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**Introduction:** HMS *St Lawrence* was a 112-gun first-rate wooden warship of the Royal Navy that served on Lake Ontario during the War of 1812. She was the only Royal Navy ship-of-the-line ever to be launched and operated entirely in fresh water.

HMS *St Lawrence* was the largest warship ever built on the Great Lakes during the age of sail.



### HMS *St Lawrence* (Painting)

**Career:** British naval commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo commissioned her as his flagship, with Captain Frederick Hickey as Flag Captain.

At the time, Lake Ontario was effectively landlocked for any but the smallest vessels, due to shallow water and rapids on the St. Lawrence River downstream and Niagara Falls upstream. As a result, warships operating on Lake Ontario had to be built on site, either in Kingston or in the American naval dockyards at Sackets Harbor, or converted from merchant ships already operating in the lake.

Control of the lake, the most important supply route for the British for military operations to the west, had passed back and forth between the Americans and the British over the course of the war. The construction of a first rate ship-of-the-line, in a campaign that had been dominated by sloops and frigates, gave the British uncontested control of the lake during the final months of the war. HMS *St Lawrence* never saw action, because her presence on the lake deterred the U.S. fleet from setting sail.

After the war in 1815, the ship was de-commissioned. In January 1832, the hull was sold for £25. Between May and August, the hull was towed out of Navy Bay. It later formed the end of a pier attached to Morton's Brewery in Kingston and was used as a storage facility by the brewery. Later, it was sunk in 30 feet (9.1 m) of water close to shore and is now a popular diving attraction.

**Design:** The size and power of the *St Lawrence* were a result of the ambition of Commodore Yeo. He had approval to build a smaller ship, but being far from his authorities in England, he greatly enlarged the ship.

Master shipbuilder John Dennis and nearly 200 shipwrights built the *St Lawrence* in less than 10 months. The keel was laid on April 12, 1814 at the Point Frederick shipyard in Kingston, Upper Canada. HMS *St Lawrence* was launched September 10, 1814.

Unlike sea-going ships-of-the-line, the *Saint Lawrence* was constructed without a quarterdeck, poop deck or forecastle. The ship had a shallow draft and was rather unstable.

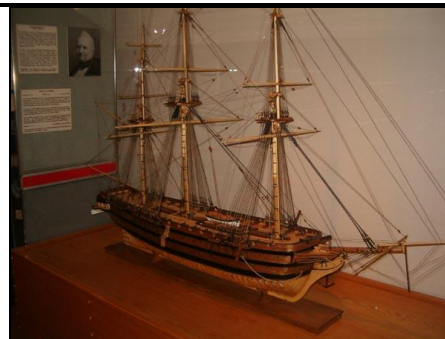
Nevertheless, the *St Lawrence's* 112 guns on three flush decks qualified her as a first rate, larger than Horatio Nelson's flagship HMS *Victory* at the Battle of Trafalgar nine years earlier.

She carried a crew of 837 officers and seamen, most of whom had to be dispatched from Quebec City.

The *St Lawrence* measured 2,305 tons fully laden. The gun deck's length was 191' 2" and the beam was 52' 6". The crew numbered 700.

She carried thirty-two 32-pounder carronades<sup>1</sup> and two 68-pounder carronades on the upper deck, thirty-six 24-pounder long guns on the middle deck and twenty-eight 32-pounder long guns, four 24-pounder long guns and two 68-pounder carronades on the lower deck.

<sup>1</sup> The **carronade** was a short smoothbore, cast iron cannon. Its main function was to serve as a powerful, short-range anti-ship and anti-crew weapon. Carronades eventually disappeared as long-range naval artillery led to fewer and fewer close-range engagements.

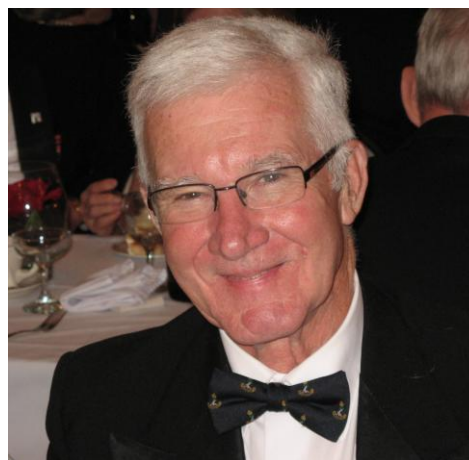


**HMS St Lawrence (Model)**

### References:

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_St\\_Lawrence\\_\(1814\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_St_Lawrence_(1814))
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carronade>
3. <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0012312>

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Mike Braham is a graduate of the Royal Military College (1965) and a former naval officer and senior official with DND. He has an abiding interest in military history.