

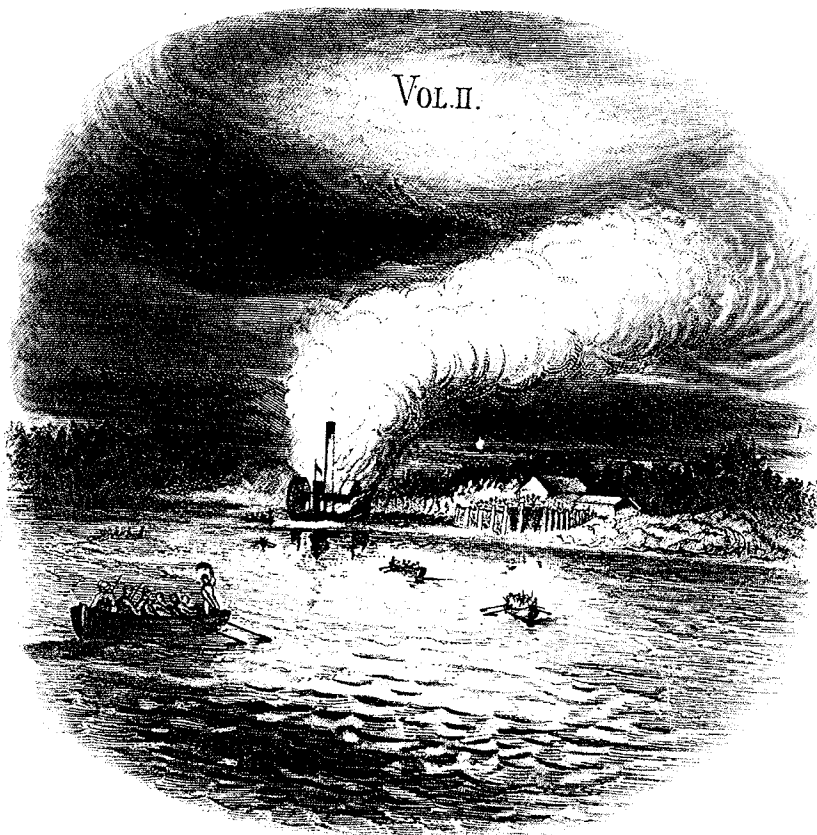
THE BURNING OF THE CAROLINE

During the rebellion of 1837, William Lyon Mackenzie and his followers, after losing at Montgomery's Tavern to Colonel FitzGibbon (who had won a victory over invading Americans at the Battle of Beaverdams during the War of 1812), narrowly escaped capture. They fled to the United States and regrouped on Navy Island in the Niagara River. Mackenzie's supporters on the Island numbered between 200 and 300 men, most of whom were Americans. To counteract this rebel threat, Colonel McNab and 2,500 Canadian militia took up a position on the Canadian mainland opposite Navy Island, where they encountered sporadic firing from across the river which was only 2000 feet wide at that point.

In order to transport food and supplies between the American mainland and Navy Island, the rebels had purchased an American steamboat called the Caroline. McNab believed that the boat was intended to facilitate Mackenzie's invasion of Canada, and therefore sent a small group of soldiers, under Captain Andrew Drew to destroy the ship. At midnight on December 29, 1837, the Canadian soldiers crossed the river in small boats. When they did not find the ship at Navy Island, they continued to the American mainland where they found the Caroline moored near Fort Schlosser. The Canadians boarded the ship and, after a brief scuffle which resulted in one American casualty, forced the crew off of the boat. The Caroline was then towed to the middle of the Niagara River, set ablaze and allowed to drift over the Falls. Following the burning of the Caroline, the rebel forces at Navy Island were subjected to intense bombardment which forced them to abandon the Island for the American mainland.

Greatly exaggerated accounts of the burning of the Caroline were soon circulated in the United States and caused great resentment among Americans. Many believed that the seizing of

the Caroline constituted a violation of American territory and called for retribution. It was feared that this situation would escalate into another war, but the governments of both countries were determined to maintain the peace. Therefore, after leading a series of raids against Canada in 1838 and 1839, Mackenzie was convicted of violating neutrality laws and imprisoned in 1839, after which the rebellion eventually died out.



*The Cutting out of the Caroline
A Sketch by Henry J. Morgan
National Archives of Canada*