Discussion of Compilation Procedures for Maps

By M.B. Walsh

This section explains procedures used in compiling maps referenced in the article entitled, “General Hull’s Campaign along the Detroit: Shots Not Fired on 16 August 1812?”

Many of the maps of the Detroit area produced during the 1700’s and early 1800’s are useful for their topology and labeling of features. The geometry in these maps is far from satisfactory, in spite of some of them having been drawn by surveyors or military engineers. Some measurements may have been made on the ground, but it appears that much of the information was drawn on the maps based upon visual observations without measurements, upon memory or upon earlier maps by others.

Maps for this project have been compiled using old maps and textual data to place features in a modern geometric framework. The book Frontier Metropolis Picturing Early Detroit, 1701-1838 by Brian Leigh Dunnigan has been an invaluable source of maps and analysis. Maps referred to in Frontier Metropolis are cited by page number.

Karl Longstreth, Map Librarian of the University of Michigan, helped considerably by digitally scanning maps and making geometric corrections and registration and merging imported data from digital databases. This was accomplished using ArcGIS software from ESRI (ArcMap 9 and ArcMap 10). The merged database could be used in the future by other researchers at the University.

In addition to maps of the Detroit area representing 1812, maps were produced for equivalent areas representing 2012. One map superimposes features from both times.

Hardcopy maps that were scanned and digitally merged include:

1835 map of Detroit by John Farmer, 1840 map of Wayne County, State of Michigan, by S. W. Higgins,
1872 map of Detroit by Silas Farmer & Co., 1876 Springwells map from Belden Atlas,
1905-19?? United States Geological Survey 15 minute quad maps for Detroit area,
1917 Geologic maps based upon 15 minute quad maps, and
1919 map of City of Detroit and environs.

A number of additional maps were consulted including those copied in Frontier Metropolis, those in the University of Michigan Map Library, and copies of several maps from Windsor’s Community Museum.
Digital data include:

United States Geological Survey 7.5 minute 1:24,000 scale quad digital data\textsuperscript{144},
Original Vegetation Cover for State of Michigan,\textsuperscript{145}
State of Michigan road and railroad digital data,\textsuperscript{146}
Digital vector data for Windsor, Ontario area,\textsuperscript{147}
Great Lakes medium scale shoreline from U.S. Government,\textsuperscript{148} and City of Detroit property line
digital data.\textsuperscript{149}

After the War of 1812 much of southeastern Michigan was surveyed by United States Deputy
Surveyors, who were essentially contractors who had taken an oath. They ran a principal
meridian and baseline and divided the United States lands into survey townships. The townships
were further subdivided into sections one mile square. In addition to measuring the sections and
placing stakes, they were directed to keep notes of land cover, soil and crossings of streams and
trails. The survey teams actually walked along a grid with one mile squares. Township plats
were the responsibility of the U. S. Deputy Surveyors, but for many of the townships an
arrangement was made in which persons in the office of the Surveyor General were paid by the
surveyors to generate the plats from the field notebooks. Trails, streams and other features were
connected using the best judgment of the person drawing the plat. In many cases these features
were drawn in detail without surveyors having walked over the land, even though they might
have noticed some of the features from a distance. Townships plats were later made available to
the public, including persons prospective land buyers and persons making maps.

Maps generated by Risdon and Farmer in the mid-1820’s and by the State of Michigan in 1840
were based mostly upon the township plats. For the purposes of this project, most of the land
along Detroit River of highest interest had already been claimed by private individuals and had
been surveyed separately at the expense of the private owners. Good information about the
locations of roads, trails, and streams running through these private claim tracts did not get
included in the township plats. The outlines of the private claims were included in many maps of
Detroit during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, but good information of the locations of former
streams did not get preserved.

After the War of 1812 efforts were made to delineate accurately the boundaries of United States
properties controlled by the War Department within Detroit. Placement of the fort, citadel,
public wharf, storehouse and short sections of the Detroit river edge and Savoyard Creek in the
maps for this article were based upon a map engraved for the American State Papers, a copy
which is found on page 178 of Frontier Metropolis (FM). This was based upon work of John
Anderson, U. S. Army officer, graduate of the academy at West Point, and long-term Detroit
resident.

Location of the first shore artillery battery, the storehouse battery, can be determined with
confidence. Captain John Whistler, commanding the garrison at Detroit, wrote to the Secretary
of War that a position was located “on the most suitable spot lying partly in front of the Citadel
at the lower end of the public store House, which stands immediately in front of the Citadel, and
the lower end of the Town.”\textsuperscript{150} Daniel Baker described the battery being erected “on the site
where the old ice house was.”\textsuperscript{151} A map by Major Rivardi found on page 104 of Frontier
Metropolis depicts Detroit during the 1790’s and shows a structure outside the main gate of the old town with the label “Ice H.” The structure is found on what can be described as a peninsula of high ground extending toward the river along the river bank. This peninsula is located near the upper end of a diagonal path ascending the river bank. Some maps show the presence of the wood wharf, probably the wharf used to bring in firewood by water from distant parts. Blocks of ice could also have been landed here and brought up the diagonal path during the winter. The feature described as a peninsula is depicted on several maps from the late 1700’s including those on pages 90, 92 and 95. The Aaron Greeley map of 1809 (page 124), while not showing a peninsula-shaped feature, does use the label “High Ground” downriver from the newly built government store house. This is the only place where high ground is labeled. It is not known if this was the highest ground along the river bank at Detroit or if it the just the highest in the vicinity.

The old blockhouse built by the British at the lower end of the old town and citadel is located in a sketch drawn by Governor Hull in 1807 of projected defenses for the town and is found on page 122 of Frontier Metropolis. It is located in the middle of the main street, later called Jefferson Avenue. The new gate for the lower end of town was located in 1807 a distance downriver from the old British gate and blockhouse.

The first location for the second battery, called the wharf battery, is at Berthelet’s Wharf. Several years after the war, a new Berthelet’s Wharf was built at the end of Randolph Street. The only privately-owned wharf shown in maps is what is called Merchants’ Wharf on some maps. It is concluded that Berthelet’s Wharf and Merchants’ Wharf are one and the same. This wharf is located downriver from Randolph Street but upriver from a protuberance in the shoreline that had been occupied decades before by the water blockhouse.

The second location for the second battery, named the pear tree battery, was within what was called the commanding officers’ garden. Benson Lossing cites Judge Benjamin F. H. Witherell, who locates the battery at the rear of the United States Court-house. Benjamin, a son of James Witherell, was in Vermont in 1812 with his mother. He however grew up in Detroit and may have learned about the location of the battery from his father or others. The courthouse in the mid-1800’s was located in a building that had been built for the Bank of Michigan at the southwest corner of what became called Jefferson Avenue and Griswold Street. The front faced Jefferson Avenue. The rear was therefore toward the river from Jefferson Avenue downriver a short distance from the centerline of Griswold.

The third battery or lower battery, commanded by Lieutenant John Anderson on 16 August 1812, was located at the lower edge of town a short distance downriver from the storehouse battery. It is likely that it was near the boundary of the town and the upriver limit of the Macomb Farm (Private Claim 55). It has been described as at Woodward’s garden. James May was leasing the Macomb Farm from the William Macomb estate. May also owned the large stone house built in 1805 and located near the downriver edge of town. Judge Augustus B. Woodward was in the process of purchasing the stone house property from James May and was residing there. The battery was probably located at where the downriver gate was built in 1807 in what later became called Jefferson Avenue. It probably adjoined the garden or yard of the stone house property. The battery was probably not located further downriver on the Macomb Farm. Terrain elevation
decreased going downriver. Reports of the battery being located on an “eminence” indicate that it was on high ground.

Three iron six pound pieces mounted on garrison carriages were deployed in a blockhouse at the upper end of town. This blockhouse was built in 1807 at what later became Jefferson Avenue at the upriver boundary of the Brush Farm. This blockhouse was evidently all that remained of the defensive perimeter that was built around the town in 1807 connecting with the fort. Some of the pickets from the 1807 stockade were probably used in making improvements to the fort in 1812.

It appears that nine artillery pieces (12 and 9 pounders) were mounted at the fort. No reliable information is available to provide more detail. An asterisk symbol is shown in the center of the fort, but of course individual pieces would have been deployed around the perimeter of the fort. Larger asterisk symbols are reserved for the heavy artillery batteries that were used for firing across the river.

Lieutenant Anderson deployed one brass six pounder proximate to the militiamen in United States service deployed along a fence line downriver from town. It is likely that it was on or near the river road where it could be provided cover by the militiamen with small arms.

The position of the fence line, where the militiamen in United States service were deployed, is important. In the maps compiled for this project, it is placed at the downriver boundary of the Macomb Farm (Private Claim 55). At the trial of General Hull in 1814, Thomas Jesup testified that the “line was formed perpendicularly to the River, upwards of a quarter mile below the Fort.” One quarter mile is 440 yards. The downriver boundary line of the Macomb Farm is upwards of 600 yards from the southwest part of the fort, measuring in the downriver direction orthogonal to the boundary line. Josiah Snelling also testified, but Snelling is a particularly unreliable source. Snelling testified under oath at first that the line of militiamen was “about 600 yards in advance toward Spring Wells; does not recollect the distance precisely, might have been more.” The next day Snelling changed and the following was entered into the official record: “On reading over his testimony Major Snelling states, that on reflection, since yesterday, he thinks the distance could not have exceed[ed] four hundred yards.”

If Snelling’s reflection is taken to be worthy of credit and if he was specifying the distance from the fort and not from the lower edge of town, where the lower battery of 24 pounders was located, then the United States defensive line would be placed more than two hundred yards closer to Detroit running through the midst of the Macomb Farm.

The position where General Brock’s invasion force of British regulars and Canadian militiamen deployed, can be established with a reasonable confidence. Multiple sources report that the force turned inland at the tan-yard and that they followed a gully or ravine. The stream that entered the Detroit River at Henry’s tan-yard is best known as May’s Creek, named after a later owner of the property through which it flowed. In the maps the name “May’s Creek” is enclosed in square brackets because the name was not used until after the war. A water-driven mill operated along this creek in the mid-1700’s, which was capable of operating most of the year and became the subject of a dispute. May’s Creek ran through the farm that was later called the Lognon Farm (Private Claim 27). Claude Campau operated the mill, but the mill pond encroached on a
meadow of the lower adjacent farm owned by Joseph Cabacier. Cabacier wanted to disable the mill, but Du Quesne in Montreal ruled that the mill should remain unmolested. Several old maps include a stream entering Detroit River about where May’s Creek was, but do not include much detail. A map representing the late 1790’s, found on page 109 of Frontier Metropolis, shows three streams entering Detroit River between the town of Detroit and River Rouge. The middle stream is forked into two branches and shows a symbol between the river road and the fork in the stream, probably meant to signify a mill.

Samuel W. May, youngest son of James May, was born in 1819 at a house by the tan-yard and grew up near May’s Creek. When interviewed in 1906 he told how the creek followed where the rail tracks are now. The creek was eight or ten feet deep in places and two or three feet deep in other places. He spoke of the creek curving to the northwest and originating from towards River Rouge.

Silas Farmer in his massive history of Detroit and Wayne County includes a map of Detroit showing May’s Creek originating in the vicinity of the Grand Circus along Woodward Avenue. A Mr. Cliff, a native of England, operated a tavern on Woodward Avenue near the Grand Circus. A tributary of May’s Creek crossed Woodward Avenue here at what became called Cliff’s ford. This later was applied to Clifford Street. Clearly there were two major branches of May’s Creek, a main branch originating from the vicinity of the River Rouge watershed and another branch originating near Grand Circus. Farmer does not mention the first and Samuel W. May does not mention the second. An 1840 map of Wayne County, published by the State of Michigan, clearly shows that there were two branches.

There could have been a jog in the main course of the creek below where it forked, but unfortunately no graphic illustration can be found to clarify some of the motions made by Samuel May during the interview. Perhaps better information could be obtained later, such as from soil borings, that will permit the course of May’s Creek to be further refined.

The full length of Bloody Run has not been attempted, since it is not important for the purposes of this project.

The course of Knaggs’ Creek is mostly based upon the Springwells Township cadastral map in the Belden Atlas of 1876. Whitmore Knaggs was an uncle of Samuel W. May. May asserts that both Knaggs’ Creek and May’s Creek turned toward River Rouge. This is consistent with the map on page 109 in Frontier Metropolis where the stream is shown originating in a wetland.

The positions of the British artillery cannot be established with as much confidence as the United States artillery. Although General Brock had five field pieces with the invasion force, we do not know where they were located with respect to the defensive position at May’s Creek or if there were any steps taken in placing them for action.

The British shore batteries were located on the Canadian banks of the river across from Detroit. Charles Askin in his journal mentions the firing from “Our Battery at Mr. Babys.” Francois Baby’s farm was where General Hull encamped for several weeks and had placed some artillery to protect the encampment and to assist in interdicting enemy traffic along the river. Francois
Baby’s farm was more than 200 yards in width along Detroit River. An asterisk is placed near the center of this frontage.

The position of the second battery upriver from Baby’s property cannot be confidently placed. Duncan McArthur, when questioned at Hull’s trial where he observed the British fortifying a battery position on 14 August 1812, answered that it was about 100 yards above the previous American encampment at Baby’s and about half a mile upriver from the small fortification built by the Americans. Lossing cites Judge B. F. H. Witherell in stating that a battery was located across the river from where Woodward Avenue ended. In the Detroit Detail map representing 15-16 August 1812, the British upper battery is placed about 200 yards upriver from the upper boundary of the Baby property.

Several maps were produced during the War of 1812, none of which are adequate. A manuscript map evidently sketched by a British officer is found on page 140 of Frontier Metropolis. Using the width of the river to approximate scale, the positions of some features can be estimated. The place of embarkation for British troops is at a point downriver from the village of Sandwich. The ravine where the British invasion force halted is marked close to one mile downriver from Fort Detroit and is labeled as a mile and quarter from the fort. A British shore battery is located perhaps 5 to 600 yards upriver from the house of Francois Baby. The position marked for the afternoon engagement of 9 August 1812 is marked upriver from Grosse Ile and upriver from the marked position for the Indian village of Maguaga. That engagement actually took place miles downriver closer to the village of Brownstown. Perhaps this map was drawn by an officer that arrived in the area after 9 August.

The manuscript map shown on page 141 has some significant differences from the previously discussed map. Fort Detroit is depicted in width over one half of the distance of the width of the river. Claud’s Creek (May’s Creek) is shown almost across the river from the village of Sandwich. The point downriver from the village where embarkation took place is missing and the indentation or cove of the shoreline is gone. Whereas the first map (page 140) shows Baby’s and Gouie’s as two separate entities spaced a good distance apart, the second map (page 141) collocates the American encampment and fortification at the same place. Two closely spaced symbols marking the position of British shore batteries appear to be located across from and between Fort Detroit and the town of Detroit. The map does not locate the engagement of 9 August, but does label the landing place of the American invasion force in July apparently upriver from the lower end of Hog Island (Belle Isle). It erroneously specifies the date of 5 July 1812, whereas it really occurred on 12 July, seven days later.

The engraved map on page 142 was included in an atlas published by John Melish in Philadelphia in 1813. It appears to be based on the previously discussed map on page 141 and has the same problems. Below the title is the attribution, “From an Original Drawing by a British Engineer.”

A map on page 137 of Frontier Metropolis, attributed to an American named Evans, depicts Fort Detroit as wider than Detroit River. This is an error of an order of magnitude. One rightfully should be skeptical in trusting locations and geometry in this map. This map also labels the American shore batteries with three pieces at each battery for a total on nine. Actually only
seven were mounted. The map also depicts two British shore batteries, apparently placed further upriver than the map created for this project.

In the 1812 Detail map Canadian militiamen have been placed near the British shore batteries. General Brock’s initial report asserted that he had no more than 700 British and Canadians. The next day his more lengthy report states 730 British and Canadians was the “force which I instantly directed to march against the Enemy.” The official British prize list totals to more than 1300 British and Canadians. Brock may have initially marched from Spring Wells with 730, but more Canadian militiamen landed and joined the force near the tan-yard later that morning. The total number deployed near the tan-yard may have been closer to 800 or 900 than 730. Also, Brock’s total force included men manning the British shore batteries, men aboard the armed vessels, officers and interpreters of the Indian Department, boatmen, a security force for the beachhead and a security force for the British shore batteries. These were all obedient to Brock’s commands and in communication.

A British officer, in a Montreal paper, informs that there were some Canadian militiamen on the batteries on the British side, but doesn’t tell us more about numbers or precise location. The placement of symbols and a label is not based on good location information, but is rather notional. Lieutenant Jesup criticized General Hull, because Jesup had proposed that he lead a raid on the British shore batteries and General Hull did not approve it. Chances are that Jesup did not know how many armed men were near the batteries and he may have encountered a rude surprise if he had been allowed to attempt the raid. Did Jesup imagine that the British had forgotten to assign a security detachment for the shore batteries? Jesup, before entering the U. S. Army, had worked in a counting house in Cincinnati. Since he was not only literate, but could also account for money, he had spent most of his time in the army in administration and procurement staff work. He had no combat experience and was not an officer of the line. Some other line officers, who had fought at Tippecanoe, might have looked askance at this young staff officer being assigned to lead a critical combat mission.

The area near Detroit had been settled for over 100 years. As the population grew inhabitation extended along the Detroit River waterfront and to River Rouge and Lake St. Clair. In general houses were located near the water and gardens, fences, orchards and cultivated fields developed nearby. Firewood was collected in the back and pastures and open fields without fences became established to the rear of the cultivated areas. The edge of the natural forest regressed a mile or mile and a half back from the waterfront. Over time it probably became easier to cut and collect firewood from remote forested areas with easy navigable water access and transport the firewood by boat.

The positions of most buildings and structures, fences, orchards, crops and similar features cannot be known with confidence. Therefore the positions and extents of these features are in large part notional. Some old maps found in Frontier Metropolis were used for insight, but even these locations may not be based on careful observations and measurements. It should be noted that evidently some of the private farms in addition to having structures near the waterfront, had some structures set back a distance. Several selected buildings have been included with a dark brown color, whereas the notional buildings are represented with black circular dots. Partial
boundaries of some of the farms are depicted in tan. They might or might not have had fences along the boundary lines.

Friend Palmer recalled that when he was young Detroit residents visited a growth of large trees along the river bank slope on the farm below Detroit. This is depicted in the 1812 Detroit Detail map with a different pattern distinguishing it from the cultivated and orchard areas.\textsuperscript{164}

A number of the features shown in the 2012 maps, including buildings and tunnels, are located only approximately and are not meant to be interpreted as exact or definitive. This project does not require accurate boundaries of modern features. It is believed these maps are a major step forward for interpreting events of 1812, but the digital database could be further refined and corrected for future maps and other projects.

\textsuperscript{137} Dunnigan, Brian Leigh, \textit{Frontier Metropolis Picturing Early Detroit, 1701-1838 [FM]}, Detroit, 2001.
\textsuperscript{138} Farmer, John, \textit{Map of the city of Detroit in the State of Michigan}, Detroit, 1835.
\textsuperscript{139} Higgins, S. W, \textit{Map of Wayne County: illustrative of the scale adopted for the construction of the geological and topographic maps of the several counties of the state of Michigan as now in progress in the office of the state geologist, geology not included}, 1840.
\textsuperscript{140} Farmer, Silas, & Co., \textit{Map and manual of the city of Detroit: issued from the publishing house of Silas Farmer, Detroit, 1872}.
\textsuperscript{141} H. Belden & Co., \textit{Illustrated Historical Atlas of the county of Wayne, Michigan}, Chicago, 1876.
\textsuperscript{143} Sauer, William C., Sauer’s map of the city of Detroit and environs Michigan: a general map of Detroit and suburbs including the entire metropolitan area within a radius of fourteen miles from the city hall, showing all highways steam and electric railways , , , Detroit, c1919.
\textsuperscript{144} Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Digital Raster Graphic (Topographic Map), Lansing, MI, circa 1968.
\textsuperscript{145} Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Landuse/Cover Circa 1800, Michigan Resource Information System, Lansing, 1978, \url{http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgd1}.
\textsuperscript{146} Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Geographic Framework: Wayne County, Version 10a, Michigan Center for Geographic Information, Lansing, MI, 2010, \url{http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgd1}.
\textsuperscript{147} Department of Natural Resources Canada, CanVic 1:50,000 digital vector topographic data for the Windsor Ontario area (files include 040J-02, 040J-03, 040J-06 and 040J-07), Sherbrooke, Quebec, \url{www.geogratis.ca}.
\textsuperscript{148} National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, Medium Resolution Digital Vector Shoreline, Washington DC, \url{http://coastalgeospatial.noaa.gov/gis_files/shoreline/data/shapefiles/gl_medium_shoreline.zip}.
\textsuperscript{149} City of Detroit Information Technology Services Department, Detroit Parcel Database, Detroit, 2009.
\textsuperscript{150} Whistler to Eustis, 2 April 1812, in \textit{KNOPF}, v. 6, part 1: 117.
\textsuperscript{151} Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Jacob Kingsbury Correspondence and Papers, Daniel Baker to Jacob Kingsbury, 17 May 1812.
\textsuperscript{152} FM: 104.
155 NARA, Case File B-1, v. 2: 51.
157 Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Samuel W. May Papers, Samuel W. May interview, 25 November 1906.
159 H. Belden & Co., Illustrated Historical Atlas of the county of Wayne, Michigan, Chicago, 1876.
161 Lossing, Benson J., Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812; ..., New York, 1868: 287.
162 Montreal Herald, [date unknown], copied in United States’ Gazette, Philadelphia, 26 November 1812, A British Officer
163 NARA, Case File B-1, v. 2: 133-134.
164 Palmer, Friend, Early Days in Detroit, Detroit, 1906: 381.

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