

COBOURG 1837

THE AFTERMATH OF THE REBELLION

Mackenzie's Rebellion of 1837 was quickly quashed and the involvement of soldiers from Cobourg was chiefly in the mopping-up operation which followed. But unrest continued for some time and the next year Cobourg had its own bit of excitement with what has become known as:

“THE COBOURG CONSPIRACY”

Cross border raids against Canada by freewheeling American “buccaneers” as well as by American “patriots” continued for a number of years.

It is important to note that citizens of all political stripes were together in wanting Mackenzie's armed rebellion to be put down. Nevertheless, following the release of the *Durham Report* of February 1839, which recommended many of the reforms for which Mackenzie had campaigned, **the moderate Reformers of the province felt encouraged to show their support more openly.**

In the Cobourg area, such meetings of support were held, a “Lord Durham and Reform” flag flown, and feelings began to run high. One particular meeting degenerated into “a typical, old-time bloody battle”. The *Toronto Examiner* called it a peaceful meeting “disturbed by a band of Orange ruffians”, who “at the instigation of the Family Compact” committed “most bloody outrage”.

PLANNING FOR REVENGE

Encouraged by all this was one Samuel P. Hart. Hart had been a printer with Reform sympathies, a resident of Cobourg and Belleville. After having his Belleville plant destroyed by loyalists he fled to the United States and there **began to plan revenge with a number of other Patriots.**

On Saturday morning, July 27, 1838 a schooner left Oswego, New York, ostensibly heading for Niagara. It soon became clear to the crew that the actual destination was Cobourg.

“By overhearing chance bits of conversation”, the crew “were able to gather that Cobourg was to be burned after the bank had been robbed and two or three individuals plundered or murdered... one for his part in cutting-out the *Caroline*, the supply boat of the Navy Island Patriots.”

On landing just east of Cobourg the conspirators made rendezvous at the Joseph Ash farm with some local supporters. Among other things discussed was the plan to rob “Squire” Henry's private bank opposite St. Peter's Church, and further, **“to rid Cobourg, in particular, and Upper Canada in general, of two prominent members of the Boulton family, the Hon. George S. and D'Arcy, both strong supporters of the Family Compact”.**



George S. Boulton

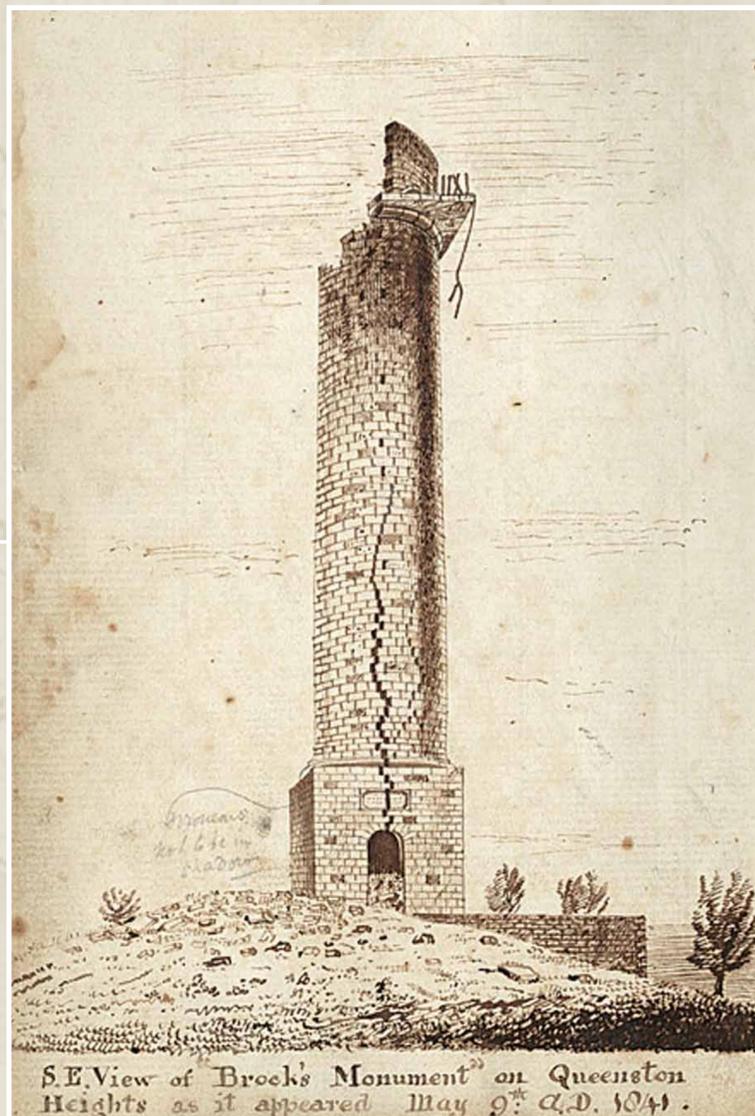


D'Arcy Boulton

BETRAYED, THANK GOD!

During a number of delays in carrying out their plans, one of the conspirators, Henry J. Moon, thought better of his involvement and was able to personally warn D'Arcy Boulton of the plan. On July 29, a "body of trusty men" with names such as Boswell, Ruttan, Boulton, Chatterton, surrounded the Ash homestead and demanded entrance "in the Queen's name." Some of the conspirators escaped through windows and into the woods, but the principals, including Hart and Ash were caught. (One who may have escaped was the, later notorious, Ben Lett who (debatably) blew up Brock's Monument in 1842.

One of the leaders of the 'Cobourg Conspiracy' against Robert Henry's bank was Benjamin Lett, a notorious "Patriot". Lett left mayhem in his wake and a reputation for both avoiding and escaping capture. Whether involved or not, he was justifiably accused of the bombing of Brock's Monument in 1840.



The conspirators were brought to trial on Friday, September 13. Acting as **their defence attorney was the same D'Arcy Boulton** against whom they had allegedly plotted! Samuel Hart was sentenced to 7 years hard labour in the Penitentiary and Joseph Ash, 6 months in jail and a fine of 100 pounds.

Summarized from the Canadian Historical Review, 1937