

The Revenge of PIRATE BILL

Those perfidious Canadians had burned an American ship — now it was payback time

BY TONY KEENE

By the middle of the 1830s, America was still smarting from its failure to conquer Canada during the War of 1812. Looking for ways to foment rebellion in the remaining colonies had become something of a passion for certain American politicians, and their favorite hobby horse in 1837 was a radical newspaperman — a Scottish immigrant named William Lyon Mackenzie.



Map showing the dispute area between the USA and Canada.

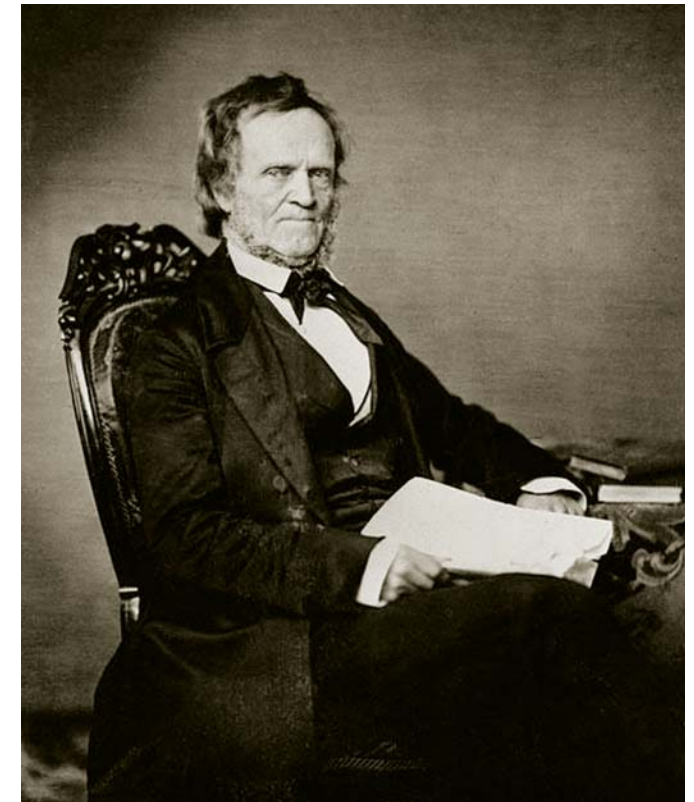


Canadian marine artist Peter Rindlisbacher's interpretation of the Battle of the Windmill. It is seen from the north with the American shore and Ogdensburg, New York, in the background.

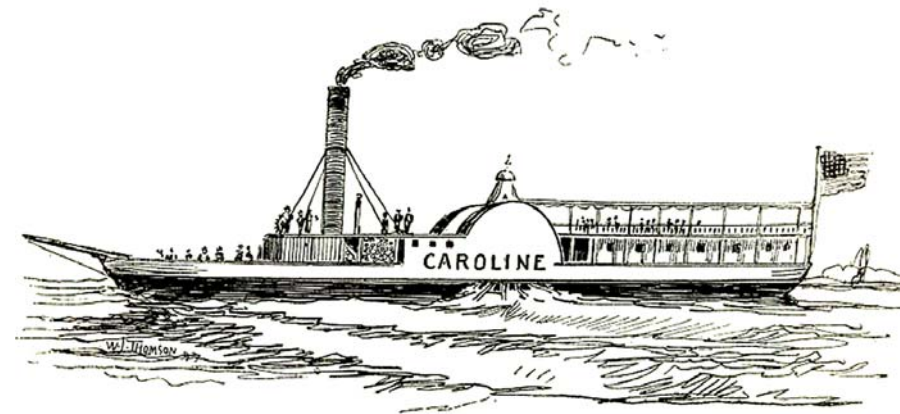
To be truthful, there were reasons enough for some people to feel rebellious. Upper Canada, which would later become the Province of Ontario, was run by a close-knit aristocratic elite known derisively as "The Family Compact." Mackenzie had several times been elected to the colony's Assembly, only to be suspended and thrown out by the conservative members. In 1834, he became the first mayor of the newly-incorporated City of Toronto, formerly called York, and all the while continued to denounce the ruling elite. He has been described by his biographers as a born muckraker and scandal-monger.

Following the appointment of the arch-Tory Sir Francis Bond Head as lieutenant-governor in 1836, and the blatantly rigged elections which followed, Mackenzie had had enough. Mackenzie called for open rebellion, gathered a ragtag army around him at Montgomery's Tavern just north of Toronto, and marched into the city. There were no loyal troops nearby, but the rebels were fired upon by the local sheriff and a small party of volunteers. Both sides broke and ran, but several men were killed. Two days later Bond Head and the Militia arrived, and Mackenzie fled south.

Gathering his supporters around him, he raised a flag on Navy Island in the Niagara River, declaring



William Lyon Mackenzie — this period portrait gave Mackenzie the look of a zealot.



himself president of the Canadian Republic. He received support from a clandestine organization called "The Hunters' Lodge," which was actually an American front to foment unrest in Canada. Very much like the Central Intelligence Agency and the Contras more than a century later, the Lodge financed and supported border raids into Canada, which succeeded only in getting a large number of people killed on both sides.

As Mackenzie set up his base on the island, he received men and supplies from the American side ferried over by the steamer *Caroline*. The Canadian Militia Commander, Col. Allan MacNab, realized he had to cut the rebels off from their supply line in order to forestall a fresh invasion. Conferring with his senior Naval officer, Cmdr. Andrew Drew, a plan was drawn up to destroy the steamer while it was on the Canadian side.

However, after rowing out to Navy Island under cover of an artillery bombardment, Drew and his men found the *Caroline* was not there. Undeterred, they carried on over the line to the



Aflame, the steamboat *Caroline* approaches Niagara Falls on the night of 29 December 1837.