

Capital in Flames

The American Attack on York, 1813

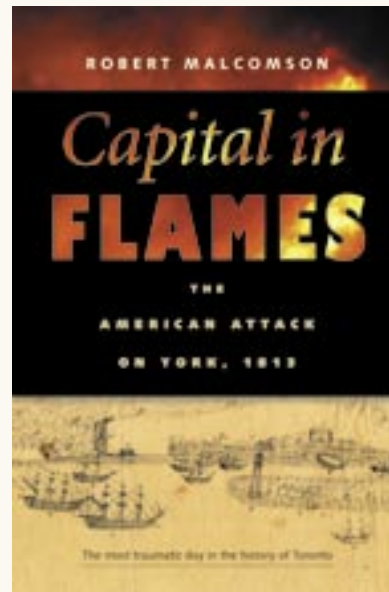
Robert Malcomson

The megacity of Toronto was the frontier town of York in 1813 when it suffered its most traumatic day. Though it was the capital of Upper Canada, York had only weak defences, and when military leaders decided to make it the central depot and naval dockyard on the Great Lakes early in the War of 1812, they essentially painted a bull's-eye on the town and its 700 residents.

In April 1813, a squadron of warships under U.S. Commodore Isaac Chauncey sailed up Lake Ontario and landed about 1,800 soldiers where today's Canadian National Exhibition grounds are located and used the ships' guns to cover their advance. Renowned western explorer General Zebulon Pike led his men into battle against British, Canadian and native defenders led by General Sir Roger Hale Sheaffe, victor of the Battle of Queenston Heights in 1812. But fate stepped in and a mighty explosion ripped the earth open and rattled windows forty miles away. Pike was killed and Sheaffe withdrew. Though the Americans had taken the town, the invasion was a disappointment as the vessels they expected to seize were not there and supplies they hoped to capture were destroyed. Discipline broke down and roving gangs of invaders looted and burned public buildings – and the loyalty of some citizens came into question.

The young town suffered a trauma that few of its inhabitants would ever forget. And Sheaffe, the much-criticized British general, was sent home and never again saw active service.

Robert Malcomson brings to life the politicians, soldiers and citizens whose destinies clashed at York. He explores the causes of the event and allows the voices of the mighty and the meek to recount their experiences. Readers will discover fresh insights into the capture of Upper Canada's capital and the people who lived through that harrowing spring.



What is left for us to explore today?

Capital in Flames is hand-somely illustrated with maps, portraits and contemporary illustrations. Photographs enable readers to discover the **present-day location of landmarks** and events of the battle. Appendices listing military and naval personnel of both sides will be welcomed by **genealogists**.

This is the first full-scale book on the attack on York. Historian Robert Malcomson's account is based on years of research in primary sources. It challenges some of the conventional ideas about the battle and raises many intriguing questions.

- What brought war to this place in 1813, turning a frontier town into a battleground?
- How did British regulars, Canadian militia and native warriors defend their shores?
- Was there a connection between the attack on York and the burning of Washington by the British the following year?
- Who were the community leaders who came forward to deal with the invaders after the British army retreated?
- Who burned the Parliament Buildings of Upper Canada?
- Were there instances of disloyalty among the citizens?
- What were the effects of the Battle of York on the subsequent course of the War of 1812, and on the town of York?

512 pages • 6 x 9 inches • more than 100 illustrations and maps
• appendices, notes, bibliography, index • 978-1-896941-53-0 •
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Robert Malcomson's articles have appeared in journals, magazines and newspapers in Canada, the U.S.A. and Britain. He is a member of the Company of Military Historians and Collectors and is on the board of *The Journal of the War of 1812* and *The War of 1812 Magazine*, an internet site. He conducts tours of the battlefield at Queenston Heights for the Friends of Fort George and is a frequent speaker at historical society conferences. In 2006, he was a consultant and participant in the TV documentary



Bloodlines: The Battle of Queenston Heights. He has recently been named assistant editor of *The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*, for publication in 2012, and is working on several committees and other projects for the upcoming bicentennial of the war. He lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

His previous books include *A Very Brilliant Affair: The Battle of Queenston Heights, 1812*, *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1814* and the *Historical Dictionary of the War of 1812*.