

## Major General Robert McDouall (1774–1848)



Source: Dumfries and Galloway Council (Stranraer).

[Likely a McDouall of Logan because of the spelling of his last name, and his interment at Kirkmaiden cemetery, south of Logan]

**McDOUALL, ROBERT**, army officer; b. March 1774 in Stranraer, Scotland, second son of John McDouall, a magistrate of the town, and Jean Kerr; Robert died there unmarried on 15 Nov. 1848.

Robert McDouall was born in Stranraer where his father was a magistrate. He was educated in Scotland and at Felsted School in England before being placed in a business establishment in London. His father and uncle hoped that he would become a merchant, but the young man was attracted to a military career. With his father's reluctant approval, he purchased an ensigncy in the 49<sup>th</sup> Foot on 29 Oct. 1797 and a lieutenancy in the 8<sup>th</sup> (The King's) Regiment of Foot three days later. McDouall took part in

the British expedition to Egypt in 1801 (together with his kinsman, Lt. Colonel Patrick McDouall of Freugh, who was wounded, and subsequently died, at the battle of Alexandria), and he was promoted Captain on 24 Oct. 1804. He saw service during the Copenhagen expedition of 1807 and at Martinique in 1809 before coming to Lower Canada with his battalion in May 1810. Soon after the outbreak of war with the United States in the summer of 1812, McDouall was appointed ADC (aide-de-camp) to Governor Sir George Prevost\*. He was with Prevost at the attack on Sackets Harbor, N.Y., in May 1813, and was then sent to the Niagara peninsula with instructions for Brigadier-General John Vincent. McDouall later claimed to have suggested the attack at Stoney Creek on 6 June, in which he took part. Promoted major in the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles on 24 June, he was sent home with dispatches and was made brevet lieutenant-colonel on 29 July. He came back to the Canadas before the end of 1813.

\* McDouall's connection with Prevost was undoubtedly responsible for his selection late that year as commandant of Michilimackinac (Mackinac Island, Michigan), which, since its capture from the Americans in July 1812, had been the key British military and fur-trade post in the northwest. It had been captured by the British and Indians by surprise early in the war, thereby inducing many more Indians to ally themselves with Britain. In 1813, the Americans had won the Battle of Lake Erie, which had isolated the island from supply via Lake Erie.

Being "fully sensible to the chances of enemy attack," McDouall had detailed conversations with Prevost about the reinforcement of the post and conducted a correspondence with William McGillivray of the North West Company to obtain advice about local conditions. Under his leadership an expedition bringing reinforcements and much-needed supplies reached Michilimackinac on 18 May 1814 after a difficult journey via York (Toronto), Lake Simcoe, and Nottawasaga Bay. McDouall and a party of soldiers from the Royal Newfoundland Fencibles, voyageurs and craftsmen journeyed north in the depths of winter from York, the provincial capital of Upper Canada, to the Nottawasaga River, where they constructed batteaux. (Glengarry Landing on the Nottawasaga River, where McDouall oversaw the construction of the flotilla, was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1923). When the river unfroze in the spring, they sailed and paddled the length of Georgian Bay and Lake Huron to reach Mackinac with vital supplies. McDouall took up his post as commandant and began improving the defences of the island.

Late the next month McDouall received news that the Americans had taken Prairie du Chien (Wis.), a strategic post on the Upper Mississippi. He at once realized that if the enemy were not removed "there was an end to our connection with the Indians . . . tribe after tribe would be gained over or subdued, and thus would be destroyed the only barrier which protects the Great trading establishments of the North West and the Hudson's Bay Company." He at once sent a force under William McKay "to dislodge the American General from his new conquest," and Prairie du Chien was retaken on 20 July.

The dispatch of McKay's expedition had reduced the garrison of Michilimackinac, a cause for concern in light of intelligence that the Americans were planning an attempt to recapture the island. Over the summer the defences were strengthened, but McDouall's numbers were still much smaller than the 1,000 troops in four warships which appeared off Michilimackinac on 26 July. When the enemy landed on 4 August, McDouall moved to meet them with 140 soldiers and several hundred Indians. As the opposing forces were skirmishing McDouall received a false report that American troops were in his rear, and he began a retreat in which most of the Indians joined. Left behind was a band of Menominees, who "commenced a spirited attack" upon the enemy. The Americans, after losing "their second in Command and several other officers" in a short time, retired "in the utmost haste and confusion" to their boats, McDouall noted.

Although Michilimackinac was not attacked for the duration of the war, the Americans destroyed the British base at Nottawasaga Bay and stationed two vessels near Michilimackinac to prevent supplies from reaching the garrison. Rations were short when Lieutenant Miller Worsley of the Royal Navy arrived on 30 August with supplies. With McDouall's approval, he carried out an attack which captured the American vessels and ensured British control of the northwest during the conflict.

In the spring of 1815 McDouall learned that peace had been signed and that "the mutual restoration of all Forts" had been ordered. He was "penetrated with grief at the restoration of this fine island, a fortress built by Nature for herself," and lamented that "our negotiators as usual, have been egregiously duped . . . they have shewn themselves profoundly ignorant of the concerns of this part of the Empire." As preparation for the restoration of Michilimackinac, which occurred on 18 July 1815, the British had established a base on nearby Drummond Island (Michigan), and McDouall was commandant there until the reduction of the garrison in June 1816. Before leaving for Scotland the same year, he asked McKay to sit for a portrait, as it was his intention "to embellish his retreat" with paintings of his wartime friends.

McDouall spent the remainder of his life at Stranraer. Although eager to return to active duty, he was not employed again, being promoted Colonel in July 1830 and Major-General in November 1841. In February 1817 he had been appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) for his efforts at Michilimackinac. Later in life McDouall was much influenced by the teachings of the Free Church of Scotland, and he gave generously of his time and money to its works, contributing to the libraries of the church's colleges in Edinburgh and Toronto. A solid, dedicated, and astute officer, Robert McDouall was representative of the British military and naval personnel who served with courage and quiet distinction in British North America during the War of 1812, while their confrères were enjoying the limelight cast by the Napoleonic battles of Salamanca and Vitoria.

#### References:

AO, MS 35. DPL, Burton Hist. Coll., Robert McDouall, orderly book, Drummond Island, 1815. PAC, MG 19, E5; RG 8, I (C ser.), 685, 688, 1219. Andrew Bulger, An autobiographical sketch of the services of the late Captain Andrew Bulger of the Royal Newfoundland Fencible Regiment (Bangalore, India, 1865). "Major-General M'Douall, C.B.," Free Church of Scotland, Pub. Committee, Monthly-Ser. of Tracts (Edinburgh), no.58 (July 1849). G.B., WO, Army list, 1798–1848/49. Officers of British forces in Canada (Irving). B. L. Dunnigan, "The British army at Mackinac, 1812–1815," Mackinac Island State Park Commission, Reports in Mackinac Hist. and Archaeology (Mackinac Island, Mich.), no.7 (1980). A. R. Gilpin, The War of 1812 in the old northwest (Toronto and East Lansing, Mich., 1958). R. S. Allen, "The British Indian Department and the frontier in North America, 1755–1830," Canadian Hist. Sites, no.14 (1975): 5–125. B. L. Dunnigan, "The battle of Mackinac Island," Mich. Hist. (Lansing), 59 (1975): 239–54.

#### Stranraer Old Parish Records

Roberts parents were John McDOWAL(L), described as a merchant, and Jean Kerr, who were married 28 Oct 1765. There is a monument to them in the Stranraer parish Kirkyard, but at the time of the DGFHS transcriptions, little detail could be read. James McDOWALL was the only other mentioned, presumably their son.

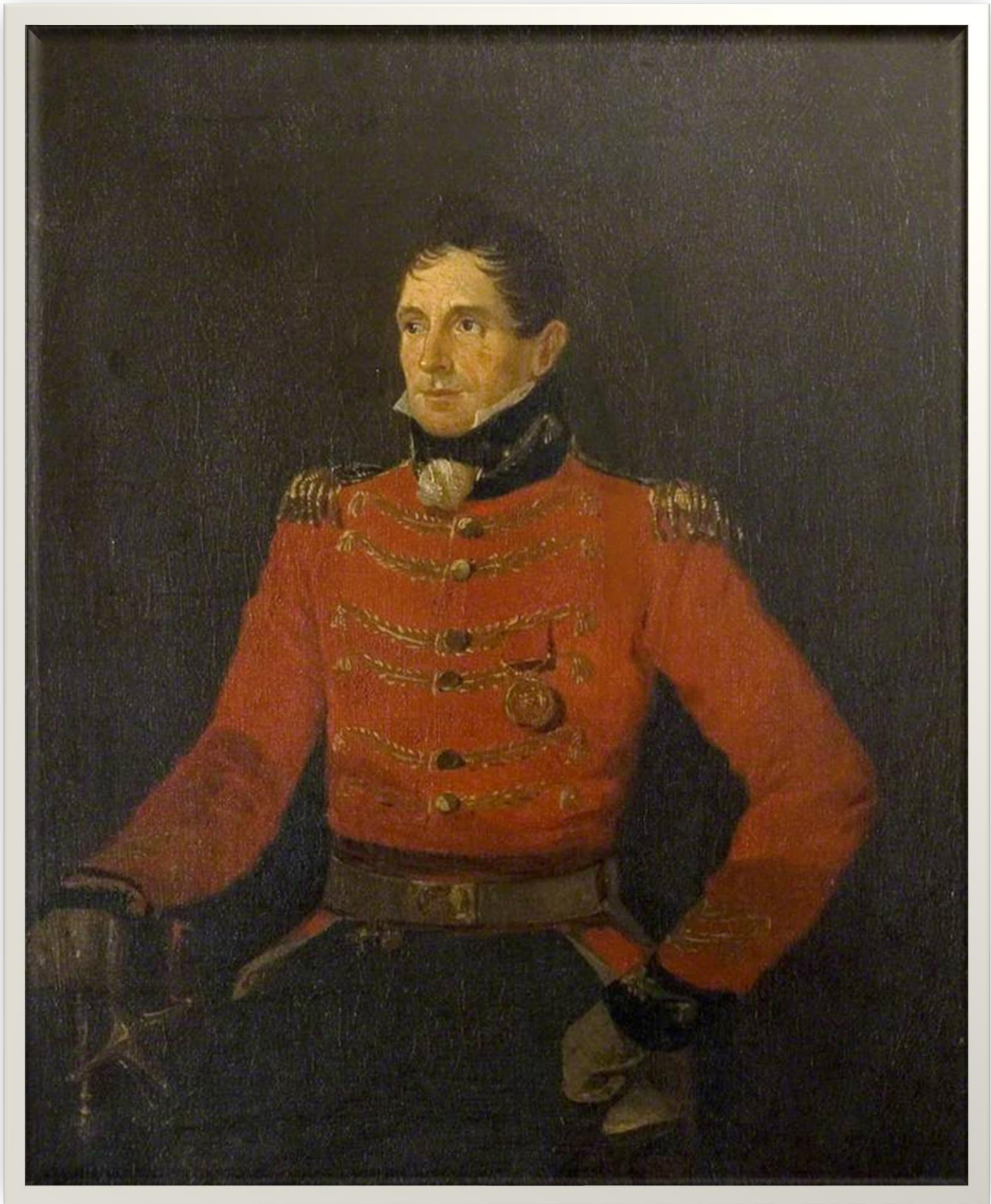
From the Stranraer OPR (old parish records), they had 11 children:

Elizabeth, born 26 Aug 1766; Patrick, born 20 Oct 1767; John, born 08 Jan 1769; Helen, born 06 Mar 1770; Mary, born 27 Feb 1772; Robert, born 25 Apr 1774 (likely the date of baptism); James, born 30 Mar 1776; Niven, born 05 Oct 1778; Jean, born 27 Mar 1781; Alexander, born 26 May 1783; Alexander, born 16 Aug 1786

Note: The Stranraer baptism register didn't record mothers names until 1775, however it appears that Jean was his only recorded wife. Also Robert's older brother Patrick probably died in infancy, and hence Robert is described as the second

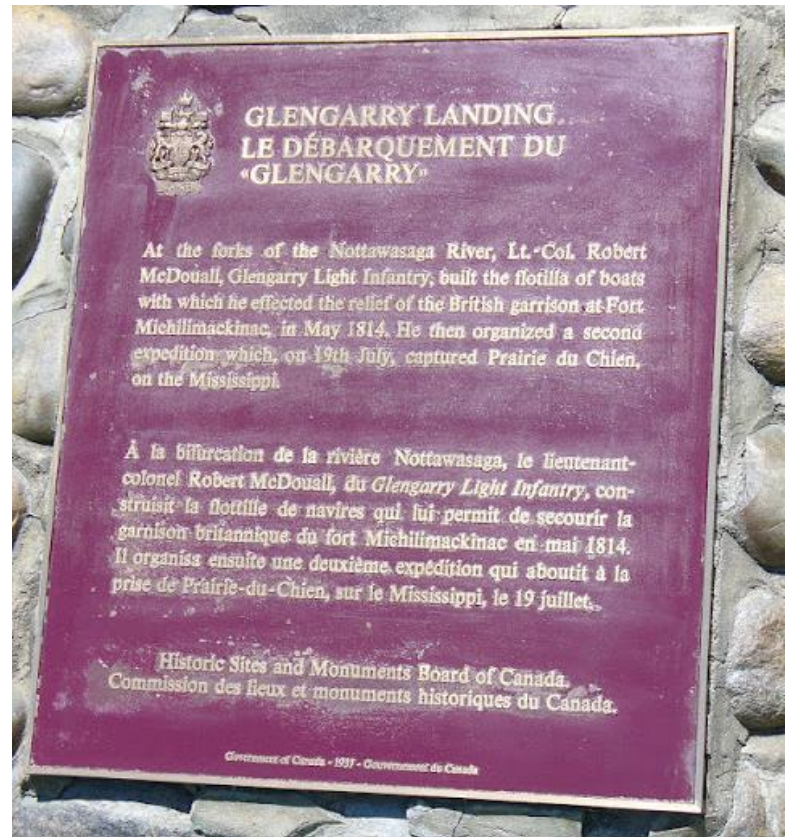
son. Robert's brother, Provost Alexander McDouall, erected a monument to him at the Kirkmaiden Cemetery where he is buried.

**Painting of Robert McDouall in Stranraer Museum**





Historic Marker for the Glengarry Landing on the  
Nottawasaga River, nr. Springwater, Ontario



### Description of Historic Place

Glengarry Landing National Historic Site of Canada is located on the east bank of the Nottawasaga River, south of Edenvale in Simcoe County, Ontario. The site consists of a semi-rural landscape that was occupied during the War of 1812 by the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles who constructed a flotilla of boats to relieve the British garrison at Fort Michilimackinac. At the time of designation, the site encompassed cleared fields and pasture, with no evidence of the 1814 military expedition's activities. Today, the site has been divided into several lots, with the addition of several different structures and access roads. Official recognition refers to the legal property boundaries at the time of designation.

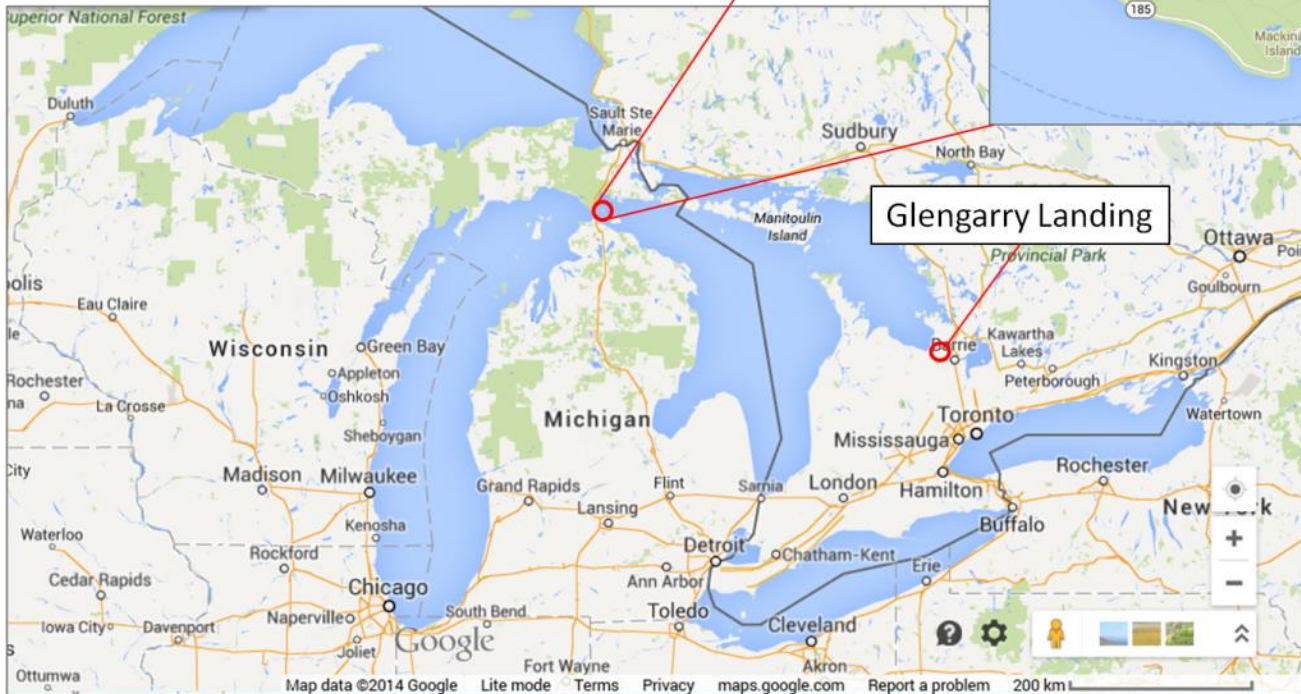
Glengarry Landing was designated a national historic site of Canada in 1923 because:

- at the forks of the Nottawasaga River, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McDouall, Glengarry Light Infantry, built the flotilla of boats with which he effected the relief of the British garrison at Fort Michilimackinac in May 1814, and the subsequent capture, in July, of Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi.

In February 1814, during the War of 1812, the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles were sent from Kingston under the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McDouall to reinforce the garrison at Fort Michilimackinac. En route, the troops stopped at the junction of the Nottawasaga River and Marl Creek, where they spent two months constructing a flotilla of boats to move supplies and troops across Lake Huron to the fort. On April 19, 1814, the flotilla left the landing for Fort Michilimackinac. Subsequently, McDouall divided his forces and sent a party to Wisconsin, under the command of Brevet Major William McKay, to recapture Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River. This mission was successfully carried out in July 1814.

## Mackinac Island

A Strategic Location on the Great Lakes, which was the key British military and fur-trade post in the northwest during the war of 1812.

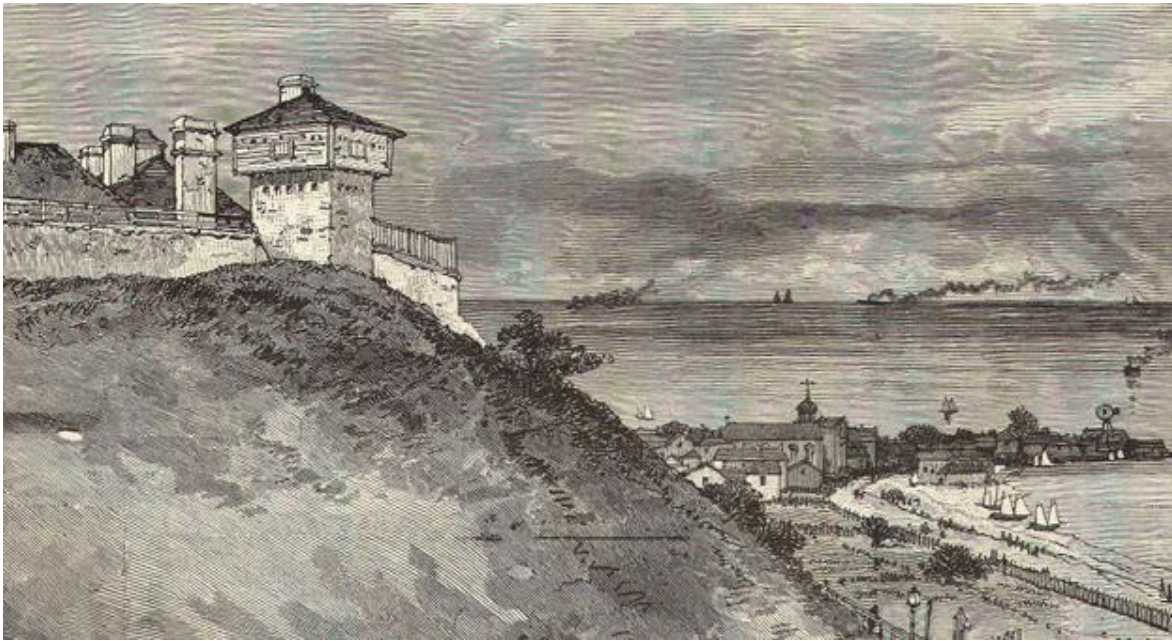


### The Battle for Fort Mackinac

Under the cover of darkness, a 300-man force of British soldiers and Native American allies embarked from Fort St. Joseph and landed on the north shore of Mackinac Island. They dragged their cannon to the high ground behind the fort, took positions in the woods and prepared to attack. American soldiers, about 30, were completely surprised and outnumbered by the British invasion. They quickly surrendered without a fight following a single warning shot by the British. This was the first land engagement of the War of 1812 in the United States. British troops garrisoned the fort and built a new fortification, named Fort George (later renamed Fort Holmes) at the highest point on the island to act as defense on the weak north side. Two years later American soldiers tried to recapture Fort Mackinac. Invading from the north, they were met by British soldiers at the center of the island. The Americans were badly defeated in the only battle ever fought on Mackinac Island. Following the battle, British soldiers also captured two American vessels that were blockading the harbor.



## Fort Mackinac



There were two Battles of Mackinac Island during the War of 1812, fought in 1812 and 1814; both were British victories over American forces. Mackinac Island is located at the confluence of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. It became a British outpost in 1780 after they abandoned Fort Michilimackinac, which occupied a similarly strategic position at the confluence of the two lakes, but in an exposed position on the northern tip of the Michigan peninsula. In 1796, in accordance with the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation, or Jay's Treaty, Mackinac Island was transferred to the US. The British established a new post 50 kilometres to the east on St Joseph's Island, near the mouth of St Mary's River. The names "Mackinac" and "Michilimackinac" are often used interchangeably, though they are actually names of two distinct places.

### 1812 Battle of Mackinac

Mackinac Island was strategically located to control navigation between Lakes Huron and Michigan, access to the northwest and in maintaining First Nations alliances. Major-General Brock, the commander of Upper Canada, declared that he would seize the island if war broke out with the US. When war was declared, Brock sent conflicting messages to Captain Charles Roberts, the commander at Fort St Joseph, who interpreted them as instructions to attack Fort Mackinac.

Taking 46 officers and men of the 10th Royal Veteran Battalion, several gunners of the Royal Artillery, 200 fur traders and 400 Aboriginals, Roberts left for the American post by bateaux and canoe on 16 July 1812. Roberts' men landed the following day and then marched the three kilometres to the fort. The American commander, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, was offered an opportunity to surrender, which he accepted. Hanks and the garrison of 61 men were taken prisoner and sent to Detroit on parole. The victory allowed the British to cement their alliance with the local First Nations groups. When Brigadier General William Hull learned of the British victory, he terminated his invasion of Upper Canada and withdrew to Detroit.

The loss of Mackinac and the subsequent defeat at Detroit were serious setbacks for the American war effort. Almost immediately, plans were put in place to gain control of Lake Erie, regain Detroit and capture Fort Mackinac. While the first two were achieved in 1813, the third could not be attempted until 1814.

### 1814 Battle of Mackinac

The loss of Lake Erie cut the British supply line to Fort Mackinac and the northwest. In early 1814, Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost, the commander-in-chief of British North America, ordered the establishment of a new communication route from York to Nottawasaga Bay, the reinforcement of Fort Mackinac and the establishment of a

naval base on Georgian Bay. Prevost saw these initiatives as crucial to maintaining the British presence in the northwest, preserving Aboriginal alliances and as a prelude to retaking Lake Erie in 1815. The reinforcements arrived at Fort Mackinac before the Americans arrived.

In the spring of 1814, Captain Arthur Sinclair of the US Navy was ordered to seize control of the upper lakes by recapturing Fort Mackinac and destroying the British naval presence on the lakes. Sinclair's force included two sloops, two schooners and 750 men from three regular army regiments, several artillerymen and 250 Ohio militia. The army contingent was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George Croghan.

After destroying the abandoned British post at St Joseph's Island, Sinclair's men then raided an outpost on the St Mary's River, near modern Sault Ste Marie. Sinclair arrived off Mackinac Island on 26 July.

The main American landing began at 2:00 pm on 4 August. A marine detachment was also sent to the northwestern side of the island. The British garrison was led by Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDouall and included 136 members of the Royal Newfoundland Fencibles, a dozen men from the 10th Royal Veteran Battalion, 13 artillerymen, 37 Michigan Fencibles, 100 militia from St Joseph's Island and 360 Aboriginals. MacDouall had been expecting the Americans and had constructed a new blockhouse and a palisade on a rise to the north of Fort Mackinac, which he named Fort George.

Leaving some of his men in the fort, McDouall marched most of the garrison to a position over a kilometre to the northwest of Fort George. He placed 140 regulars, 50 militia and two field guns on a low ridge that bisected a roadway. Warriors were placed in the wood lines to protect the flanks. Croghan, meanwhile, had advanced up the road and drew his men into line.

The engagement opened around 3:00 pm. The Americans advanced slowly, while the British held their line. Croghan then sent detachments to outflank the British. The group moving on the British left was attacked fiercely by Aboriginal forces and driven back. A brief exchange of fire followed and Croghan then withdrew and re-embarked on the fleet by 6:00 pm. The Americans lost 19 killed and 45 wounded, while the British had no losses.

Sinclair left two schooners on Lake Huron to intercept British traffic and returned to Detroit. The British captured both vessels in September and the American campaign ended in failure. The British left Mackinac Island following the peace in 1815, after which it was re-occupied by the US.

---

As late as 5 June 1814, Lt. Col. McDouall encouraged the chiefs on the Upper Mississippi with Prevost's promise: "My Children! Should the King, your great Father deign to listen to the proposal which the enemy have made for peace, it will be on the express condition that your interests shall be first considered, your just claims admitted and no infringements of your rights permitted in future." A mortified McDouall soon had to announce to the stunned warriors that the captured territory would revert to American control. "This peace is to last forever," he told them. "You will bury deep in the earth all private quarrels and animosities that may have subsisted ... before the war.... Live in peace and may the Great Spirit give you long life." Flabbergasted, McDouall privately predicted, "There will not be an Indian left between this and the Rocky Mountains to plague either party [American or British]." Indeed, by 1817, the Natives in Ohio were restricted to two small reserves; four years later, their brethren in Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois shared a similar fate.<sup>57</sup>

Extract from the book:  
**Wampum Denied:**  
**Procter's War of 1812**

---

---

**Robert McDouall** maintained aggressive operations on the Upper Mississippi until the end of the war. When the terms of peace became known, he tried vainly to impede the evacuation of Fort Michilimackinac but accepted the Treaty of Ghent, complaining nonetheless, that “our negotiators as usual, have been egregiously duped.” Retiring on half pay in 1816, McDouall was knighted a year later. He returned to active service, rising to major general in 1841 and died seven years later.<sup>11</sup>

---

48. Myers to Baynes, 10 Mar. 1813, *DHCNF* 1813, Vol. 1: 103. Robert **McDouall** (1774-1848) was born in Scotland. He purchased an ensigncy in the 49th Foot in 1791, serving in Egypt and Copenhagen before coming to Canada in 1810 as a captain. Prevost selected him as aide-de-camp in 1812, and he was promoted to major in the Glengarry Light Infantry Regiment on 24 June 1813. It is clear from his letters to Procter that the two were close friends, McDouall’s special references to one of Procter’s daughters suggesting a personal interest. He seemed to be Procter’s sole ally at Prevost’s headquarters, inspecting matters at Amherstburg in early 1813 and repeatedly urging that reinforcements be sent to that quarter. *DCB* 7: 556-58.
- 

Extract from the book: **Through Water, Ice & Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812**

News of the treaty devastated McDouall, who had spent most of 1814 orchestrating the defence of the Northwest. He objected strongly to handing Prairie du Chien over to the Americans, arguing that the local Native tribes had governed the adjacent territory until the Americans attacked it. McDouall suggested that this meant the upper Mississippi should have been handed back to the Sauks, Winnebagos, Sioux and others, not to the Americans. He objected to having to find a new site for a fort, and cynically suggested that the Americans would try and claim any nearby island with any kind of strategic advantage. His most bitter criticism, however, was reserved for the order to give up Michilimackinac itself. He had spent a year making promises to his Native allies, and building an alliance with the Native nations that would help seal the defence of the island. Now, with the word that he would have to give up his post, McDouall became furious:



“The surrender of this most important Island, the key to the whole Western Country, & which they fully expected would have been retained by us, if followed up by that of St. Josephs, and the adjoining Islands, will be to them, such conclusive proofs of our disgrace, & absolute submission to the American Government, that it would be most grossly deceiving ours, to hold forth the expectation of being joined by a single Indian, in the event of another war. — Their neutrality is then, the utmost, perhaps, that we can hope for, & that is more to be desired than expected. Of this be assured, that a more terrible enemy exists not, than a numerous body of Indians, properly managed & led on, in such a Country as Upper Canada.”<sup>234</sup>

In the end, Bulger and his men were withdrawn from Prairie du Chien, and McDouall prepared to pack up Mackinac. Prevost ordered that another post be built on St. Joseph’s Island, and a substantial naval dockyard at Penetanguishene.

---

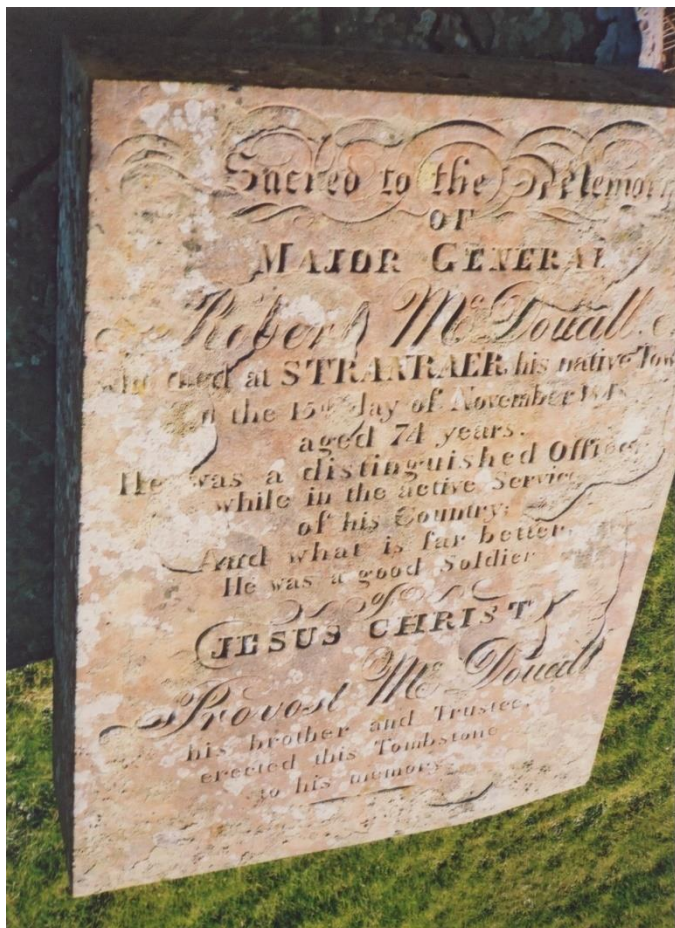
## Grave

Major General Robert McDouall died in Stranraer and was buried in Kirkmaiden.

ID: 19878

Location: Kirkmaiden Cemetery, by Drummore, Wigtownshire

Ref: DGFHS, "Kirkmaiden Cemetery (by Drummore) MI Transcriptions" (2005)



*Sacred To the Memory of  
Major General  
Robert McDouall, C.B.,  
who died at Stranraer, his native town,  
on the 15th day of November 1848  
aged 74 years  
He was a distinguished Officer  
while in the active service of his country;  
And what is far better,  
he was a good Soldier  
of Jesus Christ  
Provost McDouall,  
his brother and Trustee,  
erected this tombstone  
to his memory.*

Spotted in the local newspaper Barrie Today

## **THEN AND NOW: McDonald St. intended to honour McDouall**

Lt.-Col. Robert McDouall served during the War of 1812 and was promoted to major in the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles in 1813

Deb Exel, Feb 19, 2023

Referred to as McDonald Street since about 1854, the street was originally named after Lt.-Col. Robert McDouall. The street suffered through many spelling variations before arriving at the name used today.

McDouall was born in 1774 in Stranraer, Scotland. He began his career in 1797 as an ensign, seeing service in Egypt, Copenhagen and Martinique before coming to Lower Canada in 1810.

During the War of 1812, he served under Gov. Sir George Prevost and was promoted to major in the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles in 1813. Only a month later, McDouall was promoted again to brevet lieutenant-colonel and made commander of an important military and trading post captured from the U.S. in 1812 — Michilimackinac (Mackinac Island).

McDouall, 10 officers and 200 men of the Glengarry Light Officers, along with 20 sailors and 20 artillerymen, set out from Kingston in 1814 to relieve the garrison at Michilimackinac, near Sault Ste. Marie. When they reached York (Toronto), they headed up Yonge Street to Kempenfelt Bay. They travelled the Nine Mile Portage to connect with the advance team building the boats that would be used to reach the island.

The challenging spring crossing took almost a month and, later that summer, McDouall defended Michilimackinac from the American forces, keeping the fort in British control until the Treaty of Ghent the following year returned it to the U.S.

McDouall went on to command the garrison at Drummond Island until 1816, when he returned to Scotland. He was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath the following year in recognition of his service at Michilimackinac.

Although McDouall never saw active duty once he returned to Scotland, he was promoted to the rank of brevet colonel in 1830 and major general in 1841. He died a bachelor in his native Stranraer in 1848.

So it's unfortunate the street intended to honour this distinguished officer does not actually bear his name.