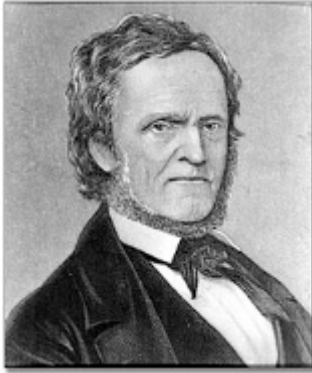


## Mackenzie Rebellion – 1837 & 1838

In the wake of an electoral defeat, William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861) founded a new newspaper, the *Colonial Advocate*, which symbolically had its first issue printed on July 4, 1836. In the pages of the *Colonial Advocate*, Mackenzie began advocating constitutional change for Upper Canada. He now believed that all of the colony's minor grievances could only be rectified through wholesale constitutional reform.



In spring 1837, Lord John Russell, the British Whig politician who was then Leader of the House of Commons (the prime minister was then Viscount Melbourne), authored his "Ten Resolutions" on Upper and Lower Canada. The Resolutions removed the few means that the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada had to control the Executive Council. The Ten Resolutions were the final straw for Mackenzie, and he now advocated severing Upper Canada's link to Great Britain and recommended armed resistance to the British oppression.

Mackenzie spent summer 1837 organizing vigilance and political unions throughout Upper Canada and holding large Reform meetings in the Home District. These meetings passed resolutions indicating grave concern over how the colony was being governed and called for a convention with delegates from both Upper and Lower Canada to discuss the situation. Moving into fall 1837, Mackenzie attracted large crowds, but also began facing physical attacks from members of the Orange Order. It was during this period that Mackenzie determined that violent rebellion would be necessary.

In early October, Sir John Colborne, who was now the acting Governor General of British North America, asked Lieutenant Governor Bond Head to despatch troops to Lower Canada, where the tensions which would lead to the outbreak of the Lower Canada Rebellion in November under the leadership of Louis-Joseph Papineau were high. In mid-October 1837, Mackenzie organized a meeting of ten of the most radical Reformers, arguing that in the absence of Bond Head's troops, Reformers should organize a coup d'état and seize control of the Upper Canadian government using the employees of two prominent Reformers in the colony. The meeting rejected Mackenzie's proposal and instead determined to organize the farmers of the colony to resist Head and the Family Compact.

Mackenzie now approached John Rolph and Thomas David Morrison with false information that people outside Toronto were prepared to march on the city to organize a revolt. He

also produced a letter from Thomas Storrow Brown of Montreal that falsely claimed that the Reformers in Lower Canada were about to rise. Rolph and Morrison were still not entirely convinced and asked Mackenzie to canvass opinion north of the city. Instead, Mackenzie called a meeting of Reform leaders outside the city and convinced them that, together with support from Rolph, Morrison, and some disaffected members of the Family Compact, they would be able to take control of the government. He then returned to Toronto and informed Rolph and Morrison that the revolt would begin on December 7. Rolph and Morrison were angry that Mackenzie had deceived them, but ultimately decided to go along with Mackenzie's plan. On Rolph's suggestion, they now contacted Colonel Anthony Van Egmond to be the military leader of the rebellion. In the November 15, 1837 issue of *The Constitution*, Mackenzie published a draft constitution, mainly modelled on the United States Constitution, but also incorporating English radical Reform ideas and some aspects of utilitarianism. If things had gone according to Mackenzie's plan, it appears that on November 29, he would have called for a provincial constitutional convention, with a provisional government headed by John Rolph administering the colony in the meantime.

On November 24, Mackenzie travelled north of Toronto to rally supporters. (There is no indication that this was coordinated with the outbreak of the Lower Canada Rebellion earlier in November.) At a meeting on December 2 in Stouffville, Mackenzie set forth his plan for rebellion in greatest detail: British troops occupied in Lower Canada would be unable to do anything as Reformers from the country marched on Toronto; once there they would join up with Rolph, Morrison, and important men such as Peter Robinson, George Herchmer Markland, and John Henry Dunn (who were not Reformers, but who had resigned from the Executive Council in protest of Lord John Russell's Ten Resolutions). Mackenzie felt that given an armed demonstration, the Tories would be overwhelmed and there would be no need to actually use violence. Instead, Lieutenant Governor Head could be seized and the reserve lands could be used to compensate everyone who marched on Toronto with 300 acres (1.2 km<sup>2</sup>) of land. The rebels were instructed to assemble at John Montgomery's tavern on Yonge Street on December 7, and then march into Toronto together. On December 1, Mackenzie wrote a Declaration of Independence that was to be distributed to rebels immediately before the march on Toronto. On Sunday, December 3, Mackenzie returned to Toronto, where he learned that John Rolph, having heard a false rumour that the government was preparing to mount a defence, had sent a message to Samuel Lount, instructing him to raise several hundred men and enter Toronto the next day. Mackenzie attempted to stop this action, but he could not reach Lount in time, and thus the Upper Canada Rebellion began ahead of Mackenzie's planned schedule, on December 4.

### **The Battle of Montgomery's Tavern**

By the evening of Monday, December 4, the first of Lount's troops had begun arriving at Montgomery's Tavern. Mackenzie determined that he should lead a scouting expedition to determine Toronto's preparedness. On the way, he was met by Toronto Alderman John Powell, who had been sent to investigate rumours of unrest north of the city. Powell managed to kill one of Mackenzie's men and then escape back to Toronto, where he warned the government of the impending rebellion.



On Tuesday, December 5, Mackenzie grew increasingly erratic and spent the day attempting to punish the property or families of leading Tories instead of marching his men on Toronto. His secondary commanders, Lount and David Gibson, began to question Mackenzie's fitness to lead. Lieutenant Governor Head, unaware of John Rolph's role in planning the rebellion, sent him to attempt to convince Mackenzie to call off the rebellion – Rolph encouraged Mackenzie to enter Toronto immediately. Finally, that evening, Mackenzie began leading his troops to Toronto, but then turned around when troops led by Sheriff William Botsford Jarvis fired at them. Many of the men, who believed that they were participating in an armed demonstration, not an actual rebellion, now deserted in the face of actual violence.

On Wednesday, December 6, new arrivals replaced the men who had gone home, but Mackenzie did not attempt to march the men on Toronto and they simply sat around at Montgomery's Tavern. Mackenzie's only action that day was seizing the mail coach bound for Toronto.

On Thursday, December 7, the day initially set for the rebellion, 1000 troops quickly recruited from loyal areas of the province and led by Col. Allan MacNab, marched on Montgomery's Tavern. Col. Van Egmond (who had just arrived) told Mackenzie that their position was impossible to defend, but Mackenzie put a pistol to Van Egmond's head. In the ensuing Battle of Montgomery's Tavern, Mackenzie's troops quickly surrendered after MacNabb opened artillery fire.

### **Attempted invasion from Navy Island**

The rebel leaders were allowed to escape to the United States, with Mackenzie arriving in Buffalo, New York on December 11, 1837. On December 12, he delivered an address to the largest public meeting in the history of Buffalo, describing Upper Canada's desire for liberty and their oppression at the hands of the British, and asking for their help. The meeting ended with wild "cheers for Mackenzie, Papineau, and Rolph!" and Mackenzie thus began a recruiting campaign. On December 13, he declared himself the head of a provisional government, entitled the "Republic of Canada". He convinced Rensselaer Van Rensselaer (nephew of Stephen Van Rensselaer III, an American colonel during the War of 1812) to join in a scheme whereby volunteers would invade Upper Canada from Navy Island in the Niagara River. Several hundred volunteers travelled to Navy Island in the next several weeks, as did shipments of food, arms, and cannon shot. Recruitment was hurt, however, when the American government, headed by President Martin Van Buren, instructed the volunteers that they would be prosecuted as criminals if they participated in

the planned invasion, and many volunteers returned home.

On December 29, British troops led by Capt. Andrew Drew of the Royal Navy and Canadian volunteers led by Col. Allan MacNab bombarded Navy Island, in the process destroying the SS Caroline, an American ship that was supplying Mackenzie's and Rensselaer's forces. The action was undertaken based on information supplied by Alexander McLeod.

While this was going on, Mackenzie had travelled to Buffalo, seeking medical attention for his sick wife. While there, he was arrested for violating American neutrality laws, but was released on bail and returned to Navy Island in January. Van Rensselaer had grown disillusioned, however, and on January 14, 1838, he and his volunteers withdrew from Navy Island.

### **Participation of the Lincoln Militia**

Late in 1837 the Rebellion appeared to be over and Navy Island had been evacuated by MacKenzie and his men in January of 1838. Volunteers were called on to enlist in the Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada and the First Frontier Light Infantry (10 Companies) was stationed on the Niagara River under Lieut-Col. John Clark. Col. Hughes of the 24th Regiment was in charge until May of 1838 when Col. Townsend of the 32nd Regiment relieved him of command.

On April 14th, nine prisoners from Dr. Dunscombe's Rising near Brantford, Ontario, were sentenced to death. Three were reprieved and the six remaining were to be hung on 20 April 1838; these were Horatio Hill, Stephen Smith, Charles Walworth, Ephraim Cook, John Tufford, Nathan Town. Tensions ran high, and on the 13th of April the hanging of Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews in Toronto, added to the resentment of the local populace.

On 19th of April a group of local men met and decided to attack the goal in Hamilton. They were led by Linus Wilson Miller and Dr. J. T. Wilson, but on arriving there they were met with a large body of militia and the news of a prisoner reprieve. On May 12th Charles Durand was sentenced to be hung in Toronto and the rest of the political prisoners being held were ordered freed. Durand was reprieved but sentenced to be banished, whereupon he fled to join other refugees in Buffalo, New York.

Meantime the patriots as they were called, captured and burnt the steamboat Sir Robert Peel, near French Creek in the St. Lawrence River. This resulted in rewards being offered for William Johnson of French Creek, and Daniel McLeod, Samuel C. Frey and Robert Smith from Upper Canada.

In June of 1838, the 2nd Lincoln Regiment of Militia was inspected due to rumours of unrest, but the inspecting officer Col. James Kerby reported on 5 June from Drummondville that such rumours were false and that "the utmost good order prevailed upon my presence"

The refugees on the American side of the river however, were still active. On the 17th of June they assembled over 200 armed men, and marched through Lewiston NY on their way to Clark's Point, where they would make their way across the Niagara to attack Queenston. Here the only defense was a small company of the First Frontier Light Infantry under Captain Lewis Palmer. On the order to embark, only 23 men obeyed - but believing that an American troop was marching towards them, they all dispersed. Still they did not give up

their plan to enter Upper Canada.

On June 10th they assembled at Schlosser and crossed to the Grand Island where they were supplied with weapons and ammunition. Twenty-six men, including Alexander McLeod and John James McNulty who had been active in the insurrection at Montgomery's Tavern in Toronto; Jacob Beemer, indicted for participation in Dunscombe's Rising; Samuel Chandler of Pelham and Benjamin Wait of Willoughby who had joined MacKenzie on Navy Island, landed near Chippawa in Willoughby Township. Under the leadership of Chandler, who had a list of over 500 sympathizers on the Canadian side, they divided into several smaller groups, and began their march to the Short Hills. Once there they gathered at the barn of Lewis Wilson, a refugee in Buffalo, but then moved on to the farm of Aaron Winchester, another sympathizer. They were now 7 miles from St. Catharines, and sent word to the newly appointed Commander In Chief of the Patriot Army, Daniel McLeod, that they stood ready and waiting orders.

McLeod decided their plan was premature and might jeopardize the success of the general insurrection, planned for July 4th. He dispatched Linus Wilson Miller to order the group to return to the United States. The men refused and continued to gather new recruits. When their numbers reached 49 men, they decided to attack the small group of Lancers just recently sent to Queenston to patrol the Niagara River. The Queen's Lancers was a small group of 13 men commanded by Sergeant Robert Bailey.

The patriots divided into three groups and set out. On their arrival at the house where the Lancers were lodged, they surrounded the home, and eventually obtained the surrender of the company by threatening to burn them out. Some among the patriots wanted to hang the captured men; others argued for their freedom on parole. The prisoners were formally paroled and released on their word to not bear arms again.

The following morning the regular troops set out to guard all roads leading to the frontier while the woods were searched for the patriot force. The patriots fled west towards Sloat's tavern near Hamilton, but Col. Allan McNab quickly ordered out four militia regiments from the Gore District - the 3rd Gore, the Beverley Regiment, the Queen's Own and the Queen's Rangers, to intercept the patriots. Thirty-one patriots, including two women, were arrested. Dr. J. T. Wislon escaped.

Names of those charged in the Short Hills Insurrection			
Name	Age	Origin	Comments
Samuel Chandler	48	Pelham ON, b CT	Leader of Patriots, banished
James Morreau/Morrow	38	Pennsylvania	executed
William Reynolds	18	Pennsylvania	
Garret Van Camp	28	New York	
August Linus Wilson Miller	20	Rochester NY	
George Cooley	29	New York	
Norman Mallory	23	New York	
Loren Hedger	27	New York	
Solomon Kemp	37	New York	
George Buck	18	Scotland	
James Gemmill	22	Scotland	
Murdoch McFadden	19	Scotland	

Freeman Brady	21	Upper Canada	
Robert Kelly	30	Upper Canada	
Ebenezer Rice	48	Upper Canada	
David Taylor	24	Upper Canada	
Abraham Clarke	33	Upper Canada	
John T. McNulty	30	Upper Canada	
John Grant	34	Upper Canada	
Street Chase	33	Upper Canada	
James Waggoner	38	Upper Canada	
Edward Seymour	26	Upper Canada	
Alexander McLeod		Upper Canada	
Benjamin Wait		Willoughby	Banished

Morrow, Wait and Chandler were tried and sentenced to hang. Wait and Chandler were recommended for mercy by the jury but Morrow was executed on the 30 July 1837. Wait and Chandler were sentenced to banishment for life. Four men from the USA were tried and sentenced to hang, along with several men who were deemed British subjects by birth or naturalization. Petitions for clemency were signed by many from the communities and Sir George Arthur recommended that the worst offender of the British subjects be hung and the rest banished or jailed. Jacob Beemer was ordered executed, Samuel Chandler, Benjamin Wait and Alexander McLeod were ordered banished for life and others jailed.

MacKenzie had escaped to the U.S.A. where he rallied American sympathizers and continued his cross border raids on Upper Canada. In November 1838, more than 200 hundred Americans landed at Prescott on the St. Lawrence River. They took shelter in a stone windmill and several nearby houses. A British force was sent from Kingston, and the Glengarry, Dundas and Grenville Militia were also sent. After 45 of the enemy forces were killed or wounded, they surrendered. The British and Canadian losses were also high, with 20 dead and over 60 wounded.

List of Officers and Men Killed and Severely Wounded in 1837-1838:

<b>Surname</b>	<b>Given name</b>
ALLEN	James
ATKINS	John
BARTLETTE	Lewis
BEATTIE	John
BONA	Usta
BROWN	L. G.
BURTON	John
CARR	Charles
CHARTRAND	Private
CHOUINARD	Francois
DENHAM	Thomas
DEVELIN	Charles
DURHAM	William
EDGEWORTH	William

ELKINS	Henry
FLOWERS	Martin
GIBSON	John
HEVENOR	John
KIDD	William
KILBORN	Alexander
KING	William
LEECH	Matthew
LINN	Henry
MCALLISTER	Charles
MCALLUM	Daniel
MCCHAME	Private
MCINTYRE	Robert
MCINTYRE	William
MCKECHNIE	Private
MOORE	William
MORRISON	Robert
ODELL	Hiram
ODELL	William
POULIOTTE	Charles
REILY	James
TAYLOR	Ralph
TOBIN	John
VITTIE	
VOSBURG	Abraham
VOSBURG	Abraham Jr.
VOSBURG	Miss
WALKER	

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