingly, to assist Porter in his duties, Colonel Samuel Hawkins, a lawyer and former district attorney of Dutchess County, New York, was named American Agent; Major Joseph Delafield of Albany was made Secretary to Hawkins; Donald Fraser of New York became Assistant Secretary to the Commission; Daniel P. Adams of Boston, then with the United States Navy, was selected as Astronomical Surveyor and William A. Bird of Troy, nephew of General Porter, was named Clerk or Assistant Surveyor.

Ogilvy's assistants were Stephen Sewell of Montreal,

1 Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, Feb. 10, 1816. Buffalo Historical Society.

2 Major Joseph Delafield, The Unfortified Boundary. Edited by Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs. Privately printed in New York, 1943. P. 136.

Secretary to the Commission; David Thompson of Williamstown, Upper Canada, who had been employed by the Hudson's Bay Company for many years, Astronomical Surveyor; and Alexander Stevenson of Chambly, Lower Canada, Clerk or Assistant Surveyor.³

The sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent stated that the Commissioners were to ascertain and decide upon a boundary line from a point where the St. Lawrence River and the forty-fifth parallel of latitude meet, westward up the middle of that river, Lake Ontario, the Niagara River, Lake Erie, Detroit River, Lake and River St. Clair and through Lake Huron to the St. Mary's River.

This was a difficult task since the Canadian-American boundary had been disputed for many years. As early as 1763 the boundary had been established by royal confirmation and confirmed by Parliament in 1774. Two years later, Sir Henry Moore, Governor of New York, in agreement with the Commander-in-Chief of the Province of Quebec, had placed markers on the forty-fifth parallel near Lake

³ Minutes of the Proceedings of the Boundary Commission under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent. Meeting of May 23, 1817. The Minutes of the Boundary Commission which comprise the general source for this chapter, are found in two ledgers at the Buffalo Historical Society. One records the Board meetings from November 18, 1816 to November 7, 1822 and the other from February 16, 1824 to October 27, 1827. Also used as general sources are the General Peter B. Porter Papers and the Boundary Commission Papers.

Champlain. This was the line described by the Treaty of 1783 by which the boundary was extended westward and northward to the northwest angle of the Lake of the Woods. The negotiators of 1783 relied upon the gossip and narratives of Indians and whites. Actually, the boundary had never been surveyed.

The Treaty of Ghent followed the same line described by the Treaty of 1783. However, when the Commissioners tried to survey the line according to the old maps, they found that the mapmakers had made many mistakes. Anthony Barclay, one of Great Britain's boundary commissioners under the Treaty of Ghent stated that "All the old maps are....known to have been made in ignorance and to be replete with errors".⁴ This situation placed upon the Commission the onerous task of making its own maps of the entire boundary as the survey progressed.

The first meeting of the Commissioners took place at Albany on November 18, 1816 at which time the two men agreed on some preparatory measures. To prevent delay, they decided that their respective commissions were to meet on May 10, 1817 at St. Regis on the St. Lawrence, the place where their active duty was to commence.⁵ On

⁴ Delafield, op. cit., P. 8.

⁵ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, November 18, 1816. B.H.S.

Saturday, May 3, 1817, General Porter and the members of his Commission left New York on the steamboat Chancellor Livingston. The next day they arrived at Albany from whence they were to proceed overland to St. Regis. As the roads were impassable, the group remained in Albany for several days. On May 9th, since the conditions of the roads had not ameliorated, they continued their journey by water and arrived at St. Johns on the 15th of May. From this point the party went to the residence of Colonel Ogilvy in Montreal but, finding that the British Commissioner had left for St. Regis, they proceeded to that village.

Both the American and the British parties camped on St. Regis Island opposite the town by that name. The camp of the former group was called Point Peace, that of the latter, Point Amity.

On May 23rd the Commissioners met at St. Regis, adopted some preliminary regulations and confirmed all appointments to the Commission. The next day at Cornwall, a small settlement on the north shore, in the presence of the two Commissioners, Secretary Sewell and Assistant Secretary Fraser were sworn in before Magistrate S. Anderson.⁶

The following morning the Commissioners prepared

⁶ Boundary Commission Papers. Oaths of office of Sewell and Fraser. Also at the B.H.S. are the original individual sworn oaths signed by more than twenty men who took part in the survey. Among them are those of Delafield, Adams, Darby and Best.

affidavits for the surveyors which placed these men directly under the jurisdiction of the former. Samuel Hawkins, the American Agent, objected strenuously. He was of the opinion that the surveyors were to be under his control in order that he might be able to substantiate any claim which might arise. He told the Commissioners that they had no control over him but could direct only his proceedings as to time and place, that they were judges only and therefore should not procure testimony. Porter felt otherwise. He informed Hawkins that the duty of the Agent was to act as counsellor to the Board, not as counsellor to his country.⁷

At a general meeting held in Porter's tent on Monday, May 26th, Ogilvy informed Porter that a British Agent had not yet been appointed. At this time however, Samuel Hawkins who had been appointed by President Madison on April 11, 1816 presented his credentials to the Board.⁸ He also presented a note to the Board which recommended the form of an oath for swearing in surveyors. This oath placed the surveyors under both the Commissioners and Agents with the understanding that all directions given

⁷ Major Joseph Delafield, op. cit., Pp. 138-139.

⁸ Boundary Commission Papers. Porter to acting Secretary of State, Richard Rush. May 27, 1817. B.H.S.

by the Agents would first have to be approved by the Commissioners.⁹ The Board filed the note but administered its own form of oath.

Affairs between General Porter and Hawkins became quite strained. The Agent, persistent in his claim of authority over the surveyors, appealed to Richard Rush, acting Secretary of State. Mr. Rush informed him that it was Hawkins' duty to aid the Commissioners. Not satisfied with this interpretation, the Agent sent an appeal directly to President Monroe.

This action prompted the American Commissioner, backed by Ogilvy, to send Rush a letter which expressed his views on Hawkins' definition of the duties of the United States Agent. According to Hawkins' interpretation the Agent and the Co-Agent represented the power and sovereignty of their respective governments concerning the demarcation of the boundary. In other words, if the Agents agreed, Hawkins felt the Commissioners were forced to concur with them. It was only when the Agents disagreed that the Commissioners were to judge.¹⁰

After reading this, Rush told Porter that the Agent had neither independent nor coordinate powers. It was the

⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #151. Hawkins to Commissioners, May 26, 1817. B.H.S.

¹⁰ Boundary Commission Papers. Porter to Rush, June 24, 1817. B.H.S.

duty of the Agents to present the facts to the Commissioners for a decision. Hawkins had to accept the outcome of the dispute but his increased hatred for Porter caused the Agent to watch the American Commissioner with suspicion.¹¹

The Commission now settled down to determine the exact intersection of the forty-fifth degree of North Latitude with the St. Lawrence River. To aid in this task, the United States Government sent to St. Regis, Andrew Ellicott, Professor of Mathematics at West Point and brother of Joseph Ellicott who was surveyor for the Holland Land Company of Western New York. Andrew Ellicott arrived there with his son and a rude but remarkably accurate zenith sector.¹² This instrument, built by Ellicott and a friend, had a six foot radius. He remained with the group for about six weeks but worked apart from the other astronomical surveyors to locate the starting point of the survey.

This point was the same one at which the survey under the fifth article of the Treaty of Ghent was to end. Therefore, the Commissioners under this clause were invited by those under the sixth article to a joint meeting at St.

¹¹ Major Joseph Delafield, op. cit., Pp. 39-40.

¹² An astronomical instrument the limb of which embraces only a portion of a circle, used for measuring angles too great for the compass of a mocrrometer, when used for measuring zenith sector. Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition. Unabridged. G.& C. Merriam Company, Publishers. Springfield, Massachusetts, 1941. P. 2263.

Regis in order to ascertain a point common to both groups. The invitation was accepted but the multiple duties of the Commissioners under the fifth article prevented the meeting.

Therefore Porter and Ogilvy continued the survey. They decided that each party should survey, trigonometrically, separate sections of the rivers and lakes. This meant that the entire boundary was surveyed twice. The calculations of each group, however, were to be compared and agreed upon by both governments. All calculations and maps were to be made during the winter.

Although the Commissioners verbally agreed that the true boundary line should be the mid-distance from main shore to main shore, no island was to be divided. If the greater part of an island was in the Canadian half of a body of water, Canada received the entire island; if it lay mostly on the American side of the waterway, it went to the United States. Another way of ascertaining ownership of an island was to determine the deepest channel or navigable channel as the case might be. If the navigable channel was found to be between the United States shore and an island, the island was to be given to Canada. On the other hand, if the navigable channel was found to be between the Canadian shore and an island, the island went to the United States. If both channels could be used by ships the true channel would be that through which the greater volume of water flowed. When there were three or

more channels, the one nearest to the whole body of water was taken, provided that each party received a ship route. When there was no navigable channel the lands were to be equally divided.¹³

These rules were necessary since navigation into the interior was of the utmost importance to both nations. If either country was deprived of a navigable waterway around any one island, it would lose the use of a good portion of the entire water route.

At this time, President James Monroe, who had been recently inaugurated, decided to visit the Canadian-American border in order to get a clear picture of the American and Canadian fortifications which were then under discussion by representatives of both countries. The result of his extensive tour was a report to Congress in December 1817 which advocated the removal of all American fortifications on the lakes and rivers bordering Canada. This led to the ratification by the United States Senate of the Rush-Bagot Treaty the following year, April 16, 1818.

Monroe's journey took him to the scene of the boundary survey where he spent two days in the company of Porter and Ogilvy. Samuel Hawkins and the American Commissioner lost no time in arranging separate interviews with the President.

¹³ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #198.
Porter to Secretary of State, October 31, 1826. B.H.S.

Each presented his case. Monroe stressed the importance of unison of opinion. Since the British government had not appointed an Agent, he felt the United States should create as little trouble as possible. Although Monroe agreed that Hawkins' remonstrance to the government was correct, he believed that the Commissioners should proceed and that the Agent should continue to guard the interests of the United States.¹⁴

This was but a lull in the storm for the two men again began to quarrel; this time over finances. Porter, disburser for the Americans, was provoked because the expense account of Hawkins, who was a spendthrift, was not always correct. The extravagance of the Agent was great; even the British group commented on the elegance of his quarters. Finally, Porter informed Richard Rush, Secretary of State, that the accounts of the Board and those of the Agent would be kept separately.¹⁵

The conduct of the American Agent must have continued to be unbearable for, in 1819, Peter Porter wrote to Secretary of State John Adams in regard to Hawkins. In a twenty page letter, the Commissioner explained the falsities of charges of misconduct which Hawkins had brought against him. The communication stated that Hawkins, whose wife

¹⁴ Major Joseph Delafield, op. cit., P. 160-161.

¹⁵ Ibid., P. 38.

was with him, maintained a separate camp which was too large and which employed too many men. He had interfered with the project by his disapproval of the method of survey and had accused the surveyors of miscalculation in their work. Hawkins, said Porter, charged that John Ogilvy, the British Commissioner, attempted to bribe the American Astronomical Surveyor, Daniel Adams. The Agent also accused Mr. David Thompson, British Astronomical Surveyor as being guilty of a dishonest attempt to vary the boundary line by secretly removing markers previously fixed by Adams. These false incriminations resulted in friction between the two groups. Furthermore, Hawkins had many creditors who not only clamored for payment but also threatened suit. For this reason, he was anxious to be disburser of the group. To this, Porter would not consent until he heard from the Department of State.¹⁶

On October 31, 1817, when the Commission adjourned for the season, the islands in the lower St. Lawrence were still in the process of survey. Much time had been consumed in attempting to find the starting point, obtaining necessary equipment, hiring employees and working out a system of survey. The nature of the work and the wild terrain made rapid progress impossible. The important thing was, however, that a start had been made.

¹⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers. Box #1. Miscellaneous Folder, Porter to John Quincy Adams, April 6, 1819. B.H.S.

Although the first meeting of 1818 was scheduled for May 15th, the Board did not meet until June 1st, at Hamilton, New York. At this meeting, John Hale, Esquire, of Quebec presented his credentials which appointed him British Agent to the Commission. The Board then went to St. Regis where the Commissioners under the fifth article waited for them in order to aid in locating the starting point for the westward survey. When Mr. Hasler, the Astronomical Surveyor under the fifth article, met with those working on the survey under the sixth article, he said their calculations were incorrect. This meant that Adams and Thompson had to compute their observations again. Ultimately all agreed that the survey should begin at the spot which Andrew Ellicott designated by a stone marker as the point where the forty-fifth degree North Latitude met the St. Lawrence River.¹⁷

Commissioner Porter proposed that the Agents and Commissioners should leave the scene of the survey since they were not absolutely necessary and their presence only added to the expense of the project. He felt that it would be sufficient if the two Agents visited the surveyors

¹⁷ The Report and Maps of Secretary of State Henry Clay to the House of Representatives on the decision of the Commissioners under the sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent, June 18, 1822. Submitted to the House March 18, 1828. B.H.S.

periodically. Commissioner Ogilvy agreed with Porter but he stated that he and not Hale would check on the progress of the work. The real reason for Porter's decision, however, was not to reduce expenses but to facilitate the survey which was being impeded by the constant wrangling between himself and Hawkins. An even greater reason was that Porter was going south to marry the gracious widow, Laetitia Breckinridge Grayson of Kentucky. The departure of the Agents and Commissioners was effected on July 4, 1818.¹⁸

During the season of 1818 and the early part of 1819, a complete and perfect survey was made of the St. Lawrence River. This included all the islands in the river and in the northerly end of Lake Ontario. It was a tremendous accomplishment for in this region are the many islands known today as the Thousand Islands. Since there were many channels to be sounded and the ownership of many islands to be determined, conflicting interests and opinions had to be adjusted and concessions made by each nation. In this manner, both parties proceeded keeping a debit and credit account of the acreages of the islands of doubtful ownership. It was a difficult process.

Many of the islands were important as points of

¹⁸ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, July 4, 1818.
B.H.S.

commerce or military defense on the frontier. One such island was Grand (or Long) Island. It was twenty-six miles long and contained about thirty thousand acres. Because it was located near the important town of Kingston, Ontario, which at that time was the site of a great fortress, Ogilvy was anxious to obtain it for his country. The United States Commissioner yielded to Ogilvy's request and took several small islands in exchange. One of the islands he took was Barnhart's Island.¹⁹ For this transaction, the British Commissioner was criticized severely by the Canadians because the only navigable channel around Barnhart's Island now belonged to the United States and Canadian navigation of the river could be stopped at that point.

After all the islands in the St. Lawrence River had been allotted, a survey of Lake Ontario was made. This was a simple matter since there were no territorial adjudications to be made.

By the early part of June 1819 the surveyors were at Niagara Falls. Peter Porter was now in familiar territory for he and his brother Augustus had secured from New York State in 1816, possession of the islands at the brink of the falls. Colonel Ogilvy made his camp on Navy Island, two miles above the cataract. The American party camped

¹⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #194. Porter to Clay, November 2, 1826. B.H.S.

on Iris Island (now Goat Island). Porter, however, hastened to his home in Black Rock where his beloved wife Laetitia awaited him.

All the men in the group, both British and American, were escorted on a scenic tour of the falls by Judge Augustus Porter who explained to them how he had constructed the bridges over the raging torrent to Iris Island. The Judge, as well as his brother Peter, was most anxious to have the islands at the head of the falls given to the United States for these men had great plans which would become complicated if Great Britain received this land.

The Board held a meeting on Iris Island on Friday, June 4, 1819. Most of the business transacted concerned personnel. Major Donald Fraser was made Secretary to succeed Stephen Sewell who had resigned. New surveyors were engaged to replace those who had left the employ of the Board. The Board adjourned after arranging to meet at the camp of Commissioner Ogilvy on Navy Island.²⁰

Very little was accomplished at the June 14th meeting. However, before adjourning the Board set June 14, 1820 as the date for the next meeting which was to be held at the river St. Clair in Lake Huron. It was also decided that if either Commissioner deemed an earlier meeting

²⁰ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 4, 1819.
B.H.S.

necessary, he was authorized to call one after giving reasonable notice.²¹

The islands at the falls were given to the United States since the boundary was designated as passing through the Horseshoe Falls. Grand Island was claimed by the United States. The assignment of Navy Island was doubtful. By actual measurement it was found that the main channel of the Niagara River was on the Canadian side where the water was deeper, the current faster and the width greater than the east branch of the river.

Through the latter channel passed 8,540,080 cubic feet of water per minute; through the west branch passed 12,802,750 cubic feet of water in the same space of time. To substantiate these figures, a check was made of the river at Black Rock above Grand Island. At that point it was found that 21,549,590 cubic feet of water flowed each minute.²² It was a very close calculation. These statistics, in addition to the fact that much of the land in the St. Lawrence River had been given to Great Britain, caused Grand Island to be awarded to the United States. Navy Island was given to Canada. The few remaining islands

²¹ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 14, 1819. B.H.S.

²² William A. Bird Papers, Reminiscences of the Boundary Survey. February 1, 1864. B.H.S.

in the Niagara River were so close to the American shore that their ownership by the United States was a foregone conclusion. Up to this point a distance of about four hundred miles had been covered and upwards of fifteen hundred islands had been surveyed.²³

In September 1819, Colonel Ogilvy, while on a tour of duty in the St. Clair Flats, contracted a fever and died in Amherstburg, Upper Canada. His death was a severe loss to the Commission.

Ogilvy's successor was Anthony Barclay of Annapolis, Nova Scotia, who was then employed in New York City by the British Government. In March of 1820 Porter met the new Commissioner in New York City where the two men made plans for the ensuing season. About two months later Barclay recommended to Porter that John Bigsby, Esquire, M.D., be appointed Assistant Secretary to the Board. Barclay felt that the presence of a physician could perhaps ward off the fatal diseases which had struck the surveyors' camp the previous year.²⁴

On June 3rd the Board met at Grosse Island in the Detroit River. There was much to be done. Anthony Barclay

²³General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, Miscellaneous Folder. Porter to John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, December 8, 1819. B.H.S.

²⁴Ibid., Box #1, #142. Hale to Commissioners, May 2, 1820.

presented his credentials which appointed him Commissioner for Great Britain. Dr. Bigsby then presented his oath of office which he had taken on May 31, 1820. William A. Bird was promoted to Astronomical Surveyor and James Ferguson received Bird's old position as Trigonometrical Surveyor.²⁵

At this time the British Agent presented a memorandum to the Commissioners which requested that the Commissioners, Agents and Secretaries leave the scene of survey in order that expenses might be reduced and the progress of the survey facilitated.²⁶

The Surveyors were instructed to determine the correct line from the point where they were then working to the Straits of St. Mary where the survey under the sixth article was to terminate. They were not bound to survey in a continuous line but could work on any part of the boundary which would be most healthful to the men. The Board, after instructing the Astronomical Surveyors to make duplicate copies of the maps, calculations and field notes of their respective surveys, arranged to meet on June 5th at Commissioner Barclay's quarters in Amherstburg.²⁷

²⁵ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 3, 1820. B.H.S.

²⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #142. Hale to Commissioners, June 3, 1820. B.H.S.

²⁷ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 3, 1820. B.H.S.

On that date little was accomplished. The Commission ordered that copies of the resolutions of the last meeting be furnished to the Astronomical Surveyors. It decided also that the meeting previously scheduled for June 14th be held instead on May 7, 1821 at Peter Porter's residence in Black Rock.²⁸

Before that day arrived, however, Congress, becoming impatient over the slow progress of the Commission, reduced the appropriation allowed for the project. Salaries of the American Commissioner and Agent were cut. Porter suggested to Barclay that since both governments were somewhat irked over the delay and expense of the work, the position of Assistant Secretary be abolished and the salaries of the principal persons employed by them be reduced. Porter felt that, since the value of money had increased, the men would be as well off financially as they had been two years before.²⁹

When the Board met at Porter's home at Black Rock on May 7, 1821, Major Joseph Delafield presented his credentials as American Agent. He replaced Colonel Samuel Hawkins the man with whom Porter had experienced much

²⁸ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 3, 1820.
B.H.S.

²⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #169.
Porter to Barclay, April 9, 1821. B.H.S.

difficulty. The surveyors were instructed to continue their work between Lakes Erie and Huron. By astronomical observations they were to ascertain the relative situation of certain points on Lake Huron in order to get an idea of the extent of that body of water. The Secretary was ordered to keep in touch with the surveyors in order to inform the Commissioners as to the probable time they survey would be completed. Not less than six weeks after receipt of such information from the Secretary, either Commissioner could call a meeting of the Board which would be held at Utica, New York.³⁰

The surveyors, obedient to the orders of the Board, left for the shore of Lake St. Clair about seven miles from the Detroit River. Messers. Bird and Thompson drove stakes in Lake St. Clair about one half mile from the shore in six feet of water and found that excellent results could be obtained by this method.³¹ When the group reached the Huron River, they were joined by Lieutenant Henry Bayfield of the Royal Navy who commanded H.M.S. Confiance. The ship and its commander had been ordered to Lake Huron by the British Government in order to render all possible

³⁰ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, May 7, 1821. B.H.S.

³¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #81. Delafield to Porter, May 22, 1821. B.H.S.

aid to the Boundary Commission.³²

As there was no conflict between Delafield and Porter over the respective duties of Commissioner and Agent, the work progressed rapidly. Early in July the surveys of the Lake and River St. Clair were terminated. The American party then proceeded to Lake Erie to complete the survey of an area which the British had been obliged to abandon during the season of 1819 when fatal diseases struck their camp. Upon the conclusion of this task, toward the end of July, the party immediately sailed for Black Rock.

Their arrival delighted Commissioner Porter. He then informed Commissioner Barclay that the survey under the sixth article had been concluded by the Americans, but that Mr. Thompson, the British surveyor, would conclude his task in about two weeks. Since the Americans would be able to complete their arrangements very soon, Porter told Barclay that Mr. Bird and Mr. Ferguson would be willing to assist Mr. Thompson with his maps and calculations. Because of the advanced state of affairs, Porter set the date for the Utica meeting for "Monday, the twenty fourth day of September next".³³ However, to accommodate the British Commissioner who was in delicate health, Porter

³² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #183. Delafield to Porter, May 31, 1821. B.H.S.

³³ Ibid., Box #2, #172. Porter to Barclay, July 30, 1821.

changed the date of the meeting to November 12th and the place to New York City where Barclay resided.

When the Board met, serious points of difference arose between the two Commissioners, each claiming certain islands of strategic value. The islands in question were Bois Blanc, Sugar, Fox and Stony Islands in the mouth of the Detroit River. John Hale, British Agent, claimed them for his country because the mid-line of the water communication measured from shore to shore passed west of Sugar and Stony Islands.³⁴ Joseph Delafield, the American Agent, stated that since the navigable channel was between the island of Bois Blanc and the Canadian shore, that Island plus Stony and Sugar Islands should be appropriated to the United States.³⁵ (See Figure 3.) Hale countered by citing the Treaty of 1794, which declared that all lakes, rivers and waterways should be open to navigation to the citizens of both countries. Therefore, said Hale, the boundary line could never affect the right of navigation.

The American claim did seem unreasonable because Bois Blanc Island was about three hundred and seventy yards from the Canadian shore and five thousand two hundred yards from

³⁴ Boundary Commission Papers. Claim of the British Agent, John Hale, December 8, 1821. B.H.S.

³⁵ Ibid., Claim of the American Agent, Joseph Delafield, December 5, 1821.

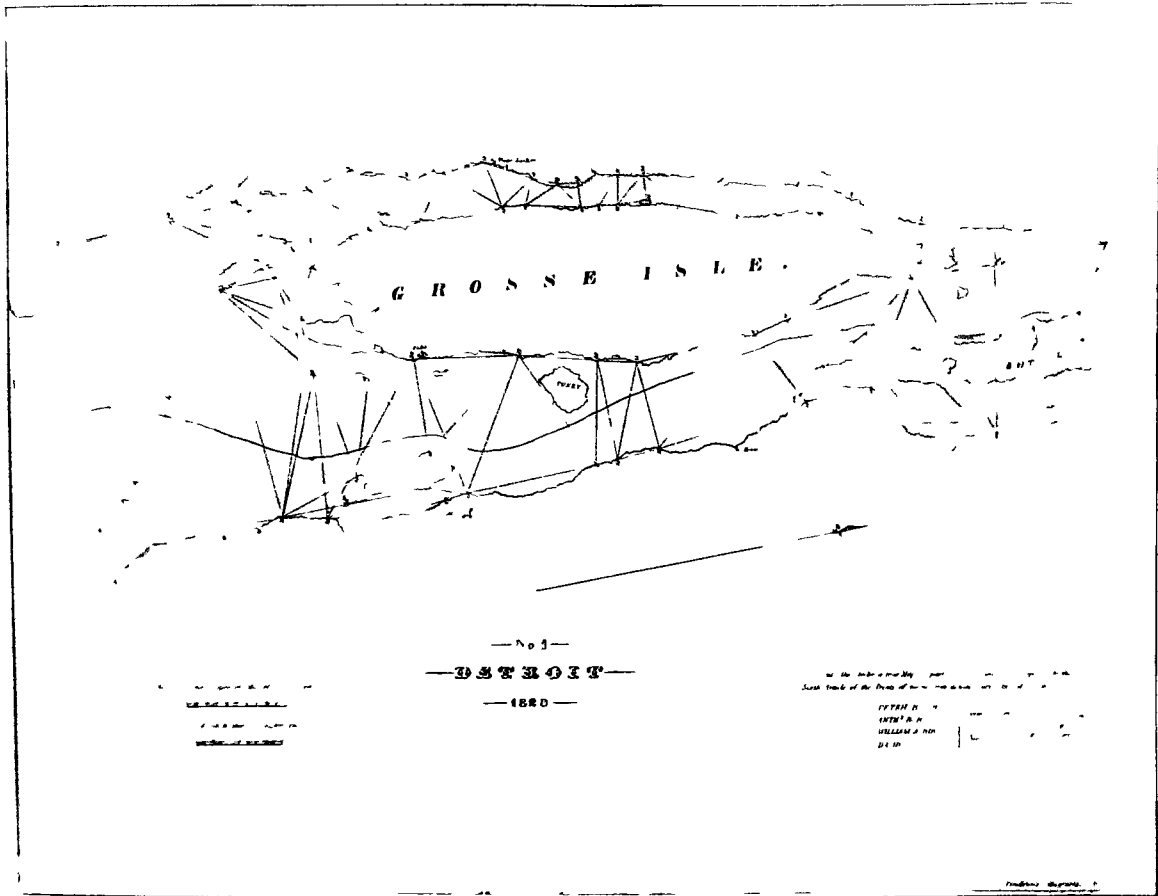


FIG. 3
 A SECTION OF THE SURVEY FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE
 NATIONAL ARCHIVES—WASHINGTON D C

the American shore.³⁶ The islands were of insignificant territorial value, but their strategic location rendered them important in a military sense. In an effort to solve the problem, the Commissioners and Agents met every day.

As the year of 1821 drew to a close, the Board asked that all abstracts of salaries and wages paid for the years 1819 and 1820 be presented to them. Donald Fraser, Secretary of the Board, came forth with an account for March 1, 1819 to March 1, 1820 which totaled \$8,469.13. His account for the period from March 1, 1820 to March 1, 1821 amounted to \$8,171.73 $\frac{1}{2}$.³⁷ Joseph Delafield and John Hale turned in the following expense account for the years 1819, 1820 and 1821.³⁸

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

March 1819 to March 1820	\$12,141.61
March 1820 to March 1821	<u>9,816.74</u>
	\$21,958.35

BRITISH GOVERNMENT

Jan. 1819 to Jan. 1820	2846.7.11 lbs	\$9,945.59
Jan. 1820 to Jan. 1821	3055.160 $\frac{1}{4}$ lbs	<u>12,223.20$\frac{1}{2}$</u>
		\$22,168.79 $\frac{1}{2}$

On January 3, 1822, after some discussion over the

³⁶ Boundary Commission Papers. Claim of the British Agent, John Hale, December 8, 1821. B.H.S.

³⁷ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #230 and #231. B.H.S.

³⁸ Ibid., Box #1, #94. B.H.S.

islands in question, it was decided that the Board should adjourn until March 1st when they would again meet in New York City. However, if either Commissioner wished to call a meeting before that date, such meeting would be held in Philadelphia.

At the request of Barclay, the Board met in Philadelphia on January 29, 1822. The British Commissioner stated to Porter that since an agreement between them, upon the whole boundary under the sixth article appeared impracticable, he was ready to exchange reports on the points of difference at as early a period as possible. The American Commissioner agreed but added that all the data of the Detroit River, which the naval officers of Great Britain and the United States had compiled, should be recorded by the Board for the benefit of a third party who apparently would have to be called in to settle the dispute.³⁹

It was decided that a general meeting should be held on June 3, 1822 at Utica. Later, at the request of Porter, the date was changed to June 18, 1822. When the Board met in Utica, Commissioner Barclay presented to the Board a paper concerning the disputed islands. In it he stated that if the dispute over the boundary were submitted to some friendly sovereign or nation to decide, the result

³⁹ Minutes of the Boundary Commission. January 29, 1822. B.H.S.

would be favorable to Great Britain. Nevertheless, he was instructed by the King's Ministers to concede to the United States the three small islands of Sugar, Fox and Stony rather than break off the friendly negotiations between them. In exchange for these three islands, however, Great Britain requested that Bois Blanc be given to her and that the boundary line be established between Bois Blanc and the aforementioned islands.⁴⁰

Porter agreed to this decision but made it understood that "no part of this arrangement shall be considered as an abandonment by either of the Commissioners of any principles which they may have heretofore respectively assumed for the establishment of the boundary."⁴¹

Their differences being settled, the Commissioners prepared in duplicate a joint report to the two governments concerning their agreement on all matters which pertained to the sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent. The report was signed by Barclay and Porter at Utica on June 18, 1822. Each government received a copy of the report together with a complete set of maps covering the entire survey. Every map of the survey was described as

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, June 18, 1822.
B.H.S.

⁴¹ Ibid.

follows:

We certify this to be a true map of part of the Boundary designated by the sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent from actual survey by order of the Board.

Signed by the Commissioners and Surveyors.⁴²

The work under the sixth article was slow but it resulted in the procurement of a perfect boundary which involved the location and survey of over two thousand islands. In addition many channels were sounded thereby aiding the navigation of both countries. Porter was proud of the outcome because the line from St. Regis to the St. Mary's River was "designated with a certainty and precision which will preclude all future doubts and disputes in regard to it".⁴³

On July 24, 1822 Joseph Delafield, Agent of the United States, presented to John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, at Washington, a duplicate (in manuscript) of the Journal of the Proceedings of the Board of Commission under the sixth article of the Treaty of Ghent. Adams also received several papers, documents, accounts and reports referred to in the Journal.

Thus ended harmoniously the labors of the Commission

⁴² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #243. Thompson to Porter, February 4, 1822. B.H.S.

⁴³ Ibid., Box #2, #191. Porter to Adams. February 12, 1822.

under the sixth article. The gratifying results were mostly due to the efforts of the two Commissioners. In no small measure it was due also to the generosity of the British Government which elected to lose strategic areas rather than to alienate British-American relations. The boundary delineated in 1822 remains the same today, a lasting monument to the friendship between the two nations.

CHAPTER VI

PETER B. PORTER AND THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION (CONT'D.)

With a feeling of accomplishment over the fulfillment of the sixth article, the Commissioners now turned their attention toward carrying out the stipulations of the seventh article of the Treaty of Ghent. This provision called for a boundary line from Lake Huron to the most northwest point of the Lake of the Woods according to the true intent and meaning of the Treaty of 1783.¹ The task before them was a difficult one for the distance between the two points was almost one thousand miles. About one half of this distance was across deep water and the other half was overland through totally wild and uninhabited country. The climate in this region was so cold that only a short period of each year could be utilized for surveying the line.²

¹ Minutes of the Proceedings of the Boundary Commission under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent, November 18, 1816 to October 27, 1827. Meeting of June 22, 1822, Buffalo Historical Society. In this chapter, as in the previous one, this document, the General Peter B. Porter Papers and the Boundary Commission Papers have been used as general sources.

² General Peter B. Porter Papers. Box #2, #191. Peter Porter to John Quincy Adams, February 12, 1822. Buffalo Historical Society.

In ascertaining the boundary under the seventh article, the most expedient method of survey was to be used in order to hasten the work. Both nations were anxious that the most northwest corner of the Lake of the Woods be determined with care and accuracy because it was from that point that the entire westward boundary between both countries was to begin.

It was practically impossible for the Commissioners to follow the true intent and meaning of the Treaty of 1783 because the negotiators of that treaty had regulated their proceedings by Mitchell's Map which had been printed in England in 1755. This map, far from accurate, contained some islands in Lake Superior which did not exist. It also showed the Mississippi River extending north to the Lake of the Woods and to the west of it.³

A glance at any present day map, based on actual surveys, will show that the Mississippi River cannot be reached by moving due west from the Lake of the Woods. These discrepancies caused the Commissioners much difficulty and they began to question the Treaty of 1783 in which the boundaries mentioned were not true boundaries but lines of demarcation made by verbal agreement.

³ Major Joseph Delafield, The Unfortified Boundary. Edited by Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs. Privately printed in New York, 1943. P. 12.

Both Commissioners were of the opinion that it was necessary not only to explore and examine the points referred to in the Treaty of 1783 but also to survey parts of the surrounding territory. It was a question not of where the line must go to conform with the treaty but where it ought to be established to harmonize with the views of the parties who negotiated the treaty.⁴

It was decided by Porter and Barclay to send two parties on the survey (one American and one British). The groups, each consisting of ten or twelve persons, were to stay near each other and to act together in ascertaining the line.

The Board then instructed the two Agents, Hale and Delafield, by letter to begin their work by surveying the islands between the foot of the Neebish Rapids and Lake Superior. These rapids were in St. Mary's River opposite the head of the Island of St. Joseph where the survey under the sixth article had ended. When this task was completed, the men were to find and examine all islands in Lake Superior which were near enough to the line described in the treaty as to render their ownership doubtful. After this was done Long Lake was to be located, for this body of

⁴ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #191. Porter to John Quincy Adams, February 12, 1822. B.H.S.

water was to be the starting point of the boundary line going westward to the Lake of the Woods. Then the two parties were to proceed to the latter lake to make a quick survey of the islands and shores of that body of water to determine its most northwestern point. Any doubts which arose between the Agents were to be communicated to the Commissioners who, if necessary, would proceed to the spot to solve the difficulty.⁵

The American Agent, Joseph Delafield was, at this time, at Sault St. Marie where he was making arrangements for the American surveyors. With Delafield was James Ferguson who had replaced William A. Bird as Astronomical Surveyor. Upon instructions from Porter, Delafield now at Mackinac, wrote to Robert Stuart, agent of the American Fur Company, with whom he had had some correspondence, and asked him to aid Ferguson financially. Stuart was requested to give Ferguson any amount of money up to one thousand dollars while he was surveying in the Lake Superior region. In addition, at Ferguson's request, Stuart was to pay the wages of the men in the American party. In spite of the fact that all funds expended by Stuart were to be charged to Peter B. Porter as Boundary Commissioner, all salary

⁵ Minutes of the Boundary Commission. June 22, 1822.
B.H.S.

vouchers were to be kept separate from those for other expenses.⁶

The same day, Delafield wrote to Ferguson and cautioned him that if he should need anything besides the supplies he did have, he was to seek the trading posts of the American Fur Company but not those of the Hudson's Bay Company unless it was in an emergency. To provide for such an occasion, however, Delafield enclosed a letter of credit for five hundred dollars from Mr. Stuart upon any agent or partner of the Hudson's Bay Company.⁷

In order to make sure that he had enough supplies, Porter sent Ferguson a shipment of flour, pork and whiskey by the steamboat Michigan. The American Commissioner advised Ferguson that the Commission was not responsible for clothing the men. However, if clothes were badly needed, the men could cut up the older blankets and use them provided they paid for them.⁸

The survey under the seventh article was begun at the mouth of the St. Mary's River by James Ferguson. By the latter part of June 1822, the survey from the Neebish Rapids

⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #98.
Delafield to Stuart, June 6, 1822. B.H.S.

⁷ Ibid., Box #1, #105. Delafield to Stuart, June 3, 1822.

⁸ Ibid., Box #2, #182. Porter to Ferguson, June 29, 1822.

to Sault Ste. Marie was completed. Ferguson's party now prepared to proceed to Lake Superior. Since the terrain was nothing but a wilderness, Ferguson obtained a man to act as guide, interpreter and steward. However, the man, whose name was McKay, would not sell his services unless his wife and two small children accompanied him. Not only did McKay know the terrain well, but he could speak the language of every tribe of Indians in the Superior region. Ferguson felt that Mrs. McKay could be useful for making moccasins for members of the expedition and hired McKay at a salary of three hundred and fifty dollars a year.

Ferguson was very pleased with the Canadians who made up part of the American group. He wished the Americans were as able and ready as the Canadians who, as long as they could sing and smoke, worked incessantly until night.

The American Astronomical Surveyor gained little information concerning the Indian country since the traders and agents he met either concealed or misrepresented conditions. The numerous lakes and falls in the district made him certain, however, that a correct survey of the region would be impossible. Because of the many portages, thirty-six of them, provisions and equipment could be taken into the interior only by canoe. Ferguson, therefore, arranged with the captain of a vessel in Lake Superior, which belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company, to take his supplies to Fort William on Thunder Bay on the north bank

of the lake.⁹

Evidently, the stores which Porter had sent to Ferguson did not reach their destination in time. After waiting for them in vain until July 9th, Ferguson decided to purchase supplies at Sault Ste. Marie and to proceed with his men to the Lake Superior region. At the Sault he procured fifteen barrels of flour, sixteen barrels of pork at ten dollars per barrel, seventy sacks of corn at seventy cents per bushel, twenty pounds of tea at eighty seven and one-half cents per pound, and one barrel of whiskey. From the American Fur Company he bought blankets, shirts, tobacco, gunpowder and other necessities. The cost of these purchases amounted to one hundred eighty-six dollars and seventy cents. In addition to this, Ferguson had to pay in advance, three hundred ninety-one dollars and twelve cents to three Canadians employed by him. This brought his total expenses to five hundred seventy-seven dollars and eighty-two cents exclusive of the amount owed to the Hudson's Bay Company for transportating his supplies to Fort William. Thus prepared, Ferguson and his men went into the interior where, cut off from all communications, they expected to remain for one year. Before he left, he made it clear to Porter that not under any terms would he

⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #126. Ferguson to Porter, July 2, 1822. B.H.S.

consent to spend a second winter in the interior.¹⁰

Almost from the beginning, Porter and Barclay wrangled over the rules which were to be followed in fulfilling the instructions of the seventh article of the Treaty of Ghent. Barclay insisted that the same rules used in conducting the requests of the sixth article be used for the seventh. Porter countered by declaring that no pre-established rules had been mentioned in the establishment of the line from St. Regis to the Neebish Rapids, except that which required that no island be divided.

This difference of opinion began over the ownership of the island of St. George in the St. Mary's River. On the western or American side of this island there was a shallow unnavigable body of water while on the eastern or British side there was a deep channel suitable for boats. This was the only route by which lake boats could ascend to the falls above. Barclay claimed the island for Great Britain but Porter would not agree with him because British possession of the island would interrupt American communication to Lake Superior. Each Commissioner believed that, should a friendly power be asked to decide the issue, his country would be given the disputed territory. (See Fig. 4.)

¹⁰ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #128. Ferguson to Porter, July 13, 1822. B.H.S.

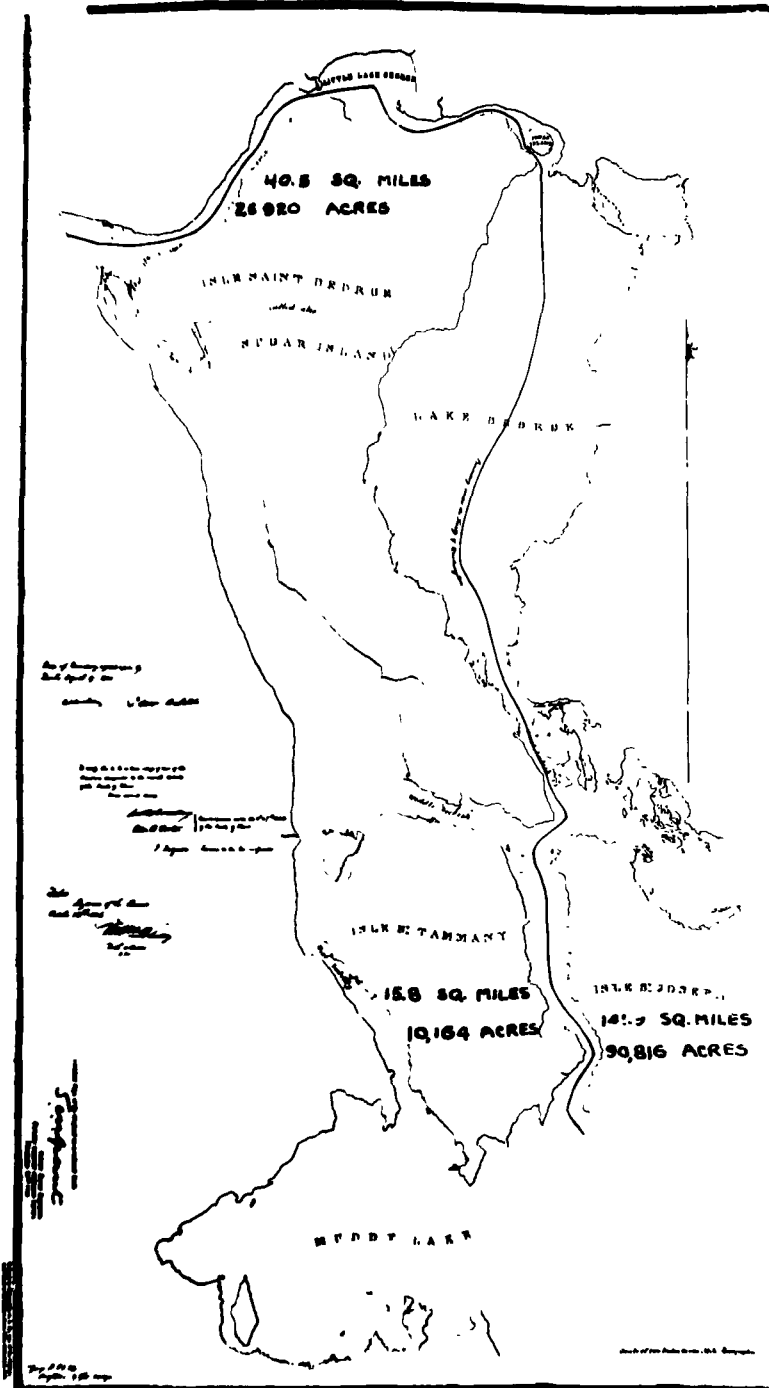


FIG. 4
 A SECTION OF THE SURVEY UNDER THE VII ARTICLE USED BY WEBSTER AND ASHBURTON TO DESIGNATE THE BOUNDARY UNDER THE TREATY OF WASHINGTON. IT SHOWS WEBSTER'S AND ASHBURTON'S SIGNATURES. IT IS NOW IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WASHINGTON, D. C.

An even more serious dispute arose over the location of Long Lake. The Treaty of 1783 had mentioned the boundary as running from Long Lake to the Lake of the Woods along the water communication between them. The question of great importance was: Where is Long Lake? There were many inlets and bays in this region, any of which might be the sought for body of water. At Superior, Delafield left the American party which consisted of a principal surveyor, one assistant who also acted as draughtsman and a few boatmen, and went to Washington to deliver the final papers of the Board concerning the sixth article to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. While he was in Washington, Delafield asked Adams about Long Lake. In reply, the Cabinet member brought out a map, used by the Commissioners of 1783, which explained what was meant by Long Lake. It was pictured as a body of water near the Grand Portage, formed by a peninsula which projected into Lake Superior. It was really Pigeon Bay at the mouth of the present Pigeon River. Delafield immediately communicated this information to Porter.¹¹

Upon receipt of this news, the American Commissioner wrote to Adams and asked for official papers to prove that Long Lake was a part of Lake Superior. If this could be

¹¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #100. Delafield to Porter, August 2, 1822. B.H.S.

proved, Porter felt that the controversy over the location of the lake would be settled once and for all.¹² As soon as Porter received authoritative documentation from Adams, he notified Ferguson that it was definite that the Long Lake was a bay of Lake Superior and not a separate body of water.

The season of 1822 was spent chiefly in search of Long Lake. Both the British and Americans were proceeding upon the common theory that the starting point of the route from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods was at the opening of the old Grand Portage route or at Pigeon River. Nevertheless, this common impression was soon abandoned by the British surveyors who began to direct their attention to the Fond du Lac far to the south of the Pigeon River. They explained their action by stating that Fond du Lac, a bay of Lake Superior was really the Long Lake described in the Treaty of 1783. The British began to run their boundary from the point where the St. Louis River flows into Fond du Lac, northwestward along an indirect water communication to the Lake of the Woods. This line, if established, would have added enormously to British territory, including the entire chain of lakes extending from Pigeon Bay to Rainy Lake. (See Fig. 5.) The British completed their survey and claimed

¹² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #186. Porter to Adams, August 20, 1822. B.H.S.

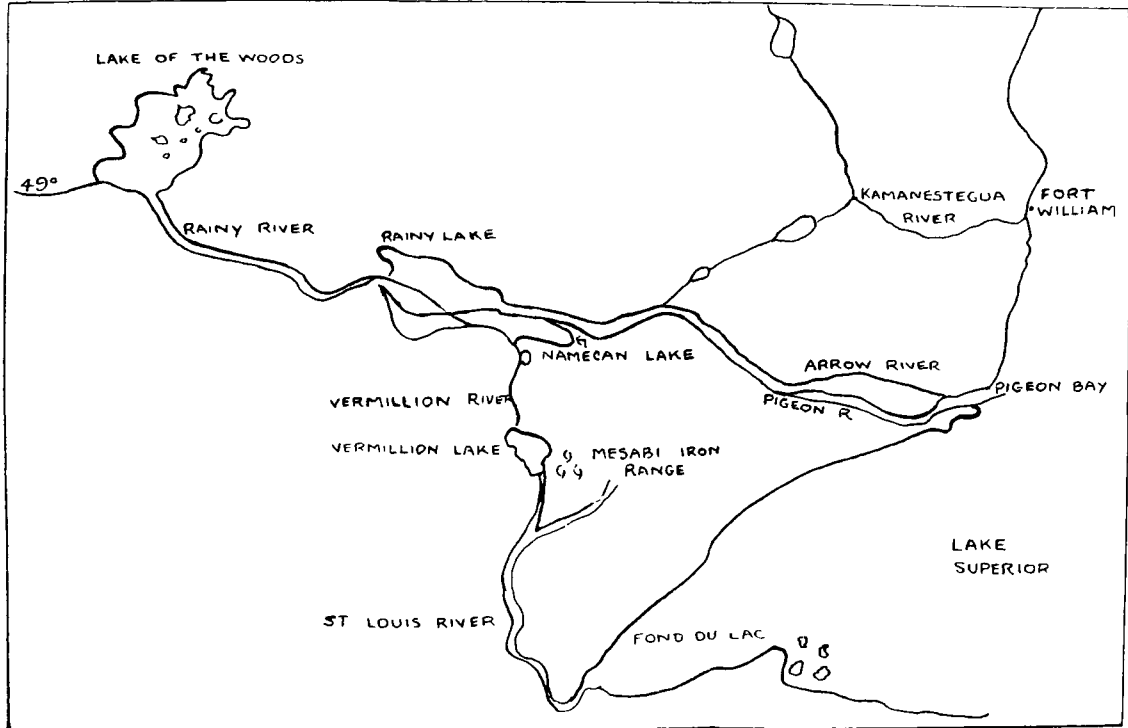


FIG 5 MAP SHOWING AMERICAN AND BRITISH BOUNDARY CLAIMS IN THE SUPERIOR REGION

it as the boundary intended by the Treaty of 1783.¹³

The American surveyors at Pigeon River proceeded westward to the Lake of the Woods. By the summer of 1823 they had nearly finished their work. Because of the nature of the shores of the Lake of the Woods, it was very difficult to determine its most northwestern point. When it was ascertained, it was found to be a little north of the stipulated forty-ninth parallel. This meant that a line would have to be run due south from that point, along the shores of the lake, to the forty-ninth parallel. The result of this new boundary meant that the islands in the lake over which ownership had already been determined by a line through the middle of the lake, would have to be reapportioned.

Joseph Delafield, American Agent, now sought to counteract the boundary claimed by the British. He felt that since the British Agent, John Hale, had ignored the Long Lake as designated in Mitchell's Map, he could do so also. Therefore, Delafield began to search for evidence to prove that the Long Lake mentioned in the Treaty of 1783 was not Pigeon Bay but the Long Lake of the Kamanistegua or Dog River which emptied into Lake Superior forty miles northeast of Pigeon Bay. Acceptance of this claim by the

¹³ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 23, 1826. B.H.S.

British would give the United States much territory including the complete ownership of part of the chain of lakes from Pigeon Bay to the Lake of the Woods. (See Fig. 5.) Since Delafield substantiated his claim by the evidence of various British maps made by the geographers of the King, Porter decided to support the American Agent.¹⁴

The report of his findings which Delafield presented to Secretary of State Adams stated that the Grand Portage route from Lake Superior to the Pigeon River was formerly used by the British. However, under the supposition that it was within the limits of the United States, they had abandoned it and adopted the Kamanistegua River route to the northeast where they built Fort William. In regard to his findings, in his ascent of the Pigeon River, Delafield insisted that there was no direct water communication between the Long Lake (Pigeon Bay) and the Lake of the Woods as stated in the Treaty of 1783. Hence the Long Lake was not Pigeon Bay but the Kaministegua River outlet.¹⁵

When the Board met at Albany in February 1824, Delafield said he believed that the Kamanistegua River was the point on Lake Superior where the boundary should begin on its way

¹⁴ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 5, 1826. B.H.S.

¹⁵ Major Joseph Delafield, op, cit., P. 74.

westward. He insisted that he would not relinquish this claim until both parties would agree to declare Long Lake an imaginary place. Hale refused saying there could be no boundary until the Long Lake was found. The Commissioners then ordered that as soon as the weather allowed, the surveyors were to complete the surveys yet required from the mouth of the Pigeon River to the Lake of the Woods. After this, if time permitted and if it was deemed necessary, they were to make further examinations of the Fond du Lac route.¹⁶

At the meeting of the Board in October, Joseph Delafield presented, among other documents, a copy of Mitchell's Map of North America. He requested that Pigeon Bay be recognized as Long Lake since the map showed them to be the same body of water.¹⁷ The British Agent admitted the soundness of Delafield's claims according to Mitchell's Map. Nevertheless he stated that because the map possessed numerous inaccuracies, Delafield's claim could not be given credence. As Hale believed that the Long Lake was a separate body of water, he requested that a closer survey of the Superior region be made. Due to the fact that this would delay the activities of the Commission, Porter objected. To clarify the situation the Board requested the surveyors to make a

¹⁶ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, February 24, 1824. B.H.S.

¹⁷ Ibid., October 25, 1824.

series of maps of the area. Then it adjourned until December 20, 1825.¹⁸

Before that day arrived, Barclay called a special meeting of the Agents and Commissioners at New York for Tuesday, November 1, 1825, in order to clear up some affairs pertaining especially to the Agents. Barclay was embarrassed, therefore, when the British Agent, John Hale was not at the meeting. He apologized for Hale's absence and declared that the Agent was prevented from leaving the Province of Lower Canada by the command of the Governor-in-Chief. In order to facilitate matters, he asked permission of Porter to be allowed to act both as British Agent and Commissioner for that meeting. The request was granted.

Porter then asked for the survey reports and maps which were to be used by the Commissioners in making final boundary adjustments. In behalf of the British Agent, Barclay said that the British surveyors were still at work and for this reason he could present neither reports nor maps. He stated that because of the nature of the task they would not be ready before May 1826. The American Agent who had all material ready, presented it to the Board, and stated that the quadruplicate copies were in a state of preparation.

At this time Barclay asked that a balance be obtained

¹⁸ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 27, 1824. B.H.S.

between the accounts of the two governments. He felt that abstracts of all accounts and complete sets of vouchers should be presented to the Board at the next meeting. Porter agreed but informed Barclay that the Americans did not have duplicates of all vouchers. However, those they lacked could be obtained from the office of the United States Treasury where the originals were on file. Before they adjourned, the Board scheduled the next meeting for May 22, 1826.¹⁹

Many circumstances arose, however, which made a postponement necessary. James Ferguson, now at home in Albany, informed Porter that David Thompson, Chief British Surveyor, would not have his maps of Lake Superior ready by May. Ferguson, therefore, wished to know whether Thompson's anticipated absence would require a change in the date of the meeting.²⁰

John Hale also intended to be absent in May. In a letter to Delafield, a copy of which Delafield sent to Porter, the British Agent said his wife who was seriously ill, was not expected to survive. Since he did not know when he would be able to meet the Commission, Hale stated Barclay should feel free to replace him if that gentleman

¹⁹ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, November 1 & 2, 1825. B.H.S.

²⁰ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #131. Ferguson to Porter, March 30, 1826. B.H.S.

felt that he (Hale) was delaying the completion of the survey. In order that the Board would not be hampered in its proceedings, Hale said he would send all necessary documents in his possession to Barclay.²¹

Early in May, Porter was informed by Joseph Delafield that Commissioner Barclay, who was in Savannah, Georgia, requested a delay in the contemplated meeting. The British Commissioner proposed that the date be changed from May 22nd to June 22nd because he believed that Mr. Thompson could have his maps ready by that time.²²

While suitable arrangements were being sought for the next meeting, the surveyors of both nations were busily engaged in preparing all maps and calculations which would be required whenever the Board did get together. James Ferguson had a little trouble in preparing his papers. It seemed that David Thompson had not given Ferguson a portion of the British survey papers in spite of Ferguson's requests. Since he could not complete the survey in the St. Mary's River without these papers, Ferguson asked Porter to speak to Barclay about the matter.²³

In compliance with Barclay's wishes, Delafield notified

²¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, #111. Delafield to Porter, May 10, 1826. B.H.S.

²² Ibid., Box #1, #115. May 6, 1826.

²³ Ibid., Box #2, #132. Ferguson to Porter, June 24, 1826.

everyone concerned that the Board would meet on June 22nd. Later the date was changed to September 21st. When Peter Porter, who happened to be in Cabellsdale, Kentucky, heard that the date had been changed to September 21st, he wrote to Joseph Delafield who had arranged the date with Commissioner Barclay. Porter's tone was one of mild protest and complete resignation as he expressed his disappointment over the selected date for the meeting. He had taken it for granted, from his previous correspondence with Delafield, that the date would not be earlier than October 1st, and had arranged his journey to Kentucky accordingly. Nevertheless, Porter did not want to delay the progress of the Commission and said he would curtail his visit in Kentucky in order to arrive in New York City on the appointed day.²⁴

According to the seventh article of the Treaty of Ghent, the work of the Commissioners was to end at the most northwestern point of the Lake of the Woods. However, the second article of the Convention of 1818 between the United States and Great Britain provided that if the most northwestern point of the Lake of the Woods was not on the forty ninth parallel, a line was to be drawn north or south from that point to the aforementioned parallel.²⁵

²⁴ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #210. Porter to Delafield, August 16, 1826. B.H.S.

²⁵ William M. Malloy, Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements Between the United States of America and other Powers 1776-1909. Vol. I. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910. P. 633.

Barclay who was authorized by the British Government to ascertain this line, proposed to Porter that they work together in finding the forty-ninth parallel. Although Porter had not been authorized to perform this new task he told Barclay that he would refer the matter to Secretary of State Henry Clay.²⁶ It was not long thereafter that the American Commissioner received a letter from Clay which authorized him to concur with Barclay in carrying out the second article of the Convention of 1818. The Secretary of State congratulated Porter on his skillful handling of the duties of Boundary Commissioner and stated that President John Quincy Adams was quite pleased with the friendly relations which prevailed between Porter and Barclay.²⁷

At last, on Wednesday, October 4, 1826, the Board met in New York City. Each of the Agents presented his claims to the Commissioners on the following day. Delafield presented at least ten maps to substantiate his claims to the Kamanistegua line. He also placed before the Board an affidavit by James Ferguson in relation to the channels on each side of the island of St. George. The Agent of his Brittanic Majesty then presented his argument in support of the St. Louis River line together with two letters from the

²⁶ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #203. Porter to Barclay, August 24, 1826. B.H.S.

²⁷ Ibid., Box #1, #63. Clay to Porter, September 25, 1826.

late William McGillivray dated September 4, 1824 and August 30, 1825.²⁸

On October 6th, Hale continued his argument before the Commissioners who agreed, after Hale finished, that both Agents should have until Monday, October 9th to answer each other's claims. On that day the British Agent read two letters from Lieutenant Henry Bayfield of the Royal Navy and brought forth a map made by the Lieutenant to substantiate the claim of his country.²⁹ Two days later, after Delafield replied briefly to Hale's contentions, the Board adjourned until the 16th. This meeting dealt with routine business. On the 17th each Agent presented an account of disbursements. That of the American Agent included the period from March 1824 to March 1826 and contingent expenses from January 1824 to January 1826. Hale's account was for the years 1824 and 1825.³⁰

The two Commissioners met one week later and examined carefully the two claims together with all the documents concerned. After some discussion they found, they could not agree on the ownership of St. George's Island and the

²⁸ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 5, 1826. B.H.S.

²⁹ Ibid., October 9, 1826.

³⁰ Ibid., October 17, 1826.

route which the boundary was to follow from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake which was between the former body of water and the Lake of the Woods.

Both men attempted to compromise the issues in dispute. Porter suggested that instead of adopting the claim of either nation in the Superior area, the route of the Pigeon River, which was between the two claims, should be followed. Mr. Barclay, after claiming the St. Louis River route, offered as a compromise to take the Grand Portage route which was south of the Pigeon River. From the junction of the Grand Portage and the Pigeon River, the British Commissioner wished the boundary to follow a route partly overland and partly through the center of the waterway to Lake Nemecan. Since this was not in keeping with the treaty which stated that the boundary was to follow an all-water route, Porter rejected the plan. Barclay now attempted to compromise the dispute which centered around St. George's Island. This was that the island should go to Great Britain with the stipulation that the United States should have free use of the eastern channel of the island in exchange for which the British should be allowed the use of the southern channel around Barnhart's Island in the St. Lawrence River.³¹

³¹ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 23, 1826. B.H.S.

Since no compromise was reached, Barclay asked for time to confer with his government in the hope that the intervention of a third party would not be necessary.

President John Quincy Adams of the United States was reluctant to have a third party enter the dispute. He wished the Board to continue negotiations even though it was deadlocked because he felt some point of agreement could still be reached. Adams, in accordance with the recommendation of the Commissioners, gave Porter permission to erect a stone marker on the forty-ninth parallel at the west shore of the Lake of the Woods.³²

While Barclay was waiting to hear from his government, Porter was in almost constant communication with Henry Clay. In a private letter to him, Peter Porter placed the entire situation before the Secretary of State and accused Barclay for all the unnecessary delay in concluding the seventh article. Even in carrying out the instructions of the sixth article much time had been wasted, said Porter, because Barclay was always waiting for secret instructions from his local government. The claim of the British Commissioner that much difficulty had been encountered in surveying the water route from Lake Huron to Lake Superior

³² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #231. Clay to Porter, October 22, 1826. B.H.S.

was a deliberate "cover up to protect the delay".³³

No trouble had been encountered in that area, continued Porter, but since the British were not satisfied with the results of the survey under the sixth article, they were seeking excuses in an attempt to alter the decision. However, because the work had been carried out as per the treaty, it could not be changed except by diplomatic negotiation. England was envious of the fact that the United States possessed the only navigable channel around Barnhart's Island and feared the United States might close this route to British navigation.

That condition, boasted Porter, was entirely due to the greed of Mr. Barclay who was willing to sacrifice a navigable channel in exchange for Grand Island in the St. Lawrence. The American Commissioner said he had offered Barclay two alternatives but that the British Commissioner chose the island instead of the water route. Porter was very pleased with the situation. He felt that it was all right to negotiate this point provided the United States got the use of the St. Lawrence below St. Regis and also the use of the Grand Portage near the mouth of the Pigeon River.³⁴

³³ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #194. Porter to Clay, November 2, 1826. B.H.S.

³⁴ Ibid.

Porter asked Clay not to give St. George's Island to the British because the island had an area of over forty and one-half square miles, contained much timber and good soil. If the United States received this island, it would possess an excellent waterway from the Niagara River to Lake Superior with the exception of about a mile in the St. Mary's River where there were treacherous rapids. However, a canal had been built around these rapids to Lake Superior which eliminated any interruption of navigation.³⁵

The Board met on November 10, 1826. At this time Porter suggested that, since it would take several months for the governments of the two nations to read the reports of the two Commissioners in regard to the points in dispute and since it would save expenses, the Board should adjourn until March 1, 1827. It was hoped that by that date both Commissioners would have received instructions in regard to procedure which would clear up the difficulties encountered by the Board.³⁶

Evidently, Commissioner Barclay complained to his government about Peter Porter because Charles R. Vaughan, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Great

³⁵ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #209. Porter to Clay, November 7, 1826. B.H.S.

³⁶ Minutes of the Boundary Commission. November 10, 1826. B.H.S.

Britain wrote to Secretary of State Henry Clay concerning the behavior of the American Commissioner. In a reply to him Clay sided with Porter. He enclosed a copy of a letter which he had received from Porter and which proved that Vaughan had been misinformed in regard to the conduct of the American Commissioner.

Clay said that the United States would not infringe upon the Board's power by stepping into the dispute. If the American Commissioner refused or unreasonably delayed the execution of the treaty, then of course the United States would interfere. However, since no complaint of this nature had been made, the Board should be allowed to continue unhindered. To do otherwise, said Clay, would not only be unfair but would establish a precedent for future negotiations between the two nations. Nevertheless, should the Board be unable to come to an agreement, the United States would be willing to join Great Britain in settling the affair in order to obviate foreign intervention.

The Secretary of State accused Great Britain of mixing a question which had been settled (Barnhart's Island) with one which was still in controversy (St. George's Island). Ownership of the latter island by the United States would not harm British navigation because the United States had always felt that both nations had the right to use the lakes and rivers on the border no matter where the navigable

channel happened to be.³⁷

Due to many unforeseen circumstances, the Board did not meet until October 22, 1827 in New York City. In attendance were the two Commissioners, Joseph Delafield, David Thompson and Secretary Donald Fraser. John Hale, British Agent, and James Ferguson, American Surveyor, had been dismissed some time before.

As soon as the meeting opened, Barclay stated that because a compromise could not be obtained, his government had instructed him to proceed to close the Commission in the manner directed by the Treaty.

Porter replied that he believed an amicable settlement of the entire line would be beneficial to both countries. Nevertheless, since Barclay's persistence in his claim to St. George's Island precluded any hope of an ultimate agreement, Porter was prepared to terminate the function of the Board as soon as all accounts were straightened out.³⁸

The Board met every day until Saturday, October 27, 1827. On the 26th each nation presented an account of its expenditures from 1817 to 1827. The American disbursements amounted to \$84,786.19. The British expenditures totaled.

³⁷ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #232. Clay to Vaughan, November 15, 1826. B.H.S.

³⁸ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 22, 1827. B.H.S.

23,329 pounds, one shilling, six pence, three quarter penny or \$93,316.31. Since the British had spent \$8,530.12 more than the Americans, Porter agreed to pay Barclay the sum of \$4,265.06 to balance the accounts.³⁹ Thus each government paid \$89,051.25 which made the total cost of the boundary survey under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent \$178,102.50.

At the last meeting, the Commissioners agreed that their respective Reports, witnessed by one or both Secretaries were to be exchanged in the City of New York on December 24, 1827. The Board then adjourned for the last time.⁴⁰

It was not until the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 that the boundary in question was settled. That treaty granted free navigation to both countries of the Detroit River, St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair and certain channels in the St. Lawrence River. St. George's Island was given to the United States and the boundary from Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods started at Pigeon Bay. Thus all the claims of Peter B. Porter were recognized by the negotiators of 1842.

Although the business of the Boundary Commission under

³⁹ Minutes of the Boundary Commission, October 26, 1827. B.H.S.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent was officially closed, Porter's connection with it was not over. The accounts of the American Commission were not correct and for some time later, Porter and Delafield were going over them with the United States Auditor in Washington.⁴¹

Porter was dissatisfied with the whole affair especially with regard to the salary he had received as Commissioner. The Treaty of Ghent had not stipulated the amount of salary to be paid to the Commissioners but when Porter was appointed in 1816 his salary had been set at \$4,444.44 per year to correspond with that of the British Commissioner. In 1821, because Congress had reduced the appropriation for the survey, Porter's salary had been reduced to \$2,500. He now sought to recover the difference in his salary for the years 1821 to 1827. Porter appealed to Martin Van Buren, Secretary of State, who in turn presented the case to Andrew Jackson then President of the United States. Andrew Jackson replied that if Porter sought redress he should appeal to Congress or to the Judiciary.⁴²

When all the accounts of the American Boundary Commission had been checked, the Auditor found that Porter had

⁴¹ Augustus S. Porter Papers #600.006. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, June 22, 1828. B.H.S.

⁴² General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1. Miscellaneous Folder. Andrew Jackson to Martin Van Buren, November 20, 1829. B.H.S.

overdrawn \$9,444.32 from the United States Treasury. Porter insisted that he was entitled to credit the whole amount of his starting salary (\$4,444.44) for the years 1821 to 1827. This meant that Porter's account could be as much as \$13,611.08 over and above what was allowed. Porter said that actually the government owed him \$4,170.76. When Porter refused to pay the amount demanded by the government, his property was ordered to be seized to satisfy payment. However, he gained a stay of execution of the seizure until the case could be tried in court.

On December 16, 1829 before the case was tried, Stephen Pleolonton, Agent of the United States Treasury, acting under a law of May 15, 1820 which provided for a better organization of the Treasury Department, brought suit against Porter.⁴³ Once more his property was ordered to be seized and once again Porter obtained a stay of execution.

The United States now had two suits pending against Porter; one entered by the United States Auditor for the United States and one brought by the United States Treasury Agent for the government. The first suit was tried in the District Court of the United States for the Northern District of New York. On August 1, 1830 in Utica, the

⁴³ Peter B. Porter vs United States of America Plea and Notice of I.C.Spencer for Defendent. Filed September 25, 1832. U.S.District Courthouse, Buffalo, New York.

Federal District Judge decided in favor of Porter and declared his property free from seizure.⁴⁴ The second suit was tried before Judge Alfred Conkling who, on Friday morning January 25, 1833 at "½ past 9 o'clock" cleared Peter B. Porter of the charge of misappropriation of Federal funds.⁴⁵

Had it not been for the American Boundary Commission, the State of Minnesota would not be as large as it is today, for the area between the St. Louis River and the Pigeon River which Porter claimed for the United States, is now part of that state. Within this region lies the fabulous Mesabi Iron Range from which have been mined hundreds of millions of tons of iron ore. Undoubtedly, had the United States known then the potential value of the land, it would not have quibbled over a few thousand dollars in the salary of a man who had given his best efforts to his nation.

The activity of the Boundary Commission which, under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent, was in existence for eleven years, is a credit to both nations. The results it achieved are due to the intelligence, fortitude and diplomacy of both Commissioners. The Canadian

⁴⁴ Peter B. Porter vs United States of America. op. cit.

⁴⁵ Engrossing Register, August 1827 to May 1835. U.S. District Courthouse, Buffalo, New York.

American boundary as delineated under the sixth article has never been disputed. The work under the seventh article was also well done for, although the final conclusion was delayed until 1842, the original lines of survey laid down by Porter and Barclay were followed by Webster and Ashburton.

Today the Canadian-American boundary from the Atlantic to the Pacific is the longest unfortified boundary in the world, an excellent example of the trust and friendship which exists between the two nations.

CHAPTER VII

PRIVATE ENTERPRISES OF PETER B. PORTER

Up to this time we have dealt with Peter Porter as a public figure. In this chapter we shall discuss how he utilized the time between these various public offices to promote his private interests. These enterprises, in which Augustus usually was a partner, not only enriched the two men but also formed the nucleus of industrial activity on the frontier.

In 1805, the Porter brothers, interested in the potential power which could be derived from the swift river at Niagara Falls, purchased some land at the head of the great cataract from the State of New York. The same year, because lumber for the erection of buildings was of prime importance, they built a sawmill. It was operated by a short canal or raceway which was almost parallel to the river bank. In 1807, the Porters, in connection with Porter, Barton and Company, erected a grist mill a short distance from the sawmill.¹ This too was propelled by a canal coming in from the river and turning a mill wheel. Since it was the only grist mill in the vicinity, it

¹ Holland Land Company Papers, Report of Joseph Ellicott, 1809. Buffalo Historical Society.

proved to be a profitable undertaking, for people from miles around brought their grain here to be ground.

Close by the grist mill the two men erected a cording mill, about thirty-six feet long, where rope was manufactured for British and American vessels which plied the Great Lakes. The hemp used in making the rope was obtained for three hundred eighty dollars per ton from James Wadsworth, who grew it on the flats of the Genesee River. For the purpose of supplying part of their own hemp, the Porters purchased about one thousand acres of swampland from the Holland Land Company for twelve shillings per acre. This land, located on the Ridge Road a few miles from Lewiston, had to be drained before it could be utilized. The tar used in the production of cordage was obtained from New York.²

The Porters were next attracted by the industrial possibilities of the islands at the brink of the falls. Accordingly, in 1811, Augustus petitioned the New York State Legislature for permission to purchase them. The request was refused, however, because the legislature believed that the site was ideal for a state prison or a state arsenal. Nevertheless the Porters did not give up

² Augustus S. Porter Papers. #200.019. Augustus S. Porter in account with Porter, Barton and Company. Feb. 12, 1819. B.H.S. In writing this chapter the author has used the Augustus S. Porter Papers and the Peter A. Porter Collection as sources of general information.

hope of obtaining the islands but decided to await developments. Actually, the state could not sell the land since the Indian rights to the property had not been extinguished.

Soon after, the brothers learned that Samuel Sherwood, a lawyer, had a document from the State of New York which permitted him to obtain two hundred acres of any unsold or unassigned territory in the state. The Porters purchased this paper from Sherwood and bided their time.

On September 12, 1815, the state extinguished the Indian claim to Goat Island and the other islands at Niagara Falls. Among those who signed the purchase papers were Peter B. Porter, trusted friend of the Indians, Red Jacket, Seneca Indian Sachem, and Daniel D. Tompkins, Governor of New York State. The terms of purchase stipulated that, in addition to one thousand dollars in cash and an annuity of five hundred dollars in perpetuity, the Seneca Indians were to retain hunting and fishing privileges on the islands. As soon as the deal was concluded, the Porters selected the islands as part of the land specified in the option which they had purchased from Sherwood. The deed to the lands was received from the state on November 16, 1816.³ It was made out to Augustus Porter, but he immediately deeded one-half of the land to his brother.

³ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #350.012. Deed to Goat Island, New York State to Augustus Porter, November 16, 1816. B.H.S.

The following year, in order to utilize the property, the brothers built a bridge to Goat Island. It was located farther upstream than the bridge which is there at present. During the winter of 1817-1818, this structure was swept away by the heavy ice floes. A new bridge was erected in 1818 where the present one stands. Actually, the bridge did not go to Goat Island directly but went first to Bath Island which lies between the former island and the main shore. The bridge from the mainland to Bath Island was four hundred feet long; that from Bath Island to Goat Island was two hundred twenty-five feet in length. The latter span was anchored to the river bottom by five piers, the former by seven.

The scenic beauty of the great cataract was quickly recognized by the enterprising Porters for, a toll of twenty-five cents was charged to tourists who wished to use the bridges in order to see the Horseshoe Falls from the American side.⁴ At the very brink of this cascade was a footbridge which led over the rocks to a tower situated at the edge of the precipice. This was the famous Terrapin Tower. For an additional payment, the visitor was allowed to ascend the narrow stairway leading to the narrow parapet from which he could behold the awesome spectacle around him.

⁴ Joseph Delafield, The Unfortified Boundary. Edited by Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs. Privately printed in New York. pp. 222-223.

Many travelers objected to the tower at Terrapin Point and called the Porters vandals for destroying the natural beauty of the waterfall.

Around the American Falls a fence was built. For sixpence tourists were allowed to go through a door in the fence and into a garden from which one could obtain a view of that falls. Here, along the face of the cliff, the Porters built a winding stairway which led to the river below. From this point the visitor could gain a new perspective of the falls and, if he wished, take the ferry which was owned by the shrewd and ingenious brothers, to Canada.⁵

The natural assets of the river were utilized further by the Porters who, taking advantage of the gradual drop of about sixty feet in the Niagara River from the upper rapids to the precipice, dug a canal seven and one-half feet deep and thirty rods long. This waterway, known as the upper raceway, extended from the rapids down toward the American Falls and discharged its water in the river just above the falls. Manufacturers were then invited to build on the land between this canal and the main stream.

Among the factories built at this time was a cloth dressing and wool-carding establishment owned by James

⁵ Interview with Augustus G. Porter in his home at 127 Buffalo Avenue, Niagara Falls, New York, October 17, 1949.

Ballard. A short time later it was taken over and enlarged by D. and S. Chapman who used the plant to manufacture woolen cloth and satinet. In 1821, a forge, a rolling mill and a nail factory were erected by Messers. Bolls and Gay. In 1822 the Porters built a large flour mill which not only had four runs of stone but also possessed all the modern improvements of the time. A year later Jesse Symonds established a paper mill near the Goat Island bridge and soon the island itself became the site of many factories. As early as 1826, on Bath Island, Albert H. Porter and H. W. Clark built a large paper mill which was later purchased and expanded by L. C. Woodruff.⁶ It was not until 1902 that the last factory on the islands was torn down to make way for the state park which is enjoyed today by visitors from all over the world. Niagara Falls, or Manchester as it was then called, was developing rapidly because the foresight of the Porters made prosperity prevalent in the community.

The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, however, stopped the progress of industry at Niagara Falls, for although the waterway went through Niagara County it did not touch the city in which the great cataract is located. Great sources of water power had been created by the canal

⁶ Albert H. Porter, Historical Sketch of Niagara, 1678-1876. n.p. 1876. p. 42.

at points where none had existed before. Towns like Black Rock, Lockport, Medina and others west of Rochester began to flourish while Niagara Falls remained somewhat inactive.

Peter and Augustus Porter realized that it was time to interest the manufacturers of the nation in the vast potentialities for industry in the Cataract City. Therefore, on June 24, 1825, they advertised in the various newspapers of the eastern part of the country an account of the industrial advantages at Niagara Falls. It was entitled An Invitation to Eastern Capitalists and Manufacturers.

In this solicitation it was pointed out that Niagara Falls could supply a thousand mills with a never failing power at an annual cost of not more than fifty dollars each. The location of the city was excellent since it was close to Lake Ontario from which boats could go down the St. Lawrence River. Access to the Atlantic Ocean was assured through the Erie Canal. Of course the upper lakes and western ports could be reached easily by way of the Niagara River and Lake Erie. An abundant supply of fuel for use in manufacturing was guaranteed by the extensive forests which covered the vicinity. Raw materials such as wool, hemp and flax were close at hand while other needed supplies could be obtained quickly and cheaply through the Erie Canal. The Porters stated that although they would be willing to sell all or part of their holdings, with the

exception of the farm and private buildings of one of them, they preferred that the entire property be sold to one company.⁷ The invitation went unheeded for the men with money chose to invest it in the new towns along the canal. In an attempt to revive industry at Niagara Falls the upper raceway was extended in 1826. This aided temporarily since some new factories were erected on the extension, but the stimulus was not sufficient to recreate great activity.

Undismayed by this turn of events, the Porters planned an even greater project. This included the erection of a harbor with a wharf opposite Grass Island near the end of river navigation. An hydraulic canal was contemplated from this point to a reservoir or canal basin to be located atop the river bank a short distance from the falls. Power would be available from the fall of water which, after operating wheels set below the level of the ground, would drop two hundred feet to the river below. Liberal offers of land were made to anyone who would proceed with the plan but again no one came forward to take advantage of the facilities at Niagara Falls.⁸

⁷ Peter A. Porter Collection, Miscellaneous Papers, Invitation to Eastern Capitalists and Manufacturers, June 24, 1825. B.H.S.

⁸ Edward D. Adams, Niagara Power, Vol. I. Privately printed for Niagara Falls Power Company, Niagara Falls, New York, 1918. P. 50.

It was not until 1861, long after the Porter brothers died, that the hydraulic canal was completed. The first mill to use water from this canal was the Charles B. Gaskill Flour Mill in 1875. The first company to engage in the development and sale of power on a large scale was the Niagara Falls Hydraulic Power Manufacturing Company. The plan under which this firm operated was outlined by the Porter brothers in the 1840's.⁹

Although Peter Porter was deeply interested in the industrialization of Niagara Falls, he was even more anxious that Black Rock become a center of great commercial activity. One of his early enterprises in that village was the establishment of a shipyard where vessels were constructed for the use of Porter, Barton and Company. Much of the white oak timber used in these ships was taken from Porter's lands.¹⁰ His activity in this field caused a promising industry to arise on the banks of the Niagara.

Peter Porter, not being the kind of individual to limit himself to one type of industry, entered the brewery business before the war in partnership with Nathaniel Sill. This profitable establishment was discontinued when the

⁹ Charles M. Dow, Anthology and Bibliography of Niagara Falls, Vol. II. Albany: J.B. Lyons Co., 1921. P. 1022.

¹⁰ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.042. Peter Porter to Asa Stannard, November 25, 1813. B.H.S.

Niagara Frontier was burned in 1813.

After the war, Porter's business ingenuity spread out into a variety of enterprises. Because he knew that a vast source of water power would be created by the Erie Canal and by the harbor which he had built, the farsighted entrepreneur applied to the State of New York in 1817 for permission to lease the hydro power rights in Black Rock.¹¹ His request was granted. This lease, in addition to the land he already owned along the harbor, practically gave him a monopoly of the hydraulic power sites in the village. As early as 1820 Porter began to sell some of these sites and to sublet others to industrialists who wished to avail themselves of cheap power to run their factories.

In partnership with his nephew William A. Bird and Robert McPherson, Porter built a large flour mill which had five runs of stone. It was completed in June 1828 at a cost of twenty thousand dollars.¹² Most of the wheat in the general vicinity was taken to this mill which could produce one hundred barrels of flour per day. For a short time the flour produced by this mill was rather faulty and sales were low. After unsuccessfully attempting to find the trouble, Porter took samples of the flour which

¹¹ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-24. Jonathan Reynolds to Peter Porter, February 21, 1817. B.H.S.

¹² Ibid., #C-112. Porter to John Jacob Astor, June 16, 1828.

was ground at Black Rock to New York City to compare it with other flours. There he discovered that the flour barrels in use in the village were made from wood which had not been well seasoned. As soon as the fault was corrected the mill sold flour in great quantities. One sale, to a ship captain who was going up the lakes, was for one thousand barrels.¹³

Flour was sold for four dollars per barrel when purchased in one thousand barrel lots. The price jumped to four dollars and seventeen cents when purchased in lots of two hundred and fifty. In lots of fifty or less the cost was anywhere from four dollars and nineteen cents to four dollars and twenty-five cents per barrel. Much grain was sold too. In August of 1830, Porter's mill sold four thousand bushels of wheat at eighty cents per bushel.¹⁴

Porter was not afraid of competition. He advised all interested capitalists that there was enough power at Black Rock for many flour mills. The only drawback was that in the spring ice floes would hamper the flow of water to the mills and thereby curtail production. Nevertheless, due to Porter's guidance, a group of seven or eight flour mills was erected in Black Rock in the late twenties. Most of

¹³ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-141. William A. Bird to Peter Porter, Aug. 1, 1830. B.H.S.

¹⁴ Ibid., #C-142. Bird to Porter, August 8, 1830.

them were located at the foot of Ferry Street and at the foot of Amherst Street. From these developed the milling industry of modern Buffalo which is today the largest flour milling city in the world.¹⁵

Peter Porter was always ready to take advantage of any opportunities which arose in the little village of Black Rock. When he heard that the state was ready to sell certain mill seats along the canal, he immediately advised his brother Augustus to be present at the sale. He felt it was imperative that they purchase any strategically located mill seats which might enhance the industrial possibilities of the village.¹⁶ Porter's interest in his town caused it to be recognized as one of the most flourishing communities in New York State.

One of Porter's great enterprises was the founding of the Buffalo and Black Rock Jubilee Water Works Company. The firm, which was to supply drinking water to both villages, began in 1827. Its capital stock of twenty thousand dollars was obtained by selling one thousand shares of stock at twenty dollars per share. Part of this money was used to purchase the Jubilee Water Springs which were located at the present intersection of Delaware and Auburn Avenues in

¹⁵ Buffalo Evening News Almanac and Fact Book for 1949. Buffalo Evening News. P. 105.

¹⁶ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.148. Peter to Augustus, August 17, 1831. B.H.S.

Buffalo. (See Figure 6.)

The company was authorized to enter private lands with the consent of the owners and upon payment of a just compensation could lay and construct conduits below the level of any street. It was also privileged to lay conduits below the level of any highway, lane, alley or public grounds within the village of Black Rock or within the limits of Buffalo.¹⁷ The Jubilee Water Works Company immediately laid a wooden conduit from the spring to Black Rock. Since the springs were located on high ground, the water flowed through the wooden pipes by gravity. In 1829 the company extended its service to the northern part of Buffalo. Very soon after, pipes were laid along Main Street to the southern part of that town. By 1832 sixteen miles of conduits had been put into use.

The officers of the Buffalo and Black Rock Jubilee Water Works Company for the year 1832 were as follows: Peter B. Porter, President; Donald Fraser, S.C. Brewster, Peter B. Porter, Directors; Absalom Bull, Secretary and Treasurer; Donald Fraser, Superintendent.¹⁸

During the firm's early years money was urgently

¹⁷ Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Buffalo, January 1, 1911 to December 31, 1911. Buffalo: James D. Warren's Sons Official Printers, 1911. P. 291.

¹⁸ Truman C. White, Erie County, New York, Vol. I. Boston History Publishing Company, 1898. Pp. 296-297.



Fig. 6. Jubilee water spring house.

needed for materials and labor costs. Consequently, each stockholder was called upon from time to time to give financial aid according to the amount of shares he held. Four calls on the stockholders were made in 1827.¹⁹ In the following year three calls were made.²⁰

In spite of the almost constant call on the stockholders for funds, Peter Porter had enough faith in the enterprise to increase his shares to five hundred eighty one by 1830.²¹ His faith was rewarded for in 1834 the water company began to operate at a profit. This made people anxious to purchase stock in the firm.²²

The following year, Porter, as spokesman for the Jubilee Water Works Company, tried to sell part of the water system to the City of Buffalo. In a letter to the Common Council of Buffalo he gave a brief resumé of the history of the company and then offered the Council two propositions by which a sale could be effected.

He stated that the company owned acres of valuable land on which were located the principal springs. The

19 Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-86, #C-89, #C-90, #C-91. G.W.Bush to Peter Porter, Aug. 15-Oct. 3, 1827. B.H.S.

20 Ibid., #C-106. Nelson Randall to Peter Porter, April 8, 1828. B.H.S.

21 Ibid., #C-29. Absalom Bull to Peter Porter, January 18, 1830.

22 Ibid., #C-164. N.W.Randall to Peter Porter, December 18, 1834.

first well was gauged in the summer of 1827 by Simeon Dewitt, Surveyor General, who estimated the water supply to be sufficient to accommodate one hundred thousand people. The water was pure, better than that of Lake Erie and always clearer than that found in other springs. In addition to the springs, the company owned reservoirs, buildings and seventeen miles of aqueducts. The diameter of the largest conduit which brought water to the reservoir in Buffalo was six inches. Conduits on the main streets were four inches in diameter, elsewhere they were one and two inches. The company's expansion program had cost sixteen thousand dollars since 1827. However, the firm declared its first dividend of one thousand dollars in 1834.

Although the Jubilee Water Works Company would not sell until it had contacted all its stockholders, some of whom lived in various parts of the state, Porter believed that they would all agree to the proposition he was about to make.

This was, in effect, that since the water system and springs which fed Buffalo were entirely separate from those which supplied Black Rock, the company was willing to sell to Buffalo the springs, water system, buildings and land needed to furnish water to the latter community, for twenty thousand dollars.

The second proposition made by Porter was one which had been fully authorized by the stockholders. This stated

that for twelve consecutive years the Jubilee Water Works Company would convey to reservoirs in Buffalo, at places designated and built by that city, whatever amount of water was needed. The cost of this service would be three thousand dollars for the first year, four thousand dollars for the second year, five thousand for the third year and five thousand annually for the remaining nine years to be paid semi-annually. The company felt this was a fair price since the population of Buffalo was increasing steadily. Black Rock, however, was to receive all the water it desired regardless of any arrangement made between the water company and Buffalo.

At the end of twelve years the Common Council would receive the entire use of all the aqueducts going to Buffalo with the exception of the six inch main conduit which brought the water to the main reservoir. With care, said Porter, Buffalo would have enough water to supply its people and industries for the next twenty years. He estimated that for six thousand dollars per year, Buffalo could supply its entire population of fifteen thousand with water. This would amount to forty cents per person or about two dollars per family. In view of the fact that the people of Buffalo wasted so much water, the price was extremely low. In concluding his letter, Porter reminded the Common Council that, if it should decide favorably to the proposition, that body had the company's permission to

employ surveyors or engineers to gauge the wells.²³ The City of Buffalo rejected both propositions.

In 1843, however, the village of Black Rock decided to purchase one-half of the Jubilee Water Works Company. The administrators of the village believed that since the stock of the company was not paying dividends, they would be able to purchase at a very low figure. At this time Porter was still the major stockholder having three hundred and seven shares.²⁴ Since most of the other stockholders sold out at a very low price, the village was able to acquire four hundred and ninety-eight shares for twenty five hundred dollars.²⁵ Porter did not sell any of his shares to the village.²⁶ With money obtained by bond issue, Black Rock extended the water system to various parts of the village. In 1850 the Jubilee Water Works Company conveyed its entire interest to the village of Black Rock.

When the town was incorporated into Buffalo in 1853, the water works became the property of Buffalo. In keeping

²³ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-170. Porter to Buffalo Common Council, April 27, 1835. B.H.S.

²⁴ Ibid., #C-226. William a Bird to Porter, July 1, 1842.

²⁵ Ibid., #C-228. Bird to Porter, April 10, 1843.

²⁶ Inventory and Appraisal of Estate of Peter B. Porter. Niagara County Surrogate Court Records. Drawer P. Niagara County Hall, Lockport, New York.

with the rules prescribed in the act of incorporation in regard to the Jubilee Water Works, the Buffalo Common Council appointed a Jubilee water commissioner. In 1870, two additional commissioners were appointed. That year, the Common Council, due to a revision of the Buffalo City Charter, received the power to fix, regulate and establish rates and charges for the use of the Jubilee water. All money received from the sale of the water went into a fund known as the Jubilee Water Fund.

Up until 1898, a few families in Black Rock were still using Jubilee water. Eventually the residents of the Black Rock district decided that the money in the fund was to be used to erect and equip a library in Black Rock.²⁷ The building constructed according to these plans is located on Niagara Street and is known today as the Jubilee Branch of the Buffalo Public Library.

The waters of the Jubilee Springs are still flowing swiftly. Today they supply the fountain at Gates Circle in Buffalo. The remainder is piped into Forest Lawn Cemetery where it eventually finds its way to Scajaquada Creek which runs through the cemetery grounds.²⁸

²⁷ Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Buffalo, January 1, 1911 to December 31, 1911. Buffalo: James D. Warren's Sons, Official Printers, 1911. P. 292.

²⁸ Ibid., P. 293.

The formation of the Buffalo and Black Rock Jubilee Water Works Company was not Peter Porter's only venture into the field of public utilities. In 1833 he decided to construct a railroad from Buffalo to Niagara Falls. He carefully planned the route of the railroad, making sure that it did not go too near the canal towpath lest the horses, becoming frightened by the locomotives, throw their riders into the canal.²⁹ Upon Porter's request, a bill, authorizing him to incorporate the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company, was passed by the New York State Legislature on May 3, 1834.³⁰

Porter had no railroad building experience but he was confident that he could overcome this deficiency by closely investigating the method of construction. As a result of his study, he was able to compute the cost of the railroad as slightly under four thousand dollars per mile. Since the Porter finances were insufficient to meet the cost of construction, stockholders were sought. The patronage of John Jacob Astor, the well known financier, was eagerly solicited but that gentleman, because of his advanced age, refused to aid the new venture. However, Porter was able

29 Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.042. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, February 6, 1834. B.H.S.

30 Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-175. Petition to New York State Legislature by residents of Buffalo, January 16, 1836. B.H.S.

to secure other subscribers. The Davis and Brooks Company, iron importers from whom Porter was to purchase the rails, subscribed to one-fourth of the total cost of the railroad.³¹ Among the large stockholders was Augustus Porter who purchased one hundred twenty shares of the railroad stock.³² The officers of the company were Peter B. Porter, President; Colonel William A. Bird, Vice-President; and George P. Stevenson, Secretary-Treasurer.

Construction of the railroad was begun in 1835. Cross ties were laid on the ground and to these were spiked two parallel lines of wooden rails six inches square. On each rail was nailed a flat bar of iron about two inches wide and one-half inch thick which was called a "strap rail". The timber for the railroad was obtained from land owned by Porter and prepared in a sawmill which he owned and operated in partnership with Absalom Bull. For supplying and preparing the lumber, Messrs. Porter and Bull charged the railroad company \$3054.89.³³ The sawmill, the value which was only \$145.07, was dismantled after this handsome

³¹ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.043. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, August 20, 1834. B.H.S.

³² Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-117. Receipt to Augustus Porter for installment on stock of Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company, August 31, 1835. B.H.S.

³³ Ibid., #C-180. Porter and Bull in account with the B & N.F.R.R. Company, September 1836.

profit had been realized.³⁴

Upon completion of the railroad route from Black Rock to Tonawanda on August 26, 1836, a locomotive of the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company made its initial run between the two villages. The engine, the first to be seen in Western New York, was called the Buffalo. Since construction of the remainder of the route was not completed at this time, a steamboat supplied service from Tonawanda to Niagara Falls. Eventually, when tracks were laid along the entire route, two additional locomotives, the Niagara and the Peter B. Porter were put into service.³⁵ Each of the small, four-wheeled coaches of this pioneer railroad held sixteen to twenty-four persons.

The new railroad was not without its difficulties. The seventh section of the act which incorporated the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company, stated that the railroad could take all the land necessary for building the road provided it paid a just compensation to the owners of such property. Section ten of the same act permitted the company, when necessary, to lay its tracks along the

³⁴ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-195, Inventory of personal property belonging to the Sawmill lately occupied by Messers. Porter and Bull. 1836. B.H.S.

³⁵ Ibid., #C-202, Davis Brooks to Peter Porter, May 25, 1837.

edge of any highway which was six rods or more in width. Since the main street running through Black Rock was six rods wide, the company laid tracks along its edge. This action infuriated the many Buffalonians who had built homes along that road. They complained that because the railroad ran between their homes and the highway it not only endangered their lives but ruined the value of their property. When the people sought compensation from the railroad for this damage, the officials of the company refused to pay. Consequently, the people petitioned the Legislature of New York State to pass an act compelling the railroad to redress their wrongs. They stated that chartered monopolies such as the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company, were "soulless creatures of legal essence".³⁶

Accordingly, this petition in the form of a bill was submitted to the New York State Assembly on February 23, 1836. It proposed that all persons whose lands had been affected by the railroad be entitled to compensation. To receive payment, each complainant would have to submit a written claim to the office of the company. If the money was not received within three months, the corporation

³⁶ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-175. Petition to New York State Legislature by the residents of Buffalo. January 16, 1836. B.H.S.

could be sued in any court having jurisdiction of the matter.³⁷

To combat this legislation an underhand suggestion was made to Porter. This plan was that he procure a short counter resolution which would contain the signatures of some of his friends and also those of the same individuals who had affixed their signatures to the first document. This contradictory evidence, presented to the legislature at the proper time, would serve to strangle the bill.³⁸

The people of Buffalo were not the only group to object to the practices of Porter's company. The residents of Tonawanda brought suit against the company because the railroad not only encroached upon the highway but also caused mud holes to form in the thoroughfare. The suit was dropped when redress was assured.³⁹

In spite of the hostility of some of the people in Buffalo toward the railroad, Porter was able to gain some concessions from the Common Council of that city. The Buffalo terminus was at Pearl Street and the Terrace, about

³⁷ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-177. An act to amend the act entitled "An act to incorporate the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company passed May 3, 1834". Isaac Smith to Peter Porter, March 17, 1836. B.H.S.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., #C-203. T.W.Woolson to Peter Porter, May 30, 1837.

one mile from the center of the city. For the convenience of Buffalonians and other passengers, Porter wished to extend his railroad along Court Street from a point where that street intersected the railroad, to the west side of Main Street. Accordingly, he wrote to the Buffalo Common Council for permission to carry out his plan.

Porter's letter stated that the recent Buffalo ordinance which prohibited the use of steam engines within the city limits, because they were deemed to be dangerous, was unfair. The loud noise made by locomotives informed everyone of their presence and therefore made them even safer than horse drawn cars. The same ordinance prohibited horse drawn cars to move faster than a walk. This also evoked streng protest from Porter who claimed that since the latter vehicles were on tracks, they were far less dangerous than carriages which went from one side of the street to the other. He believed that the law should be relaxed to permit horse drawn vehicles to proceed at a maximum speed of five miles per hour. The Common Council was told that, should it refuse to grant permission to extend the track, the railroad would build a hotel at the city line and passengers would be left there instead of in downtown Buffalo.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-186. Peter Porter to the Buffalo Common Council, August 1836. B.H.S.

As soon as the Council granted this request, the railroad asked that group for permission to erect a car house at the termination of the track extension on Court Street. It was to be twenty-two feet wide by about sixty or eighty feet long. The car shed would be used not only as a shelter for passengers and baggage but also to break up the "promiscuous assembl' of Boys, Women and Children, which always takes place around a train of stationary cars, when in the open street".⁴¹

Many people availed themselves of the railroad to visit Niagara Falls. Although over three hundred people were brought to the site of the scenic wonder each day, the lack of accommodations caused only a few to remain. Porter felt that if a new hotel were built, Niagara Falls could replace Saratoga Springs as the place for discussing and adjusting national and state politics.⁴²

The company experienced a difficult period in 1837 when a severe economic depression swept the United States. It had just purchased a new engine from the H.R.Dunham Company of New York City because the Niagara was constantly undergoing repairs. In addition, the company had ordered

⁴¹ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-186. Peter Porter to the Buffalo Common Council, August 1836. B.H.S.

⁴² Clay-Porter Correspondence, Peter Porter to Henry Clay, August 9, 1839. B.H.S.

four passenger cars from the Eaton and Gilbert Company of Troy, New York, to be used with the new engine. Because of the poor financial condition of the railroad, Porter attempted to cancel the order for the cars. However, before the letter of cancellation reached the Eaton and Gilbert Company, two cars had already been sent to the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company. Eaton and Gilbert was willing to release Porter from the contract if he would accept the two cars which were then in his possession and remit fifty dollars to pay in part for the remaining cars which were still under construction.⁴³

About a year later, the Buffalo went off the track, plunged down an embankment and stopped at the edge of a creek. None of the passengers was hurt. Nevertheless, extensive repairs, which the company could ill afford, were required to place the damaged locomotive back into service.⁴⁴

By 1842 the railroad was heavily in debt. To make matters worse, the Buffalo was again in need of repairs which were calculated to amount to sixteen hundred dollars. The Niagara was of little use. Since the only engine running was the Tonawanda, formerly the Peter B. Porter,

⁴³ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-204. Eaton and Gilbert to Peter Porter, June 26, 1837. B.H.S.

⁴⁴ Ibid., #C-208. Augustus Porter to Peter Porter. July 29, 1838. B.H.S.

service was hard to maintain. All the profits made by the railroad were used for upkeep and repairs.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company managed to survive until 1854 when it was leased to the New York Central Railroad.⁴⁶ Thus the first railroad on the Niagara Frontier faded into oblivion.

Another industry which attracted Porter was that of the manufacture of iron. At Black Rock, in 1829, Messers. Gibson, Johnson and Ehle established an iron works known as the Gibson Foundry. The iron works contained two furnaces each capable of accommodating four tons of ore at a blast. The bellows were such that one pound of coal could melt six or seven pounds of iron. At that time, although iron sold at twenty-five dollars per ton, the Gibson Foundry had such an abundance of orders that it accepted only the most profitable.⁴⁷ However, because the owners did not get along well together, Johnson and Ehle decided to sell their interests in the business.

Immediately, Peter B. Porter, ever alert for any opportunity to make financial gain, purchased one-third of

⁴⁵ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-208. Augustus Porter to Peter Porter, July 29, 1838. B.H.S.

⁴⁶ William A. Bird Papers. Autobiography of William A. Bird, March 23, 1874. B.H.S.

⁴⁷ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-148. Peter B. Porter to J.M.Halley, January 1831. B.H.S.

the foundry for himself and one-third for his step-son, John Breckinridge Grayson.⁴⁸ The firm became known as the Gibson, Grayson Company. Porter worked incessantly to improve the foundry. Occasionally hydraulic power could not be obtained by the foundry due to the ice in the canal. To remedy this situation Porter installed a small steam engine in the plant from which power could be obtained when necessary. Thus Gibson and Grayson continued uninterruptedly to manufacture much of the iron used on the Niagara Frontier.⁴⁹

In spite of Porter's efforts, the Gibson, Grayson Company began to lose money. When he investigated closely the reasons for the constant losses, Porter found that the old Gibson Foundry had so many debts and liabilities for which it was still responsible that success seemed impossible. Accordingly, he and John Grayson withdrew from the partnership after suffering considerable losses.⁵⁰

Not long after this ill fortune Peter Porter became interested in beginning a ferry service from Bird Island at Black Rock, to Canada. To inaugurate this service, it

⁴⁸ Will of Peter B. Porter, Niagara County Surrogate Court Records, Niagara County Hall, Lockport, New York. Book #3, Pp. 209-238.

⁴⁹ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.042. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, February 6, 1834. B.H.S.

⁵⁰ Will of Peter B. Porter, op. cit.

was necessary to obtain a lease from New York State. Since roads and landing docks had to be constructed on both shores at a great expense, Porter was anxious to obtain a long term lease. He calculated that a lease of at least twenty years would be required in order to recover the initial investment in the project.

Since he was very busy at the time, Porter asked his brother Augustus to go to Albany to obtain the lease and inquire about toll rates. In regard to tolls, Porter feared that the rates, if fixed by the New York State Legislature, would not be high enough to guarantee them a profit. As for the length of the lease, he cautioned Augustus, "I think you ought to propose 60 years--work hard for 50 & not go below 40".⁵¹

As events turned out, it was Peter Porter who went to the state capital to secure the lease. After he spoke to various politicians and office holders in Albany, he realized that, if he wished to obtain the lease, he would need more statistical information to present to the legislature. Since this vital information was in the possession of Augustus, Peter Porter asked him to come to Albany with the necessary papers.⁵² Although the lease was obtained,

⁵¹ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.055. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, January 1, 1833. B.H.S.

⁵² Ibid., February 2, 1833.

the ferry enterprise was dropped because Porter had pledged most of his finances to the construction of the railroad.

Peter Porter did not confine his business interests to public utilities and factories. He owned shares in several vessels. On August 8, 1830 he received a check for \$157.20 as a dividend on the ship Henry Clay.⁵³ The steamship Niagara proved to be a good investment also, for in 1832 the Porter brother divided thirty-two per cent of the income from the vessel and still had enough left over for repairs.⁵⁴

Porter's many investments and enterprises not only made him wealthy but enriched Black Rock as well. By 1840, largely because of his guidance and encouragement, the village possessed a diversification of industry scarcely equalled by any community of its size in the United States. Among the more unique of these was a distillery, a furniture factory and a plaster mill.⁵⁵

Truly the growth of Black Rock and to a large extent that of the Niagara Frontier was a direct result of the efforts of Peter B. Porter. His faith in his village led him to toil unceasingly to make it one of the most

⁵³ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-142. William A. Bird to Peter Porter, August 8, 1830. B.H.S.

⁵⁴ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.053. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, Dec. 14, 1832. B.H.S.

⁵⁵ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-215. Lewis Allen to Peter Porter, October 12, 1840. B.H.S.

promising localities in the nation. Porter's alertness caused the slightest advantages of Black Rock to be turned into great opportunities. Because he utilized wisely the hydro-power afforded by the Erie Canal and the Black Rock Harbor, a great industrial center arose on the banks of the Niagara. Peter Porter's energetic nature and willingness to attempt anything that would further the progress of his community marked him not only as the founder of frontier industry but also as one of the greatest businessmen of the nineteenth century. The importance of the Black Rock section of Buffalo is to this day a fitting memorial to his fame.

CHAPTER VIII

PRIVATE LIFE OF PETER B. PORTER

Peter Porter was an outstanding businessman and political figure not only of the frontier but of the nation as well. This fact, however, did not affect either his social or his family life. When Porter arrived in Canandaigua in 1795, he soon became an integral part of the society of that village for his dynamic personality and exceptional abilities secured for him many friends. Although he was busy with his duties as Clerk of Ontario County, he always found time to participate in the social functions of the small community. His life in that place was both interesting and pleasant. It was, therefore, with much regret that Peter Porter, in 1810, moved from Canandaigua to Black Rock where, due to the growth of his business ventures, his constant presence was required,

Porter found the village of Black Rock very much different from that which he had left. While Canandaigua bustled with people, Black Rock contained but five families who confined their activities to those necessary for making a living. He realized that the best way to attract settlers to the vicinity was to stimulate commerce. Therefore, after he built a stone house near the river, at about the site of what is now Breckenridge Street, Porter set

about to improve the Black Rock Harbor in order to facilitate the shipment of goods by Porter, Barton and Company. As the firm grew and warehouses and shipyards were erected in the village, people began to settle in the area. By the time the War of 1812 began, it was a thriving, promising community.

Porter's diligent efforts went to naught, however, for, when the British burned the Niagara Frontier in December 1813, Black Rock suffered severely. Most of the houses, barns and shops in the little village were destroyed. Porter, Barton and Company lost all of its facilities. Damage amounted to many thousands of dollars.

When the war ended Porter happened to be in Albany. While he was there he applied to the state for permission to purchase a one hundred acre tract of land, known as the Ferry Lot, which was situated in Black Rock. When the New York State Senate received his request, it made a resolution to the effect that the land be given to Porter in appreciation for his services in the war. The gift was declined by Porter who refused to take title to the land without making compensation to the state. He thanked the Senate for its generosity which, Porter said, was undoubtedly motivated by his losses in the war. However, since many of his neighbors had suffered as much as he had, in effect if not in amount, Porter felt, "a strong reluctance to be

placed on a different footing from them."¹ Perhaps the above statement more than any other relating to him, shows the sterling character of Peter Porter.

In July 1815 when he returned to Black Rock, Porter found that his home was destroyed. Since he had nowhere to stay, the use of a small fort was offered to Porter by the commanding officer, who moved his troops to a larger fort near the river.²

As the scars of war began to disappear from the village, Porter decided to build a new home a little farther south from the site of his former domicile. Accordingly, he purchased a part of the Ferry Lot and began to make plans. The new home was to be more commodious than the old one because a man of his position entertained many notables. Another reason for building a large dwelling was the Porter's new home, like the old one, would be used for village gatherings and meetings. Mr. Canfield of Schenectady, a well known mason, and five men, were employed by Porter to construct the stone building. By the fall these men were to complete the exterior; during the winter, Mr. Hooker, a

¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #159. Peter B. Porter to the New York State Senate, February 16, 1815. Buffalo Historical Society.

² William A. Bird Papers. William A. Bird to Chas. Norton, Esq., February 25, 1865. B.H.S.

carpenter from Niagara Falls, was to finish the interior.³

The mansion was on a site noted for its beautiful scenery. Located at what is now 1192 Niagara Street in Buffalo, the house was surrounded by spacious lands sloping down from the west side of Niagara Street to the shore of the Niagara River. On the grounds was an ornamental summer house, an ice house, smoke house, stable, carriage house, and other small buildings. Near the shore was a large artificial fish pond stocked with fish taken from the river for the use of the family. Fruit trees were everywhere. The front lawn, about two hundred and fifty feet wide, extended to the road from which a carriage way and footpath led to the front door. In the middle of this lawn was a large cannon. On the posts of the high picket fence which bordered the highway were large bombshells of the late war.

The two story house was fifty feet long, forty feet wide and about thirty feet high. The outer walls, from the foundations to the roof, were of stone two feet thick. The inner partitioning walls were of brick about one foot thick. In the basement, well lighted by adequate windows, were Porter's private office, kitchen, washroom, closets, cellar, hall, and stairs going to the first floor. Here, a hall ten feet wide ran from the front to the rear of the house. A sitting room and a dining room were on the north side of

³ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.36. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, May 17, 1816. B.H.S.

this corridor, a parlor on the south side. The second floor, divided like that below, contained bedrooms. Fine hand carved door frames, glass door knobs and marble mantels could be found in every room. A doorway led from the hall to a small veranda. From this vantage point one could see a great distance up the lake or down the river or, on still nights hear the roar of the falls.⁴ (See Fig. 7.)

The estate was complete in every respect except that it lacked the presence of a gracious hostess. Porter's many activities had precluded any thoughts of marriage, but shortly after the war, Porter, who was still considered an eligible bachelor, met Laetitia Preston Breckinridge Grayson of Kentucky. (See Figure 8.) She was then the widow of Colonel Alfred Grayson of Virginia and mother of a son, John Breckinridge Grayson. Mrs. Grayson was born on June 22, 1786, to Mary Hopkins Cabell and John Breckinridge who had been Attorney-General of the United States during the administration of Thomas Jefferson.⁵

After a respectable courtship, Peter Porter and Laetitia Grayson were married at Princeton, New Jersey on October 16, 1818. The ceremony was performed by Samuel Stanhope Smith,

⁴ Frank H. Severance, editor, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, Vol. XVI. Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1912. P. 269.

⁵ Henry P. Adams and W. Porter Wiggins, Descendants of Colonel Joshua Porter, M.D. Saratoga Springs, New York: George W. Bell. P. 21.



Fig. 7. Home of Peter B. Porter at Black Rock.



Fig. 8. Laetitia Porter

President of Princeton University.⁶

When the couple arrived in Black Rock, Mrs. Porter was accompanied by a retinue of five slaves. After a few weeks, these negroes obtained their freedom by escaping to Canada just across the river. This was not an unusual occurrence, for Porter often received letters from friends in the south requesting him to apprehend their runaway slaves who were supposedly on the way to Canada.⁷ To replace the slaves who had absconded, the Porters, on their return from a visit to Kentucky in 1820, brought back five more negroes to Black Rock.⁸

With the removal of Mrs. Porter to Black Rock, the Porter mansion became the center of much activity. The kind and lovable mistress of the Porter household soon won a host of friends. Porter's duties as Boundary Commissioner kept him away from home much of the time, but his home-comings were always occasions for a series of social events. When the Boundary Commission arrived on the Niagara Frontier in 1819, the entire group was entertained lavishly by the Porters.⁹ Since many of the men employed by the Commission

6 The Niagara Patriot. Buffalo, November 3, 1818. p.3.

7 Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, September 28, 1830. B.H.S.

8 Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-42. Declaration of Peter and Laetitia Porter, July 20, 1820. B.H.S.

9 Joseph Delafield, The Unfortified Boundary. Edited by Robert McElroy and Thomas Riggs. New York: 1943. p. 219.

were residents of Black Rock, the entire town became the scene of much festivity.

The home life of the first family of Black Rock was much like that of any other family in the village. While Mrs. Porter engaged herself in the manifold duties of keeping house, her husband attended to his various business interests. When the pressure of business had been especially heavy, Porter would relax by fishing in the swift waters which bordered his estate. As in the case of many fishermen, his piscatorial efforts often came to naught.¹⁰ On the Sabbath, Mr. and Mrs. Porter, although residents of Black Rock, attended services at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Buffalo.

The happy, tranquil life led by the Porters was made even more joyous when a daughter, Elizabeth, was born to them on April 19, 1823. Among the many congratulatory messages received by the new parents was one from Henry Clay.¹¹

Perhaps, because the household tasks were increased by the arrival of Elizabeth, her father secured the indenture of an eight year old boy. He was Benjamin Riley, a poor lad

¹⁰ Augustus S. Porter Papers. #100.003. Peter Porter to Jane Porter, March 18, 1819. B.H.S.

¹¹ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, June 15, 1823. B.H.S.

of Buffalo who became bound to Porter until he reached the age of twenty-one. In return for the boy's services, Porter agreed to instruct him in the art of farming and in the rudiments of reading and writing. At the termination of the indentureship, the servant was to receive a new Bible, one holiday suit of clothes valued at thirty-five dollars, and two other suits of clothes.¹²

Another event which caused great excitement in the Porter home was the visit of General Lafayette who had aided the Americans during the Revolutionary War. The old warrior, on tour of the United States, was greeted with much pomp and ceremony by the people of a grateful nation. When the Frenchman arrived at Black Rock, Porter, chairman of the Black Rock Citizens Committee, delivered an address of welcome. After Lafayette's reply, the honored guest, his son, George Washington Lafayette, his secretary, Colonel A. Le Vasseur, and several other gentlemen were taken to Porter's home where breakfast was served. The villagers had decorated the gate which led to the courtyard in front of General Porter's home. On the apex of the arch was perched a live eagle, supported on both sides by the flags of the United States and France. The columns of the gateway were wound with spiral wreaths of variegated colors.¹³

¹² Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-65. Indenture of Benjamin Riley, December 29, 1824. B.H.S.

¹³ Black Rock Gazette, June 7, 1825. P. 2.

As soon as breakfast was over, the citizens of Black Rock passed through the house to greet the General. Following this spontaneous gesture, the Committee, Lafayette's party and invited guests boarded the canal boat Seneca Chief. To this boat were attached four decorated barges whose carsmen towed the Seneca Chief through the harbor to the entrance of the canal. Here two sets of horses waited to tow the flotilla to Tonawanda where Lafayette was introduced to the Niagara County Committee. After a brief ceremony, the party boarded carriages for Niagara Falls where a great celebration was held in honor of the French General. Later, after viewing the cataract and visiting Fort Niagara, the visitor left for Lockport. All the way across the state, Lafayette was feted and acclaimed as he proceeded toward Boston, Massachusetts for the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument.¹⁴

Not only famous people, but also relatives were entertained by the Porters. Mrs. John Breckinridge, mother of Mrs. Porter, was a frequent visitor who sometimes spent the Christmas holidays at Black Rock.¹⁵ On one occasion when she was ready to leave Black Rock for her home in Kentucky, Peter Porter and his family, ever solicitous of her welfare,

¹⁴ Black Rock Gazette, June 7, 1825. P. 2.

¹⁵ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, December 7, 1824. B.H.S.

accompanied her. Because Mrs. Breckinridge was old and infirm, the journey in their private carriage was a slow one. After eleven days of riding they were still one hundred thirty miles from Cabellsdale, the ancestral home of the Breckinridge family.¹⁶ After a short visit in Kentucky, during which they adjusted some property matters, the Porters left for New York City where Mr. Porter attended a meeting of the Boundary Commission.

Although traveling was difficult in Porter's day, he had an unique method for getting from one place to another in a short time. When he traveled great distances, he started out each morning at sunrise. He would drive for about three hours, then stop for an hour to have breakfast and to feed the horses. After driving two or three hours longer, he stopped for one and one-half hours to rest the horses. Then he resumed his journey until sundown. This procedure enabled him to travel from thirty-five to forty miles per day.¹⁷

As a private citizen Porter was very active in the affairs of the community. When the prosperous years which followed the War of 1812 gave way to a period of financial stringency, the people of Western New York blamed their

¹⁶ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.88. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, July 29, 1826. B.H.S.

¹⁷ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #219. Peter Porter to Dodge, September 22, 1828. B.H.S.

ills upon the unfair practices of the Holland Land Company. They complained that since the company was a non-resident proprietor and therefore not obliged to pay taxes for the maintenance of highways and schools, the burden of taxation upon the people was unusually severe. Furthermore the residents of the area felt that land was too expensive and that the company's rates of interest were usurious.

Peter Porter immediately became interested in aiding his neighbors to bring about reforms in the methods of the land company. His interest was prompted also by the fact that he wished to even an old score with Joseph Ellicott, agent of the Holland Land Company. Some years before, Ellicott, desiring to build up the towns of Mayville and Portland in New York State by making them stopping points on the route to Pittsburgh, asked Porter, Barton and Company to ship its goods by way of the two small towns. The portage company refused and sent its materials southward by way of Erie and Waterford, Pennsylvania instead.

Accordingly, in 1811 when the transportation company sought an extension of its monopoly from the state, Ellicott used his political influence to defeat the request.¹⁸ The ill feelings between Porter and Ellicott increased when the latter refused to sell a certain tract of land to the

¹⁸ Joseph Ellicott's Letterbook, 1805-1813. Ellicott William Peacock, January 29, 1811. B.H.S.

portage company at wholesale rates. The land agent declared that since Porter, Barton and Company had not fulfilled the improvement provisions of a previous purchase, it was evident that the lessees of the portage desired the land merely for speculative purposes.¹⁹

In 1819, Niagara County held a meeting to decide what action should be taken against the Holland Land Company. At this gathering, Peter Porter proposed that non-residents be taxed for maintenance of roads, bridges and schoolhouses. In retaliation the land company began to sue settlers for non payment of lands. Benjamin Barton, part owner of the portage company was forced to pay for a lot which he had purchased some time before. Porter himself was in possession of property which he had purchased in 1815 and had not yet paid.²⁰

The Holland Land Company continued its obnoxious practices until 1827 when the people decided to take stern action against the firm. Led by Peter Porter, protest meetings were held in Lockport on January 2 and 3, 1827.²¹ Similar gatherings were held in Buffalo on February 7 and 8,

¹⁹ Joseph Ellicott's Letterbook, op. cit., Ellicott to Paul Busti, April 13, 1811.

²⁰ Paul D. Evans, Holland Land Company, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, Vol. XXVIII. Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1924. P. 354.

²¹ Black Rock Gazette, January 6, 1827. P. 2.

1827.²² At these assemblies it was suggested that the Holland Land Company reduce the price of land, release every settler of a substantial part of his debt and renew its contracts with the settlers. The groups demanded too, that taxes be assumed equally by resident and non-resident landholders. In Buffalo the meeting resolved itself into a permanent body called The Agrarian Convention of the Holland Purchase. The new organization planned to meet annually in Buffalo on the first Wednesday of January.²³

A committee of the convention drew up a petition to the New York State Legislature asking that the property of the Holland Land Company be taxed the same as that of citizens of the state. At Albany, the lower house of the legislature passed the bill by a large majority but the upper house adjourned without acting on the proposed legislation. In the fall of 1827, however, the bill was quietly brought up and eased through both houses of the legislature.

The Holland Land Company now instituted many reforms. All holders of land contracts whose debt of principal and accrued interest exceeded the true value of their lands could have their contracts modified and renewed at a fair price, provided that one-eighth of the new price be paid upon change of contract. The balance was to be paid with

²² Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser, February 10, 1827. P. 2.

²³ Ibid., February 15, 1827. P. 2.

interest in six yearly installments. Other policies were adopted at this time to aid the settlers.²⁴

Peter Porter's successful campaign for land reform was praised by all the newspapers of the Niagara Frontier. The Agrarian Convention of the Holland Purchase became a powerful group which continued to meet annually to consider the relations between the settlers and the Holland Land Company. Porter attended these meetings, usually as the elected delegate from Buffalo.²⁵

Peter Porter was as active in the field of education as he was in the fight against the unfair practices of the Holland Land Company. In 1824, the New York State Legislature, recognizing Porter as a learned man, appointed him a Regent of the University of the State of New York.²⁶

Late in 1827 Porter became interested in establishing a high school for the youth of his community. Accordingly, on November 15, 1827, a group of influential men met at the Eagle Tavern in Buffalo to make plans for the founding of a seminary of learning based upon the monitorial system. The individuals who composed this group became known as the

²⁴ Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser, November 15, 1827. P. 3.

²⁵ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-159. Dyre Tillinghast to Peter Porter, February 14, 1834. B.H.S.

²⁶ Black Rock Beacon, February 26, 1824. P. 2.

Buffalo High School Association. The organization decided to procure not less than ten thousand dollars in stock subscriptions and named a committee, of which Porter was a member, to prepare and publish an address on the value of a high school in order to solicit the aid of the public in the venture.²⁷

About a week later, an article appeared in the local newspaper which explained the system and method of teaching to be used in the new institution. The school was to have two departments, one for males and one for females. It was made clear that the sexes would be segregated. In addition to pursuing the courses of study which were offered, each student was obliged to participate in gymnastics. Since the New York State Legislature gave the association permission to hold twenty-five thousand dollars worth of property, the group decided to sell one thousand shares of stock at twenty-five dollars each. Stockholders were to have preference in sending their children or wards to the school because a large enrollment was expected.²⁸

Among the subscriptions to this institution which, using temporary quarters, opened its doors in January of 1828, was that of Peter B. Porter for two hundred dollars.

²⁷ Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser, November 22, 1827. P. 3.

²⁸ Ibid., November 29, 1827. P. 2.

The next year, when a suitable building was erected to house the school, Porter was called upon to pay an additional one hundred and six dollars.²⁹ For some time the high school prospered but, after a gradual decline in attendance, it was discontinued.

In June 1829, Porter was reappointed a Regent of the University of the State of New York, but less than a year later he resigned the position. Porter's action was prompted by the fact that he lived too far from Albany, where the Board of Regents met, to be able to discharge the duties of the office in a manner suitable to the just expectations of the public or satisfactory to himself.³⁰

When on April 8, 1836, the New York State Legislature passed an act incorporating the University of Western New York, Peter B. Porter was made one of the trustees of the school.³¹ A few days later, he was asked to attend an informal meeting of the Board of Trustees to determine the course to be followed by the institution.³² The university was heavily endowed. It received five acres of land from

29 Augustus S. Porter Papers, #650.004. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, April 8, 1829. B.H.S.

30 General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, Miscellaneous Folder. Peter B. Porter to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly at Albany, March 24, 1830. B.H.S.

31 Records of the University of Western New York, May 4, 1836 to August 10, 1836. B.H.S.

32 Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-178. A.T.Hopkins to Peter Porter, April 13, 1836. B.H.S.

Colonel Alanson Palmer, and a little over three and one-half acres from Ebenezer Walden. In addition to these gifts the people of Buffalo endorsed the corporation to the amount of two hundred and twelve thousand dollars. Individual subscriptions of fifteen thousand dollars were not rare.

The University of Western New York leased, for fifteen hundred dollars, the building which had been erected by the Buffalo High School Association and opened its doors in November 1836. The Board decided that Commencements were to be held annually on the second Wednesday in July.³³ This pioneer effort in the field of higher learning did not last long. The project collapsed when its benefactors, seriously affected by the financial panic of 1837, were forced to withdraw their support. Porter's activities in the field of education were terminated with the expiration of the University of Western New York.

On July 14, 1827, the Porter mansion at Black Rock was again the scene of great rejoicing for, a son, Peter A., was born to Peter and Laetitia Porter.³⁴ The birth of this boy completed the family circle. The Porters were a happy, devoted group. Mrs. Porter's ardent love for her husband can be best illustrated by a letter in which she said, after

³³ Records of the University of Western New York, op. cit.

³⁴ Henry P. Adams and P. Porter Wiggins, op. cit., P. 22.

informing him of some damage to the Black Rock Dam:

.....for your own reputation sake do not let it work so heavily upon your mind for depend on it, it will endanger your life if you do. What will all this world be to us if you are gone..... 35

The affectionate Porters were not separated when President John Quincy Adams appointed Mr. Porter to the office of Secretary of War in 1828, for the new cabinet member took his family with him to the capital. The Washington home of Mr. and Mrs. Porter soon became the meeting place of the society of that city. This was due in no small measure to the soft spoken Mrs. Porter whose pleasing personality and sincere interest in her guests made her the most popular woman in Washington since Mrs. Madison occupied the White House.³⁶ Since Mrs. Porter had been reared in one of the most aristocratic families of the south, she had been taught the intricacies of hospitality almost before she learned to read and write. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that she should become a prominent figure in society.

The stay of the Porters in Washington was terminated when John Quincy Adams turned over the administration of the government to Andrew Jackson in 1829. Before departing for Black Rock, Mr. and Mrs. Porter went to the

³⁵ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-100. Laetitia Porter to Peter Porter, January 31, 1828. B.H.S.

³⁶ Margaret Bayard Smith, The First Forty Years of Washington Society. New York: Scribner's, 1906. P. 249.

Washington City Orphan Asylum to secure the indenture of two young girls, Mary Ann Mace who was thirteen years old and Martha Mace who was eleven. The sisters were bound to the Porters until they reached the age of eighteen. In return for their services the girls were to be taught the common duties of housewifery and plain needlework. Mary Anne and Martha were to be taught also to read, write and "to understand the elementary rules of vulgar arithmetic." Upon completion of the terms of indenture, each was to receive a Bible of the Old and New Testament, ten dollars in cash and a new suit of apparel.³⁷ The Porter household now consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Porter, Elizabeth and Peter A. Porter, Benjamin Riley and the two Mace girls.

At Black Rock the Porters resumed the routine to which they had been accustomed before going to Washington. The family had scarcely settled down when a procession of guests visited them. Once again sounds of laughter could be heard emanating from the large stone mansion. Many visitors, after enjoying the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Porter, received letters of introduction to Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Porter of Niagara Falls.³⁸ To this day, many visitors from

³⁷ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-123. Indenture of Mary Anne and Martha Mace, March 6, 1829. B.H.S.

³⁸ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #100.043. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, August 17, 1829. B.H.S.

all over the world stop at the home of Augustus G. Porter at Niagara Falls where the hosts are as friendly and cordial as were their great grandparents many years ago.³⁹

The happy, peaceful routine of the Porter household was not destined to last. On July 27, 1831, Laetitia Porter, who had been intermittently ill for some time, passed away in her home at Black Rock.⁴⁰ The tragedy was a severe blow to her immediate family and to her friends because the generous Mrs. Porter was admired by everyone. Inasmuch as the family of Peter Porter, like a few others at Black Rock, buried their dead on their own premises, Mrs. Porter was interred in the family plot on her own estate overlooking the majestic Niagara River. In later years her remains were removed to Oakwood Cemetery at Niagara Falls where they lie next to those of her husband.

Immediately after the burial of his wife, Porter wrote to General Winfield Scott asking him to grant a furlough to Lieutenant John B. Grayson, Mrs. Porter's son by a previous marriage. In his reply, Scott extolled the virtues of Mrs. Porter and informed Porter that, on his own responsibility, he had authorized Grayson's furlough without

³⁹ Interview with Augustus G. Porter, 127 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls, New York, November 22, 1949.

⁴⁰ Tombstone of Laetitia Porter, Oakwood Cemetery, Niagara Falls, New York.

referring the case to Washington.⁴¹ When John Grayson arrived at Black Rock he went to his mother's house immediately. His grief was profound.⁴²

Among the many prominent personages who offered condolences to the Porter family was Henry Clay. The eminent statesman, after speaking of the extraordinary qualities and endowments of the deceased, invited Porter to spend some time with him at Ashland, the palatial Clay residence in Kentucky.⁴³

At the request of Mrs. Breckinridge, Porter decided to take his two small children to Kentucky for the winter. He believed it best to close his home at Black Rock except for the basement since that part of the house could be used by the caretaker, his wife and one other hired man who were to look after the estate while he was gone. Porter, worried about the two Mace girls whom he did not want to leave unprotected, asked his brother Augustus to care for them. When the Porters left for Kentucky, they were accompanied by Elizabeth Norton who was to tutor Elizabeth and Peter during their stay in the south.⁴⁴

⁴¹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #2, #234. General W. Scott to Peter Porter, August 5, 1831. B.H.S.

⁴² Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.048. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, August 17, 1831. B.H.S.

⁴³ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, August 22, 1831. B.H.S.

⁴⁴ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.047. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, September 15, 1831. B.H.S.

While the children were at Cabellsdale, Porter, whose health began to fail after the death of his wife, placed himself in the care of a physician in New York City. There some experiments were made on his ears which improved his hearing. However, Porter felt that this occurrence was not due to the administrations of the doctor but to the fact that his health in general had ameliorated.⁴⁵ After spending a few weeks in New York City, he went to Saratoga Springs where the medicinal spring water baths improved his health further.

In June 1832, Peter Porter went to Kentucky to return his children to Black Rock. When the time came for the children to depart, Mrs. Breckinridge could not bear to part with them. Because he knew that the children would be better off in Kentucky where their health, safety and morals would be well protected, Porter allowed them to remain with Mrs. Breckinridge.⁴⁶ A short time later, he returned alone to Black Rock where he found the cholera raging in the town.

In the spring of the following year, Porter again went to Cabellsdale to see his children. His arrival found everyone in good health except Elizabeth who was recovering from an attack of Scarlet Fever which had brought her close

⁴⁵ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Porter to Clay, January 9, 1832. B.H.S.

⁴⁶ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #600.044. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, July 7, 1832. B.H.S.

to death. Porter remained in Kentucky just long enough to visit with Henry Clay and to be assured of Elizabeth's recovery.⁴⁷ Finally, after making several trips to the south to see his family, Porter brought the children back home.

At Black Rock, Elizabeth and Peter were tutored by a conscientious schoolmaster named Mr. Such. This man was more than just a teacher for, when the elder Porter was away, Mr. Such assumed some out of school authority over young Peter. The lad had excellent abilities but was indifferent in his conversations, a condition which his tutor blamed on the many absences from home of the boy's father. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was a fine student who could converse with ease in French.⁴⁸

In 1837, Mr. Peter B. Porter decided to build a home in Niagara Falls. However, because of the severe financial panic which gripped the nation at that time, he found it difficult to secure sufficient funds for the project. Consequently, he wrote to all those who owed him money demanding payment without delay. With John and Solomon Hatch who for six years owed payments on a bond and mortgage, he

⁴⁷ Augustus S. Porter Papers, #102.070. Peter Porter to Augustus Porter, April 10, 1833. B.H.S.

⁴⁸ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-183. Mr. Such to Peter Porter, August 4, 1836. B.H.S.

was quite severe. Porter asked these gentlemen to comply at once in order to spare him the unpleasant task of advertising and selling the mortgaged premises.⁴⁹ Thus, by pressing his debtors, Porter was able to begin the erection of his new home.

Late in 1837, Porter's attention was diverted from this project by the so-called Patriot's War in Canada which caused much excitement on the Niagara Frontier. Many prominent Buffalonians sympathized with the Canadian rebels. These Americans gathered about two hundred recruits, broke into the Court House at Buffalo, stole about two hundred muskets and marched to the ferry at Black Rock. This movement alarmed the Canadians who quickly assembled five hundred men on their shores and called for one thousand men from Toronto to repel the contemplated invasion. Peter Porter, along with other sober minded citizens, sent a messenger across the river to allay the fears of the Canadians and to inform them of the true state of affairs. Consequently, they withdrew their troops; the same day the Americans dispersed.⁵⁰

Porter hoped that Canada would soon free herself from

⁴⁹ General Peter B. Porter Papers, Box #1, Goodyear Folder. Peter Porter to John and Solomon Hatch, February 21, 1837. B.H.S.

⁵⁰ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Peter Porter to Henry Clay, October 15, 1837. B.H.S.

European domination but felt that it was the duty of every citizen of the United States, as it was of the government, to abstain from all interference with the internal affairs of other countries. Since the political condition of the people of Canada did not show any extreme tyranny or oppression, no intervention should be made.⁵¹

Together with many of his neighbors, Porter issued a manifesto which reminded the Americans that, should they give aid to the rebel William Lyon Mackenzie by raising an army to support him, they would incur severe penalties.^{52A} A short time later the American steamer Caroline, which had been carrying men and supplies to the rebels who were camped on Navy Island, was burned at her pier on the American shore by the Loyalist forces of Canada. The incident aroused the people on the frontier to great heights of indignation, especially since Amos Durfee of Buffalo was killed in the action. To prevent armed expeditions from leaving her shores, the American Government immediately called out the militia.

On January 5, 1838, General Winfield Scott was dispatched to the Niagara Frontier. The able general soon restored order by calming the frenzied people and admonishing the rebels. While Scott endeavored to maintain order,

⁵¹ Daily Commercial Advertiser, Buffalo. December 8, 1837. P. 2.

⁵² Ibid., December 16, 1837. P. 2.

President Martin Van Buren issued a proclamation asking the rebels to disband.⁵³ This, plus the fact that the British regulars and the Canadian militia had concentrated opposite Navy Island and commanded it, caused the rebels to flee.⁵⁴

After the fear of another war with Great Britain had been removed, Porter and his children visited Mrs. Breckinridge in Kentucky. There, during the summer of 1838, he relaxed and enjoyed the company of his friend Henry Clay who lived near Cabellsdale. After a pleasant stay in Kentucky, the Porters went to New York City. The children remained with friends in the metropolis but Porter started homeward, arriving at Black Rock in September.

There was much to be done upon his arrival as the Porters were preparing to move to their recently completed mansion in Niagara Falls.⁵⁵ The new home on Falls Street stood back from the thoroughfare on a little hill. A low stone wall surrounded the premises and elm trees shaded the lawn of Kentucky blue grass.⁵⁶ (See Fig. 9.)

⁵³ Daily Commercial Advertiser, Buffalo. January 12, 1838. P. 2.

⁵⁴ Truman C. White, Erie County, New York, Vol. I. Boston: Boston Historical Publishing Company, 1898. P. 331.

⁵⁵ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Peter Porter to Henry Clay, October 8, 1838. B.H.S.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Clay to Porter, September 12, 1838.

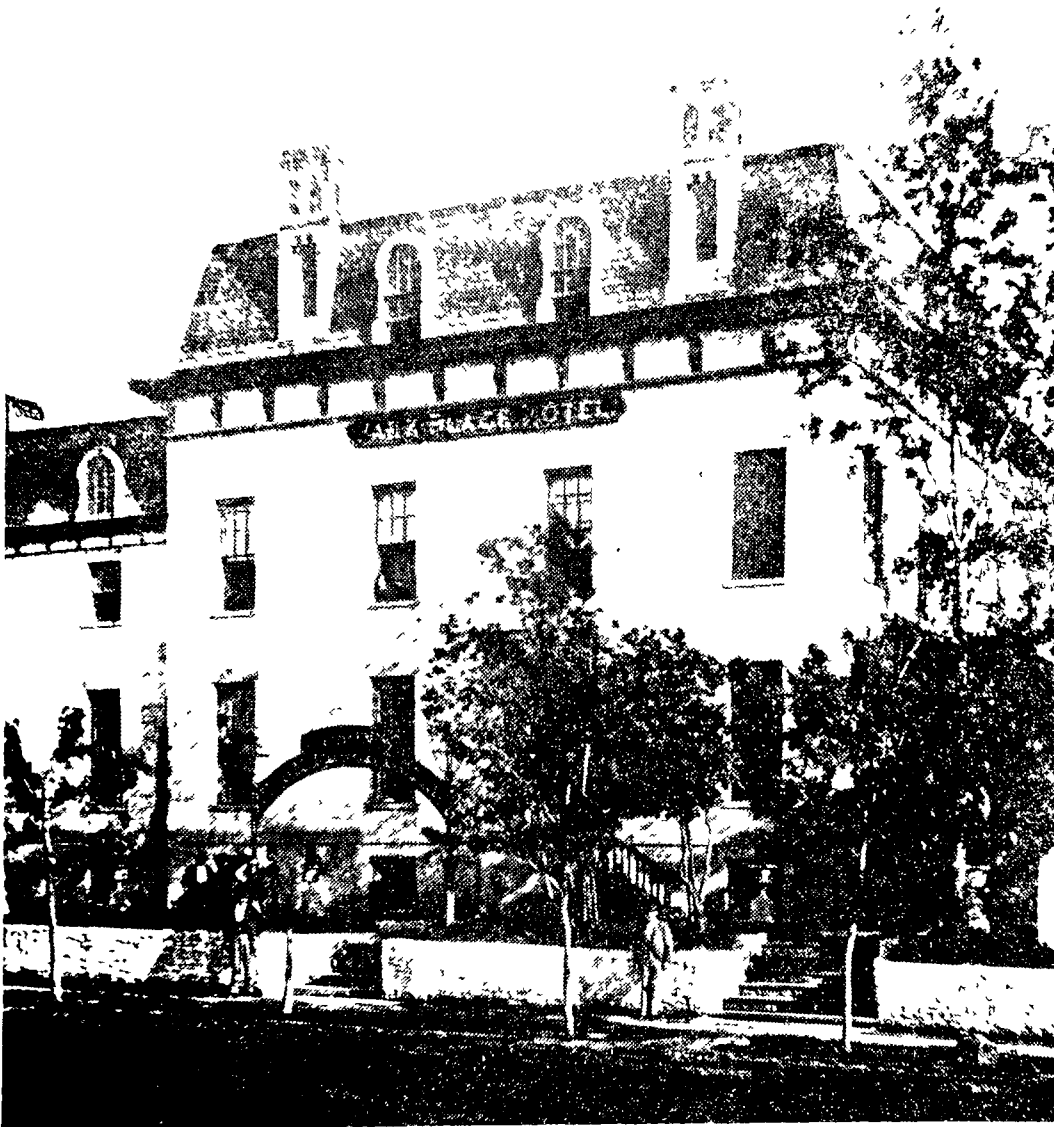


Fig. 9. Home of Peter B. Porter at Niagara Falls.

It was Peter Porter's custom, after he moved to Niagara Falls, to give an annual winter festival for the entertainment of the villagers. Dancing was the usual form of amusement at these village parties, but sometimes a play was enacted also. These festivities gave much pleasure to the people who thronged the mansion as well as to the host.

Many notables, both American and British were made comfortable in the Porter home. Numberless friends, too, visited the Porters and at times they were hosts to entire families.⁵⁷ Among the well known guests were General Winfield Scott, Joel R. Poinsett, Secretary of War of the United States, Henry Clay, and John Quincy Adams former President of the United States.

Henry Clay and his son James arrived at Niagara Falls in July 1839. The famous statesman was entertained by his friend, Peter Porter, in a quiet and distinctive manner since Clay had expressed a desire that there be "no fuss and no parades."⁵⁸ Included in the public ceremonies planned in honor of Clay was a dinner to which Porter invited the Buffalo Common Council. Most of the functions, however, were held in the privacy of Porter's home.

Late in July when Clay left for Montreal, his host

⁵⁷ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Porter to Clay, August 9, 1839. B.H.S.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Clay to Porter, May 14, 1839.

accompanied him as far as Rochester. On his journey northward to Canada, Clay was impressed with the countless inquiries concerning the health of Peter Porter. It was evident to the Kentuckian that his friend was not only very popular but also well loved by many.⁵⁹

In 1843, John Quincy Adams, under whom Porter had served as Secretary of War, visited Niagara Falls. After taking Mr. Adams to the place where the Caroline incident occurred, Porter conducted him on a tour of the falls itself. This trip included a view of the cataract from the Terrapin Point Tower. His host then took Adams to Canada to view the battle sites of Lundy's Land and Chippewa. At the latter place, Porter explained the military movements of the forces who fought in the engagement. For his part in the Battle of Chippewa, Porter had been decorated by Congress. The men, after dining at the Clifton House in Canada, returned to Porter's home where a party was given in honor of Adams.⁶⁰

Porter was quite happy in his new home in Niagara Falls because it placed him near his brother Augustus with whom he had always been closely associated. In 1841 Augustus told Peter that he wished to divide all their joint property

⁵⁹ Clay-Porter Correspondence. Clay to Porter, July 31, 1839. B.H.S.

⁶⁰ The Sun, New York City. August 2, 1891. P. 22.

except the islands, the mills above the falls and the grist mill. Augustus' desire was prompted by the feeling that he and Peter could perform the task better than their heirs.⁶¹

Although both men were getting old, their interest in the area which they had developed did not diminish. From time to time the Porter wealth made its presence known by sponsoring various businessmen who wished to settle on the Niagara Frontier.

In later years, Peter Porter's palatial home in Niagara Falls was purchased for use as the Park Place Hotel and still later it was known as the Prospect Park Hotel. At the turn of the century, a long row of wooden structures was built in front of the mansion. These were used as stores. In the 1920's the home was razed and the Strand Theatre Building was erected on the site.

The ominous clouds which had threatened war with Great Britain in 1837 when the Caroline was burned, reappeared in 1841 with the capture of Alexander McLeod, a Scotchman, who had participated in the invasion of the United States. Great Britain stated that McLeod had acted under British orders and that, should he be executed for the murder of Amos Durfee, war would ensue. Porter, who was very much upset over the revival of the incident, felt

⁶¹ Peter A. Porter Collection, #C-223. Augustus Porter to Peter Porter, 1841. B.H.S.

that the entire crew of the Caroline together with the Patriots of Navy Island should have been sent over the brink of the falls.⁶²

Once again Porter did his utmost to calm the residents of the Niagara Frontier who clamored for revenge. Although most people in the nation believed that England should be made to pay, even if it meant war, the members of the United States Cabinet were convinced that open hostilities could be avoided.⁶³ McLeod's acquittal, later in the year, dispelled the threat of conflict and the people of the area who had experienced the horrors of war in 1813, uttered a prayer of thanksgiving to the Almighty.

Notwithstanding his robust appearance and continued activity, Porter, in his later years, was plagued by ill health. Only a few months after he moved to Niagara Falls, he suffered a severe illness which caused him to lose "some forty lbs of flesh which I can well spare."⁶⁴ He never recovered fully from this sickness.

On Wednesday evening March 20, 1844, at his home, Peter Buell Porter builder of the Niagara Frontier, died

62 Clay-Porter Correspondence. Porter to Clay, January 4, 1841. B.H.S.

63 Ibid., Clay to Porter, April 24, 1841.

64 Ibid., Porter to Clay, January 20, 1839.

of natural causes.⁶⁵ The entire nation was shocked. The press was filled with eulogies to the great citizen and statesman. He was mourned by his friends and relatives, especially by his brother Augustus who had been his partner in the task of establishing civilization where once there had been wilderness.

The funeral of Peter B. Porter, although held at an inclement season, was one of the largest in the history of Niagara Falls. A large group of citizens from Niagara and Erie Counties attended the service. Among those from the latter county were the members of the Buffalo City Council who attended the ceremony in a body.⁶⁶ An old chief of the Tuscarora tribe was there. As the Indian gazed upon the remains of his friend and the guardian of the welfare of the Tuscaroras, tears streamed down his face.⁶⁷

Peter B. Porter was laid to rest in the private burial ground of the Porter family. This land, comprising twenty one acres and bordering on the Portage Road, was given by

65 Will of Peter B. Porter. Deposition of Genet Conger, physician to Peter B. Porter, April 10, 1844. Niagara County Surrogate Court Records, Niagara County Hall, Lockport, New York, Book #3. Pp. 209-238.

66 Peter A. Porter Collection. Special meeting of the Buffalo City Council, in regard to the death of Peter B. Porter, March 25, 1844. B.H.S.

67 O. Turner, Holland Purchase of Western New York. Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas and Company, 1849. P. 616.

the Porter family to the Oakwood Cemetery Association in 1852.⁶⁸ (See Fig. 10.)

An ornate sarcophagus of brown stone covers the grave. Its exquisite workmanship, stateliness and commanding appearance seem to be in keeping with the character of the man who sleeps beneath the large flat stone which forms the base. There are three bronze tablets on the north side of the tomb. The tablet on the left reads:

A pioneer in Western New York: a statesman eminent in the annals of the nation and the state.

The tablet in the center reads:

Peter B. Porter

General in the Armies of America, defending in the field what he had maintained in the council. Born in Salisbury, Connecticut August 14, A.D. 1773; died at Niagara Falls, March 20, A.D. 1844.

That on the right reads:

Honoured and mourned throughout that extended region which he had been among the foremost to explore and defend. 69

Peter Porter was survived by two children, Elizabeth Lewis Porter who died in 1876, and Peter Augustus Porter. The latter, a colonel in the Union Army during the Civil War, was killed at Cold Harbor, Virginia on June 3, 1864 while leading his men against the enemy.

68 Interview with Walter McCulloh, 319 Jefferson Avenue, Niagara Falls, New York, December 1, 1948. Mr. McCulloh was president of the Oakwood Cemetery Association for forty years.

69 Visit to Oakwood Cemetery.

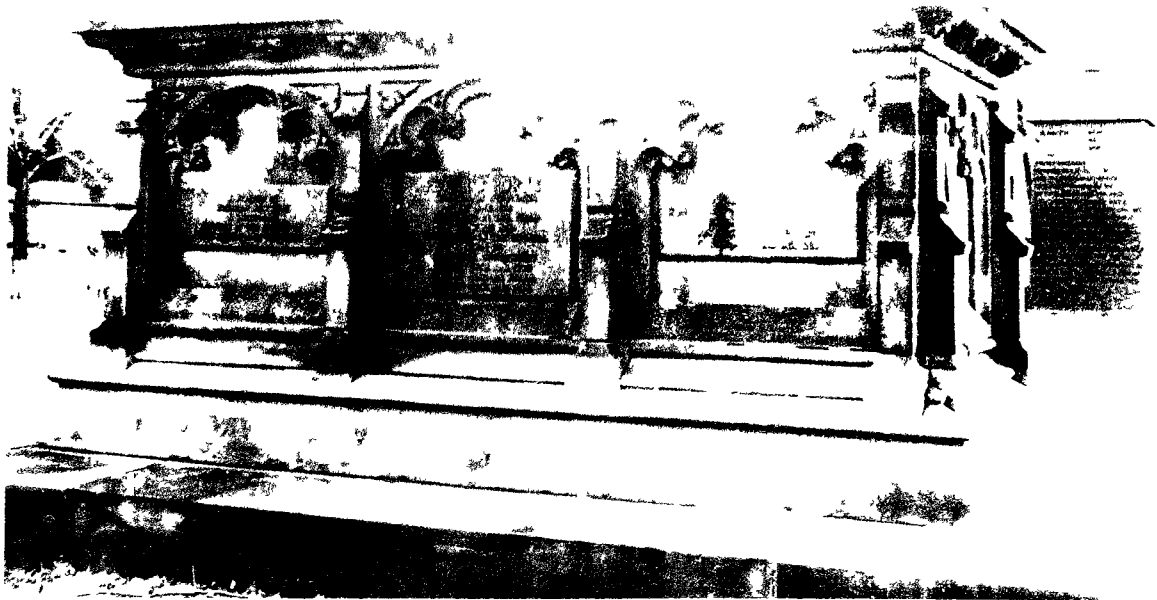


Fig. 10. Grave of Peter B. Porter in Oakwood Cemetery.

Unquestionably, Peter B. Porter possessed the faculty for making money, for he left an estate which amounted to four hundred thousand dollars, a great sum for that day.⁷⁰ The executors of the estate were his son Peter A. Porter and his nephew George W. Holley, an attorney, who lived with the Porter family in Niagara Falls.⁷¹

The useful life of Peter B. Porter thus came to a close. He was always present wherever there was some good to be done. Together with other men of sound judgement, Porter pledged his services and his money in an attempt to foster higher education in his community. When it seemed as though the people of the frontier would bring disaster upon themselves by committing overt acts which would create a conflict between Great Britain and the United States, Porter was one of the leaders who aided in dispelling the war clouds which had gathered. His generosity was overwhelming and his home was open to friend and stranger alike. In the death of Peter B. Porter the Niagara Frontier lost one of its greatest citizens.

70 Niles' Register, Baltimore, May 4, 1844.

71 Will of Peter B. Porter, op. cit.

CONCLUSION

Peter B. Porter was a most enterprising and efficient promoter of the unexampled prosperity of Western New York. The effect of his influence on the progress and development of the area cannot be over-estimated. His efforts in connection with Porter, Barton and Company caused two settlements to arise in the wilderness. Niagara Falls, with its unrivalled source of water power, became a community of diversified industrial interests. Black Rock, with its harbor built by Porter, became, for a time, the eastern terminus of the Great Lakes shipping trade.

The latter town was an important link between the Atlantic seaboard and the upper lakes. All the necessities for the United States Army posts in the west were shipped from Black Rock. Many Americans who desired to settle in the fertile fields along the lakes embarked in ships owned by Porter, Barton and Company at Black Rock for the trip into the interior. Until Porter arrived on the Niagara Frontier, there were no organized transportation facilities for those who desired to go west. To Porter can be given much credit, therefore, for the westward expansion of the United States.

As a member of the Congress of the United States, Porter made the people of the nation conscious of the

advantages of good transportation. Almost from the beginning of his Congressional term he fought for the construction of a system of waterways to connect the interior of the country to the Atlantic seaboard. When he was made chairman of a Congressional Committee to investigate the expediency of opening canals in the nation, Porter, in his report, advocated two canals for New York State. One of these was to extend from the Hudson River to Lake Ontario and the other was to connect the town of Lewiston with the village of Niagara Falls. His reason for selecting this particular route was a selfish one, for it was motivated by a desire to molest, as little as possible, the route of Porter, Barton and Company. Nevertheless, when he was appointed by the New York State Legislature to the Board of the Canal Commissioners to investigate potential canal routes from the Hudson River to the Great Lakes, he yielded to the majority who proposed a direct waterway from the Hudson to Lake Erie.

The building of the Erie Canal, in which Porter played a prominent role, brought much wealth to the Niagara Frontier. This direct communication with the Atlantic Ocean caused a great inland port to arise on the shores of Lake Erie. The growth of Buffalo was due to its strategic position at the western end of the canal. The Buffalo Harbor, which contributed to an equal extent to the rise of the city, was a direct result of Porter's ambition to have the canal

terminate at Black Rock. Since the latter town possessed a harbor and Buffalo at the time did not, the state officials were in sympathy with Porter's plans. However, the pride of the Buffalonians in their town, coupled with their dislike for Peter Porter, prompted them to construct a suitable harbor at Buffalo Creek and to secure the canal terminal for their village.

The success of the Erie Canal not only added to the wealth and prosperity of New York State by causing towns and industries to arise along its banks, but created a canal building era in the United States. Throughout the nation waterways were dug to connect the various inland lakes and rivers. The movement of manufactured products to market, and to the sea for foreign shipment, was made easier. As the people of the nation became aware that facility of transportation was the key to prosperity, industry and commerce increased one hundred fold.

It was in the United States Congress, too, that the political influence of Peter Porter came to the fore. His patriotism led him to believe that only a war with Great Britain could retrieve the honor of the United States which had been degraded by the action of the former nation. There were others in Congress who felt as he did. These men quickly gathered around Porter who was the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations. Since these men advocated war, they became known as the War Hawks. Actually,

it was more than patriotism that urged the group forward. It was the belief that Canada could be wrested from Great Britain without too much trouble. In this conviction, Porter, together with his followers were gravely mistaken for they had miscalculated the valor and strength of the Canadians. Only as the war progressed did Porter realize how seriously his party had erred in regard to Canada.

In 1828 President John Quincy Adams appointed Peter Porter to the office of Secretary of War of the United States. Although the position entailed much work, Porter conducted the office very well. Immediately, he began to reorganize the War Department. The Subsistence Department, where inefficiency was very noticeable, was the first unit to be altered. Next he ordered a relocation of western army posts in order to protect the settlers from the depredations of the Indians. Furthermore, he advocated that the Indians be urged to emigrate westward because the crowding of the Indians by the whites was not conducive to the best interests of the former. Another reason for wanting the redmen to go west was that the Ogden Land Company, of which Porter was a member, owned the preemption title to the land on the Indian Reservations in Western New York and was desirous that the natives leave those areas.

As Secretary of War, Porter did much for internal improvement of the country. Because he realized the

importance of military highways, Porter ordered many roads to be built or improved and various routes for prospective canals to be surveyed. About ten water routes were in the process of survey during Porter's tenure of office. When Porter resigned the position, the Department of War was functioning very efficiently.

Although Porter was a shrewd politician, he was impeded by the Albany Regency in his efforts to secure the votes of New York State for Henry Clay who, in 1824, was a candidate for the office of president of the United States. In 1840 Porter sought to obtain the presidential nomination for his friend from Kentucky but was outwitted by Thurlow Weed who secured the nomination for William Henry Harrison. Ever loyal to his party, Porter campaigned for Harrison and was able to poll a large majority of the votes of New York State for him. However, Porter did not give up hope of seeing Clay become president. In 1844 Clay received the presidential nomination. The task of obtaining the votes of New York State was again assigned to Porter but the erstwhile politician died before the election. Perhaps it was best because it spared him the disappointment of once more watching Clay lose the highest office in the land. Porter, who was usually successful in securing political offices for himself, was not able to accomplish his major political desire, that of placing Henry Clay in the White House.

The appointment of Peter Porter as Boundary Commissioner under the sixth and seventh articles of the Treaty of Ghent was the result of his political prominence but the choice was nevertheless a wise one for Porter knew well the region wherein the boundary was to be laid.

The sixth article of the treaty called for a demarcation of a boundary line from the junction of the St. Lawrence River and the forty-fifth parallel of north latitude to the St. Mary's River. In the performance of this task, there was much bickering between the two Commissioners.

The trouble arose over American ownership of Barnhart's Island in the St. Lawrence River, possession of which, the British felt, would deprive them of an uninterrupted use of the river. Dissension over the ownership of several islands in the Detroit River evoked much discussion also. Actually these problems arose because the Commissioners had made rules of survey which could not always be followed. Much of the trouble could have been eliminated had it been made clear to the Commissioners, by their respective governments, that regardless of the ownership of islands, the waterway between Canada and the United States would be open in its entirety to both nations. Fortunately, the Commissioners reconciled their differences and concluded the work of the sixth article in a manner agreeable to both nations.

In marking the boundary between the St. Mary's River and the Lake of the Woods, as requested by the seventh

article of the treaty, the Commissioners were unable to agree. The points of dispute concerned the ownership of St. George Island in the St. Mary's River and the location of Long Lake from which was to start the boundary going westward to the Lake of the Woods. The latter controversy was due to the inaccuracies of Mitchell's Map upon which the Treaty of 1783 was based.

At first both parties agreed that the Long Lake was really Pigeon Bay, the outlet of the Pigeon River, just north of the Grand Portage. However, the British soon thought otherwise and accepted the Fond du Lac, a large bay of Lake Superior far to the south of Pigeon Bay, as the Long Lake. To counteract this claim, the Americans decided that they would declare the Kaministegua River outlet, far to the north of Pigeon Bay, to be the real Long Lake.

Since neither side would yield, the Board concluded amicably the work under the seventh article without arriving at a decision. It was not until 1842, when the Webster-Ashburton Treaty was negotiated, that the boundary from the St. Mary's River to the Lake of the Woods was settled. The Messrs. Webster and Ashburton had no difficulty in establishing the line, however, since the spade work had been done by Porter and Barclay.

It was Peter Porter who caused the Niagara Frontier to become the great industrial district it is today. This he accomplished by launching enterprises of various kinds.

Chief among these was the exploitation of hydro power. At Black Rock and Niagara Falls water power was used to turn the wheels of many factories. This inexpensive means of operating places of manufacture drew many industrialists to the two villages. At the Cataract City, the Porters planned a great water power project which, though not put into operation during their lifetime, caused that city to become the hydro power city of the world.

Another of Peter Porter's business ventures which became a permanent asset to the Niagara Frontier was the flour milling industry. Not only did he erect a mill himself, but he encouraged others to engage in the same trade. These mills formed the nucleus from which developed, in Buffalo, a milling industry second to none.

Porter was very active in establishing public utility corporations. The formation of the Buffalo and Black Rock Jubilee Water Works Company gave the two villages an adequate, excellent supply of drinking water. Eventually the village of Black Rock became the owner of the company. When the town was made part of Buffalo, it was agreed that the proceeds derived from the sale of the Jubilee water were to be put into a Jubilee Water Fund. The money from this fund was used to build the Jubilee Library, a branch of the Buffalo Public Library. Thus the Buffalo and Black Rock Jubilee Water Works Company contributed a permanent asset to the city of Buffalo.

The Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road Company was a product of the ambition of Peter B. Porter. It was the first railroad in Western New York and connected Buffalo with Niagara Falls. The railroad, never a financial success, was leased to the New York Central Railroad in later years. This was the beginning of the growth of Buffalo as a railroad center to its present position as one of the foremost terminals in the nation.

Peter Porter was very active in the affairs of the community. Under his leadership the people of Western New York succeeded in securing legislation which not only forced the powerful Holland Land Company to pay taxes for the maintenance of roads, bridges and schools, but also compelled it to change its harsh policies in dealing with the settlers.

Hardly had the vituperations against the Holland Land Company subsided, when Porter turned his money and attention to the creation of a school of secondary education in Buffalo. The institution was short lived; perhaps, because the idea was too advanced for the times. Not many years later, however, the first public high school appeared in Buffalo.

Porter was as interested in the safety of his neighbors as he was in their intellectual progress, for, when the spectre of war appeared on the Niagara Frontier as a result of the Canadian Rebellion, he struggled successfully

to ward off disaster and maintain peace. He knew from experience that a peaceful frontier was better suited to the continued progress of his numerous enterprises.

In this thesis the writer has attempted to prove that Peter Porter was an outstanding citizen and statesman as evidenced by the following conclusions:

1. Porter's efforts in Porter, Barton and Company made the Niagara Frontier an indispensable link in the transportation of materials and settlers from the eastern to the western part of the nation and brought the frontier into national prominence.

2. The building of a harbor at Black Rock by Porter, caused that town to become, for a time, the most important village between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes.

3. His interest in facility of transportation was instrumental in the building of the Erie Canal which aided the commercial advancement of his community and made New York State the wealthiest state in the country.

4. By taking advantage of the water power afforded by the canal, harbor and river, Porter was able to create an industrial area which is today among the busiest in the nation.

5. The flour milling industry fostered by him has grown so great that today Buffalo is the largest flour milling city in the world.

6 Porter's introduction of the railroad in Western New York made other railroad companies aware of the potentialities of the region. Today Buffalo is the second largest railroad center in the United States.

7. He was directly responsible for the growth of Black Rock and to a great degree instrumental in the progress of the cities of Niagara Falls and Buffalo.

8. Porter's attempts to establish institutions of learning in Buffalo, although unsuccessful, awakened the people to the scholastic needs of the community and resulted in the permanent founding, shortly thereafter, of a high school and university.

9. The reforms forced upon the Holland Land Company by Porter aided in populating the Niagara Frontier, for more people were able to buy land in the area.

10. As a statesman he made the entire nation conscious of the fact that improved transportation facilities for the shipment of goods to market aided commercial progress and increased prosperity.

11. His convincing oratory and dynamic personality made him successful in urging the United States into a war which, from a military standpoint, ended in a stalemate, but from a diplomatic point of view brought about permanent peace between the two great English speaking nations of the world.

12. Part of the United States-Canadian boundary which was under survey during Porter's service as Boundary Commissioner was permanently established and the way left open for the easy settlement of the remainder.

13. Under his supervision, the United States Department of War was improved to give greater service through greater efficiency.

Peter Porter was the possessor of a strong will and a keen intellect which successfully concluded his many motivations and enterprises. He was unexcelled in Western New York as an organizer, promoter and politician. Truly he deserves a conspicuous place in the annals of his nation. Unquestionably he deserves a lofty niche in the history of his community, for the transformation of the Niagara Frontier from a wilderness to an area of industrial prominence was due, in a very large measure, to the intelligence, fortitude and business acumen of Peter Buell Porter, citizen and statesman.

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