

## A Promising Shipyard

In 1744, Mr. Louis Chaussegros de Léry, a New-France engineer, suggested the development of two dry docks for the Quebec City region, one in the Saint-Charles River and the other at the western tip of Orleans' Island. The Council of Marine of France gave its approval to the first one, postponing the realization of the one on the Island. Fifteen years later, the colony shifted hands in favor of the English. Then in 1806, Napoleon imposed a blockade on the Baltic Sea where England's wood stock was. Facing a crying need in wood supplies, England turned towards its new acquisition, the colony, where timber was found in abundance.

It is in this context, in the beginning of the XIXth Century, that the adventure of the young Charles Wood takes place. He was a naval architect and shipbuilder, already famous in Scotland. During a stay in Quebec City, he had noticed that the numerous coves, notably the ones in Sillery, were cluttered with wood stocks just waiting to be dispatched to England. To make up for this situation and to cut costly shipping prices, he created a raft-ship. This structure resembled a huge casing made of squared wooden pieces with sails.

Ten times bulkier than the average ship in existence, its broadsides could store up large quantities of wood, especially the valuable pieces of great size that no ship would risk hauling up on its board. Built for a single crossing, these ships would be dismantled once at destination and in order to liquidate the wooden hull, sold on the market at a low price with lesser taxes. In short, a bold and clever venture in which the Scottish merchants were interested to invest and finance.

Charles Wood set up his shipyard in the Fort's Cove. Nowadays, it is occupied by an inn and the wharf. Imagine the bustle prevailing in the gigantic dry dock and its numerous workshops! All day long, you would hear the resounding and tinkling of the tools of some three hundred workers. The swarming place was so intriguing to the local people that boatmen arranged excursions to watch from afar the work in progress!

In 1824 and in 1825, the two biggest ships ever built in Canada were launched from this shipyard: the *Columbus* and the *Baron of Renfrew*, respectively measuring 301 and 390 feet (91.75 and 118.88 meters) and of 3,690 and of 5,294 tonnage. But the adventure would end abruptly off the English coast when one and then the other were wrecked. It was said to be due to the inconsequent behavior of those responsible to bring them safe and sound to England. For the *Columbus*, the shareholders' greed would impose a second crossing for which it was not built. It resulted in a fatal blow to Charles Wood's ambitions. This double disaster would spell the end of an innovative shipyard considered at the time as one of the two most important shipyards of the golden age of shipbuilding in Quebec City.