

# Oswego Captured by the French in 1756

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## Reminiscences of Oswego, a Hundred Years Ago. Its Capture by the French in 1756

*The Oswego Daily Palladium (June 16, 1857, page 2) contained an article taken from Judge Brewster's copy of a London edition of Wynne's History, printed in 1770. Included is the image of the newspaper article and a transcription for easy reading.*

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We have given, heretofore, brief sketches of the early history of Oswego and its capture by the French in 1756. The following extract from an English history of those times in America, and incidents connected with Oswego, is a more circumstantial and connected account than we have given. We are indebted to Judge Brewster for it, who copied it from a London edition of Wynne's History, printed in 1770, which now almost obsolete. The first battle, previous to the capture of the Fort, was at Battle Island, the present site of the Oswego River Starch Factory, about seven miles up the river. We publish this account for the double purpose of interesting our readers and placing it on record, as an authentic statement from English authority:

From Wynne's History, Vol. 2, Page 37, London, 1770.

Gen. Braddock arrived in Virginia before the end of February 1755, and summoned the several Governors to meet him to consult on the ensuing campaign. The meeting was held at Alexandria, in Virginia, and after much debate it was agreed, that for the preservation of Oswego and the reduction of Niagara, Shirley's and Pepparell's regiments should be sent to Lake Ontario, on which an armed vessel or two, of about 60 tons each, should be built; the execution of which should be entrusted to Mr. Shirley. Braddock should attack Fort du Quesne, and Gen. Johnson should invest Crown Point.

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The expedition under Gen. Shirley was attended with very little advantage. He arrived at Oswego on the 18th of August, but the rest of the troops, badly provided with provisions and artillery, did not reach the place until the 31st, too late to make an attempt upon Niagara.

Though we had long been possessed of Fort Oswego, and though it lay greatly exposed to the French upon any rupture between the two nations, no care had ever been taken to put it in a tolerable state of defence or even to build a single vessel fit for navigating the Lake, until the beginning of this year, when at the meeting Gen. Braddock had with the Governors of the Colonies at Alexandria, it was resolved to strengthen both the Fort and Garrison, and build some large vessels there. A number of shipwrights and carpenters were sent thither in May and June, and at the same time Capt. Bradstreet marched thither with two companies, of 100 men each, to re-inforce the 100 there before under Capt. King. The fort consisted of only a stone wall, mounting but five cannon, three or four pounders, and was otherwise in a very defenceless condition when Gen. Shirley arrived there. The Indians of the six nations to whom he had sent invitations and by great numbers of whom he expected to be joined, declared against all hostilities on that side of the country, insisting that *Oswego being a place of trade and peace* ought not to be disturbed by either party. The Gen. waited until the 26th of September, when he received provisions but insufficient in quantity. The rainy season had commenced and the few Indians that joined him declared there was no safety in crossing the Lake, in bateaux, before the ensuing season. The expedition was unanimously abandoned in a council of war until the next season, and the forces were employed in erecting barracks and two new forts, one on the East and the other on the West side of the river Onondaga. On the 24th of October he set out for Albany leaving Col. Mercer with a garrison of no more than 1700 men at Oswego, though he was advised that the French had over 1000 men at Fort Frontenac, and the new Forts were not yet near completed.

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**Gen. William Shirley** (NYPL b12610187-423821).

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1756. Gen. Abercrombie assumes the command. The enemy entered the country of the five nations and reduced a small post occupied by twenty-five Englishmen, whom they put to the sword. They also formed an ambuscado to impede a convoy of provisions for the Fort at Oswego, but finding that the convoy had passed they determined to await the return of the detachment, but their design was frustrated by the vigilance and bravery of Col. Bradstreet. In his return down (up) the river Onondaga, while he stemmed the stream with his bateaux formed into three divisions, he was saluted by a party of Indians, secreted among the bushes and trees on the north shore, with the war-whoop and a grand discharge of musketry. Bradstreet immediately landed his men on the opposite bank and with a few of the foremost took possession of a small Island, when he was attacked by a portion of the enemy who had forded the river; these he repulsed. Then quitting the Island and collecting his whole strength, about two hundred men, he advanced and fell sword in hand upon another body which had passed the river about one mile higher, with such vigor that many were cut to pieces and the rest driven into the river with such precipitation that a considerable number of them were drowned. He then attacked the main body, consisting of six hundred men, which had forded the river still higher and pursued them to the other side where they were entirely routed and dispersed; and receiving, afterwards, a re-inforcement under Capt. Patten marching to Oswego, and another of two hundred men from that garrison, he would probably have destroyed the whole French detachment had not a heavy rain swelled the river and rivulets so that he could not pursue the enemy. The action lasted three hours. Our chief loss was among the bateau-men by the first fire from the bushes. The enemy had two hundred killed and seventy taken prisoners. Patten went to Oswego and Bradstreet to Albany and acquainted Gen. Abercrombie that the French had assembled a large force on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario, with a numerous artillery &c., to besiege the Forts of Oswego, the garrison of which, by this time, had been re-inforced to the

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**Col. John Bradstreet**, painting by Thomas McIlworth, c. 1764, National Portrait Gallery. This image is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

number of about 1400 men, besides three hundred workmen and sailors, either in the Fort or posted in small parties between the Fort and a place called Bennetsfield. Thereupon Maj. Gen. Webb was ordered to march with a regiment to the relief of Oswego. Their march was stopped by the arrival of Lord London. Notwithstanding the imminent danger of Oswego, the province of N. Y. and the northern Governors insisted upon the reduction of Crown Point and although they at last consented to the march of Gen. Webb, yet it was the 12th day of August before he was ready to leave Albany. At the carrying place between the Mohawk river and Wood Creek he learned that Oswego was taken. Gen. Webb expecting an attack himself felled trees into Wood Creek and retreated to Albany. By this misfortune the two Forts, Ontario and Oswego, were lost. The garrison consisted of 1400 men under the command of Col. Mercer, a brave and experienced officer, but the situation of the Forts were ill-chosen, the materials mostly logs of wood, the defenses badly contrived and unfinished and the place quite untenable against a regular approach. The Marquis de Montcalm, successor to Dieskau, was charged with the expedition, having under his command 1200 hundred regulars, 1700 Canadians and a considerable body of Indians. Col. Mercer received intelligence that the enemy were encamped about thirty miles to the eastward of Oswego and particularly on the 6th of August that there was a large encampment of French and Indians about twelve miles east of the Fort. He dispatched an express boat to the commanding officer on the Lake who was then on a cruise to the westward with a brigantine and two sloops, to acquaint him that he should send next day four hundred men in whale boats and desiring him to keep to the eastward, to arm the men in the boats and prevent the enemy from approaching nearer, but by some strange neglect the vessels returned the next day to Oswego and in endeavoring to enter the harbor the brigantine

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Louis-Joseph de Montcalm-Gozon, Marquis de Saint-Veran, portrait by Antoine-Francois Sergent-Marceau, 1790. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

was driven on rocky ground, by a gale and after beating for eighteen hours had to be abandoned. Montcalm, who sounded with the utmost caution to prevent surprises, having learned the situation of the English vessels took the opportunity of transporting his stores and artillery from Fort Frontenac over the Lake to the bay of Nixouri within one and half miles of Fort Ontario, the places of grand rendezvous. Having made

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soon frustrated from a bold action of 2500 Canadians and Indians who swam across the river in the night between the 13th and 14th and cut off the communication between the two Forts. The next day Col. Mercer was killed by a cannon ball and the Fort being destitute of all cover, the garrison without a commander of equal abilities, demanded a capitulation and on the following day surrendered prisoners of war. The French found some 121 pieces of artillery, 14 mortars, a great quantity of ammunition, war-like stores and provisions, 2 sloops and 200 bateaux. They demolished the two Forts &c., and re-embarked with great haste with their prisoners and booty for Montreal.

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