

Capital in Flames

The American Attack on York, 1813

Robert Malcomson

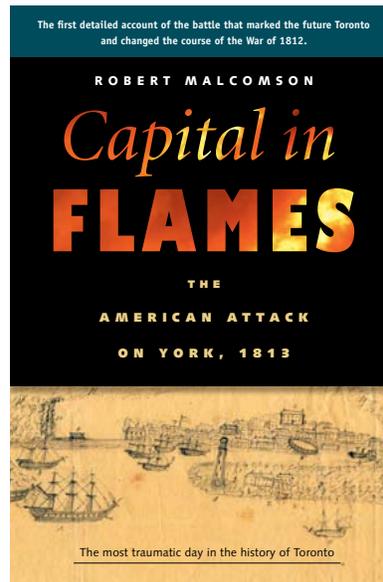
This is the first full-scale book on the attack on York. Published in 2008 to the acclaim of critics, it is now offered in a handsome paperback edition.

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 handsomely 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.

Praise for *Capital in Flames*

"Here, at last, is a comprehensive, meticulously researched history of the battle of York... This brilliant book tells the whole story from both Canadian (i.e., British) and American points of view. It is basic reading, essential for understanding early Toronto as well as the war, and destined to become the definitive study of the subject." Chris Raible, *Ontario History*

"The story of the American capture and occupation of York in April 1813 is not an edifying one. Quite apart from marking a defeat for British and Canadian arms, it was a stew of inappropriate strategic plans, weak leadership, disloyalty, faction, and bad luck. This is the story told in brimming detail in Robert Malcomson's worthwhile new book ..." Douglas Dodds, *Fife & Drum* (Friends of Fort York)

"Malcomson's coverage of the battle is masterful and comprehensive. His lively narrative is detailed and demonstrates a sound understanding of the dynamics of combat. He attacks the myths that grew up around the battle..." Richard V. Barbuto, *Journal of America's Military Past*

"... a model of how to present military history. There are good maps and many illustrations, a glossary of terms, a list of dramatis personae, and a series of appendices that offer up a host of useful information, including the terms of capitulation at York, lists of prisoners, orders of battle, and details on Fort York's layout." J.L. Granatstein, *Legion Magazine*

512 pages • 6 x 9 inches • more than 140 illustrations and maps • appendices, notes, bibliography, index • **First published in 2008, this book now appears as a handsome paperback to mark the 200th anniversary of the battle • 978-1-896941-70-7 • \$24.95 (Canada)**

The late **Robert Malcomson** was a leading expert on the War of 1812 and the Age of Sail on the Great Lakes. He wrote several acclaimed books, including *A Very Brilliant Affair: The Battle of Queenston Heights, 1812* and the prize-winning *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario: 1812-1814*, and his articles appeared in journals, popular magazines and newspapers in Canada, the United States and Britain. He was



well known for the tours he led of the battlefield at Queenston Heights for the Friends of Fort George and as a frequent speaker at historical society meetings and conferences. In 2006 he served as a consultant and participant in the television documentary *Bloodlines: The Battle of Queenston Heights*. A retired elementary school teacher since 2002 in St. Catharines, Ontario, Robert Malcomson died in 2009.