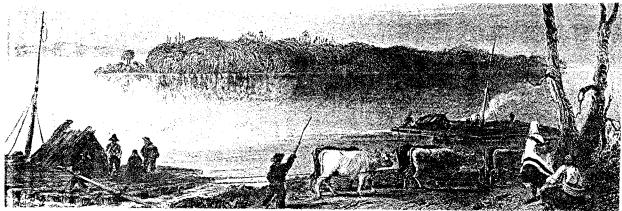# NAVY ISLAND

With a size of 316 acres, Navy Island is the largest Canadian Island in the Niagara River. Long before the United Empire Loyalists settled in the area, Navy Island was used by the French for shipbuilding and as a naval depot. It is from this early use that the Island's name is derived. On July 25, 1759, the French garrison at Fort Niagara surrendered to Sir William Johnson and Navy Island, Fort Erie and all of the Niagara River became British land.

The Island became famous as the headquarters of the rebels in the Rebellion of 1837. William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the rebels was an advocate of Responsible Government and was strongly opposed to the Family Compact. Failing in his attempts to peacefully reform the government, he took up arms, but lost during a confrontation with Colonel James FitzGibbon (who had won a victory over invading Americans at the Battle of Beaverdams during the War of 1812), at Montgomery's Tavern, north of Toronto. Barely escaping capture, Mackenzie and his supporters fled to Buffalo, where they armed themselves with cannons and military supplies, and set up a base on Navy Island on December 13, 1837. American authorities intervened and insisted that the rebels return the military supplies which they had taken from the Buffalo arsenal. The "Patriots," as the rebels called themselves, left the Island on January 15, 1838, but not before the famous burning of the American steamboat, the Caroline, by Canadian soldiers. A memorial commemorating the three main events in the history of Navy Island -- shipbuilding, Mackenzie's occupation and the burning of the Caroline -- was unveiled on October 12, 1928, under the auspices of the Lundy's Lane Historical Society. It is located on the Canadian mainland, just opposite Navy Island.

In the mid-1850s, 100 acres of Navy Island were cleared for farming, and by 1865, four families lived on the Island. In 1876, part of the Island was leased to entrepreneurs who developed a pleasure ground for tourists. They also built a two-storey summer hotel called The Queen's Hotel and a dock. This venture was abandoned in the early 1900s, and the hotel burned around 1910, and was not rebuilt. In 1938, a lease was granted to the Niagara Parks Commission allowing them to assume jurisdiction of the Island. Although Navy Island was aggressively promoted as a possible site for the new United Nations headquarters in 1945, New York was considered to be a more appropriate location, and Navy Island remained undeveloped. In 1949, the Parks Commission refused a request to lease the Island as a private game preserve. To discourage similar requests and protect the natural state of the Island, the Parks Commission declared Navy Island a Wild Life and Crown Preserve. Navy Island remains a protected area today, and camping is allowed on some parts with a permit. In 1994, 105 camping permits were purchased from the Niagara Parks Police Department.

Navy Island from the Canadian Side