

MACKENZIE'S MIDNIGHT MOUNTAIN RIDE

By Robert Williamson

World history is full of tales about bizarre characters who made famous rides such as Paul Revere or Lady Godiva. How about our own William Lyon Mackenzie (WLM)! No not the controversial Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King. That was WLM's grandson.

William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861) was born in Dundee, Scotland and immigrated to Canada in 1820. After a very brief stay in Dundas, he began a career as a journalist in Queenston. As a radical Reformer, he admired the American Republican political system and eventually became a central figure in pre-Confederation political life as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, first mayor of Toronto and leader of the 1837 Rebellion.

Having turned his mind to armed revolt, an embittered Mackenzie and his rebel supporters were defeated at Montgomery's Tavern in Toronto by loyal militia led by our 1812 War veterans; Colonel James FitzGibbon and Hamilton's Colonel Allan MacNab. On December 7, 1837, a 1000 pound reward was posted for the capture of William Lyon Mackenzie, and the chase was on.

He set off on horseback for republican political sanctuary across the Niagara River, a route that took him around the head of the lake and across the Niagara Peninsula, placing him in our neighbourhood on Saturday night **December 9, 1837**. Hence our claim to fame, "Mackenzie's Midnight Mountain Ride".

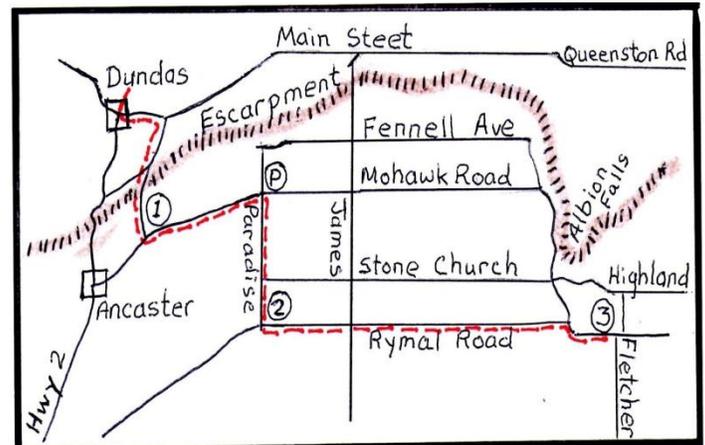
With the help of historian Chris Raible we have followed the clues, like bread crumbs, to piece together Mackenzie's probable escape route across Hamilton Mountain.

Most likely he entered Dundas on York Road from Toronto. Turning east, he followed present day Hwy 8 to the junction of Hwy 2, branching off to Filman Road (now abandoned) which climbed the escarpment to join Mohawk Road at map reference #1. Arriving about midnight, he expected to get food and a fresh horse from a colleague, Lewis Horning and his son Jacob who lived on what is now the site of the cloverleaf for Hwy 403 and the Linc. The Horning family were not at home. Disappointed he headed east on Mohawk Road to the site of present day Westcliffe Mall at Upper Paradise. There is a Rymal Family history plaque there today (letter P) which continues his story.

"Jacob Rymal (1790-1858), married Christine Horning and became the Wentworth County representative in the Upper Canada Legislative Assembly. His large wooden frame home once stood behind St. Thomas More High School on Upper Paradise Road (map

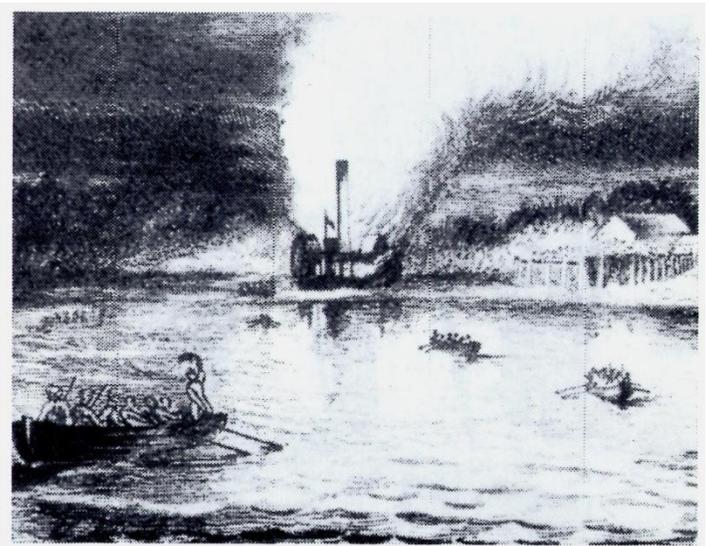
reference #2). A reformer, Jacob was known to have sheltered a rebel associate, William Lyon

Mackenzie, providing him with a fresh horse as he fled from military authorities during the Rebellion of 1837."



Turning east on Hwy 53 (Rymal Road), Mackenzie, according to what is truly a legend, sought shelter as dawn began to break, in a cavern of the Karst limestone region at map reference #3. He arrived safely in Buffalo late on Monday, December 11.

Mackenzie, attempting to continue the rebellion, gathered supporters and declared a provisional government on Canada's Navy Island in the Niagara River at Chippawa. That petered out when MacNab's militia captured and destroyed the rebel supply ship, S.S. Caroline, in a daring night raid on December 29. MacNab was knighted for suppressing the rebellion. Mackenzie was eventually pardoned a decade later and returned to Canada in 1849. His saga provides us with a truly fascinating tale of the struggle for Responsible Government in Canada.



Burning the Caroline off Navy Island Dec 29, 1837. Ontario Archives

Mountain Memories, by historian **Robert Williamson** for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society, appears monthly in the *Hamilton Mountain News*.