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Review of "Warriors and Warships: Conflict on the Great Lakes and the Legacy of Point Frederick" by Robert D. Banks

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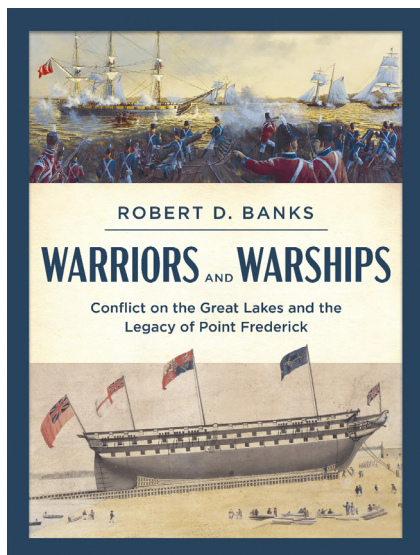
The story of the navy dockyard at Point Frederick, in Kingston, Ontario, where Lake Ontario flows into the St Lawrence River, has been told in bits and pieces, centred around the events of wars and rebellion. Robert Banks replaces this piecemeal, uneven narrative with a thorough, well researched account of Point Frederick's development as a dockyard. He covers the area's use by First Nations, into its first years as a harbour for the French ships on the lake, through its massive expansion during the War of 1812, to the slow but steady decline into the 1840s and its end in 1870. Banks' goal was to produce a similarly detailed history for the dockyard, as has been written for the Royal Military College, currently occupying the same ground. He accomplishes this goal.

While the book covers the use of the area by Indigenous nations and French settlers, the main focus is the British use of Point Frederick as a dockyard. The majority of the book focuses on the period from the Provincial Marine's construction of a wharf and simple dock yard in 1784 through the British Navy's inland presence in the War of 1812, when the dockyard grew significantly in scale and ship building endeavours, to 1834 when the British navy left. The detail on the yard's development during this time period is simply remarkable. From describing the movement of people through the yard's common and workspaces, to the order of building construction, to the quality of the craftsmanship, Banks provides a comprehensive picture of the facility's growth.

The depth of research continues as Banks describes the period of decline from 1815 through 1834, when the British navy left Point Frederick. Banks traces the return of British naval forces during the rebellion of 1837-38 and the reinvigorating of the dockyard, the turn towards steam powered ships, followed by another decline until the British navy gave the area over to the Ordnance Department, in 1853. Of particular note is Banks use of the official and personal correspondence by yard commissioners Edward Law, and Robert Hall, and store keeper John Marks. In most narratives these people appear as minor characters, whereas Banks puts them front and centre, using their official correspondence and personal observations to provide a unique insider view of the workings of the dockyard.

Banks' uses maps, charts, contemporary descriptions by dockyard workers and visitors, local newspapers, official surveys and inventories, and photographs to definitively describe the physical development of the yard. In a master stroke of integration of multiple sources, the author builds an explicit picture of the dockyard's life from the construction of the first wharf in 1784 to the remnants left in 1870. Using photographs from the 1860s through to 2016 and numerous charts, Banks pinpoints locations of buildings, fences, roads and construction sites, at various moments in time. He provides details about construction, appearance, quality of craftsmanship (which varied across projects) and the people who inhabited the buildings. An example of the last point is Banks' description of those living in the shanty huts outside of the early dockyard. Their poverty, crowded and unhealthy conditions are laid bare by the words of those who lived next to them and worked beside them in the yard.

The reader can visualise the gradual buildup of barracks, storehouses, smithies, carpenter shops, sail lofts, officers' residences, fortifications, hospital and the four slips upon which the largest men-of-war that sailed on the lakes were constructed. None of this was permanent, nearly all experienced renovation, enlargement or incorporation into newer structures. Banks notes what buildings remain in full (or at least in part), and what traces lay under the ground or in the waters along the shoreline of Point Frederick today. Most of what once occupied Point Frederick during the time it served as a dockyard is no longer there, the land upon which it sat being totally reshaped for its current use as the Royal Military College. The once large mast pond is now buried under the college's playing field. The site of the fortification at the Point during the War of 1812 is now completely covered by Fort Frederick, constructed in 1846 (though a portion of the 1813 blockhouse has been exposed for viewing).



While all this speaks to the strength of the book there is a shortfall in terms of the telling of the events that surround the dockyard's story. The distortions happen as Banks condenses the events into a quick summary. For example, in describing Lt.-Col. Sheaffe's retreat from York, April 1813 (during the War of 1812), Banks indicates that only twenty-five British soldiers reached Kingston (p. 81), when more than 200 arrived. Lieutenant Richard O'Connor, RN, as Banks states, was assigned the role of dockyard commissioner, in charge of supervising the yard staff, and building projects, from the time he arrived with Yeo in 1813, until the fall of 1814. He places O'Connor as Commodore Yeo's flag officer, in the *Prince Regent* (p. 123) when O'Connor only sailed as captain of the *Prince Regent* for two weeks in May 1814, for the attack on Oswego, (thus gaining part of the prize money), and again for three weeks in late autumn, before being sent to England with Yeo's dispatches. O'Connor was receiving Yeo's patronage, first access to glory and cash, and second a promotion to Post-Captain when reaching the Admiralty with dispatches. Banks omits the tensions between Yeo and Sir George Prevost, Governor-in-Chief of British North America, which effected work in the yard. When describing the building of gunboats during the Upper Canada Rebellion (1837-38), which remained at Point Frederick until 1841, there is no mention of the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 (noted earlier by Banks on pp. 166-67) that this increased force contravened.

This issue aside, the book is an important addition to our understanding of the life course and workings of a naval dockyard. The additional significance of this book is that the yard under discussion was not in Britain, but at an extreme reach of Britain's authority. Everything was harder to do, required shortcuts and innovation, which Banks points out. Another strong point of this book are the many charts, contemporary sketches, paintings and later photographs that have not had wide distribution prior to this publication. These are not simply illustrative of surrounding text, but are used by Banks as informative sources in their own right.

Using this book one could walk Point Frederick and identify where many of the structures were of the former yard at different times, look into the lake along the shore and spot the remnants of the wharfs and slips, and admire that which remains (though modified) from the dockyard's heyday. Banks has shown that without extensive examination of contemporary accounts and resources, walking an area where historical events took place in the distant past is likely to

not be that informative, for the landscape, as at Point Frederick, has most likely been extensively reshaped.

This book will certainly appeal to those concerned with the development and operation of royal dockyards, the running of a dockyard at the far end of the colonial reach, the British Navy on the Great Lakes, ship building in the early nineteenth century, and the development of Upper Canada.

THOMAS MALCOMSON, *INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR*