

THE TRUE FACE OF SIR ISAAC BROCK

by Guy St-Denis

ISBN 978-1-77385-021-4

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

For Want of a True Face

By the time I began researching Sir Isaac Brock, Ludwig Kosche had been dead for the better part of two years. It was then the spring of 2002, and nearly seventeen years had passed since his article on the “Contemporary Portraits of Isaac Brock” was published. Having leafed through it on more than one occasion, I was well aware of the contribution Koche made to the study of Brock iconography. Yet, most of my energy was still devoted to Tecumseh, or rather the mystery surrounding his bones. For this reason, I had to put my growing fascination with Brock’s portraits on hold. One day, however, I took a much-needed break from Native history and went in search of Kosche’s article. Recalling a thorough study, I expected a definitive conclusion. Disconcertingly, however, it appeared that Kosche was not entirely comfortable with some of his own findings. Still, his article was not a complete disappointment.

Kosche was able to identify the two portraits most likely to be authentic likenesses of Brock (figs 3, 27). He also convincingly argued that a miniature long thought to portray a young Isaac Brock was actually Lieutenant George Dunn (fig. 11). But he failed to stress these significant breakthroughs, and this because he was unable to find the documentation necessary to prove his points. Thus constrained, Kosche presented his findings in rather ambiguous language, as if the reader was expected to come around to his way of thinking. Nor did it help that he wrote in a convoluted and sometimes condescending manner. The end result was a lingering uncertainty, which led some War of 1812 historians to question whether any of Brock’s portraits were authentic.¹

To be fair, a cautious approach was recommended by one of the readers who took part in the peer review of Kosche’s article.² But Kosche was

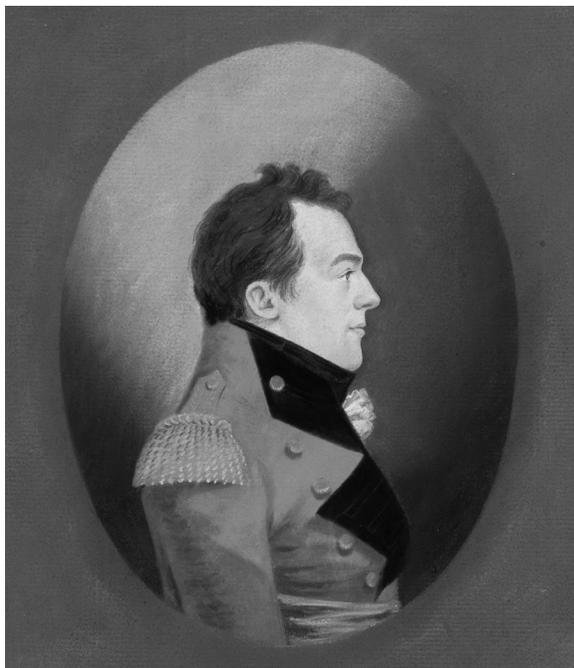


FIGURE 3.



FIGURE 27.

overly cautious, mainly because he feared being abused for alerting the world to the misidentification of Lieutenant George Dunn's miniature. He was also convinced that the first angry outburst would come from the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto, where certain members refused to give up their long-held belief that the miniature was of Sir Isaac Brock.³ But as the weeks and months passed, the dreaded backlash failed to materialize. No doubt, it was stifled by the society's ongoing decline, which in the summer of 1985 forced the ladies of the executive to debate the sale of their most valuable asset—their club house.⁴ They were far too occupied with that unpleasant business to take much, if any, notice of Kosche's article. Neither were there any complaints voiced beyond this shrinking sphere of influence. However, it was not a lack of interest that allowed Kosche to make his bold claim without recrimination. It had more to do with the fact that most Canadians were unaware of the revision he made to their pictorial heritage.

Because the circulation of *Archivaria* was, for the most part, limited to members of the Association of Canadian Archivists, it is not surprising that Kosche's article drew little attention. Had he published his findings on the Dunn miniature (fig. 11) separately, and as a feature article in one of the country's leading newspapers, they would have been more widely known. Of course, there was also likely to have been a greater reaction—which probably would have been largely negative, just as Kosche dreaded. And since he did not take well to criticism, it was perhaps best that his exposé on Lieutenant George Dunn's miniature was published without much fanfare.

In rediscovering Kosche's article, I was optimistic that his research would facilitate my own. I was keen to find an authentic likeness of Brock, and it was reassuring to know that Kosche was able to establish that there were at least two credible portraits in existence.⁵ The first showed Brock as a young ensign in the 8th (or King's) Regiment (fig. 27), and the sitter's youthful appearance corresponded with Brock's age when he entered the British army in 1785. As well, the facings of the uniform were blue—the correct colour for the 8th Regiment.⁶ The second portrait, otherwise known as the profile portrait (fig. 3), featured an older Brock only a few years prior to his death in 1812. This was exactly the image I wanted: a mature Brock near the height of his fame. Yet, Kosche seemed unsure of



FIGURE II.

himself when it came to the profile portrait, even hinting that someone should undertake further research to back him up.⁷ Although the suggestion seemed a bit peculiar, as Kosche was supposed to be the expert on the subject, I had no reason to doubt the article's scholarship—not until December of 2002. It was then that my faith in Kosche began to waver.

Quite by accident, I stumbled upon an art catalogue that was published in conjunction with an exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991. It showcased the artwork of William Berczy, who Kosche named as the artist responsible for Brock's profile portrait.⁸ Well do I remember my anticipation as I began flipping through the pages of the catalogue, expecting at any moment to catch a glimpse of the distinctive portrait. But it was nowhere to be found.⁹ This omission struck me as being very odd, given that Kosche published his article six years prior to the publication of the catalogue. Therefore, it was difficult to imagine that the catalogue's authors would not have known about Brock's portrait and its attribution to Berczy. I blamed myself for having gone through the catalogue too quickly, and so I began another round of flipping . . . albeit more slowly this time. In reaching the appendices, I was stopped in my tracks by an illustration that looked remarkably similar in style to Brock's profile portrait. I carried

on, hoping that Brock's likeness would jump out at me, but there was no sign of it. In going back to the beginning of what proved to be appendix B, I discovered it was an essay by Mary Macaulay Allodi entitled "Pastel Profiles," which looked promising enough.¹⁰ If nothing else, I expected to find Brock's portrait mentioned somewhere in the text. But I was disappointed for a third time—although I soon began to understand why.

As Allodi observed, these profile portraits were not consistent with Berczy's portraiture. For one thing, he was not known to have used pastels. Nor were his portraits ever "as rigid and formula-bound as the pastel profiles."¹¹ Allodi therefore concluded that the profile portraits had been mistakenly attributed to Berczy, and she had a pretty good idea as to who really painted them.¹² It was Gerrit Schipper, a Dutch itinerant artist who was known to have travelled extensively throughout the United States in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Allodi's first clue came courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, where a profile portrait of Governor Sir James Henry Craig, also done in pastels, provided a very close match to the profile portraits thought to have been painted by Berczy. Like them, the portrait of Governor Craig was unsigned. While there was no indication as to the artist's name, Allodi was able to make the connection to Schipper based on his very public displeasure with an unscrupulous publisher.¹³

In March of 1810, a brazen John D. Turnbull of Montreal had Schipper's portrait of Governor Craig engraved without the artist's permission.¹⁴ Schipper, who was then residing in Quebec City, responded to this shameless misappropriation by taking his case to the Lower Canadian press—including the *Quebec Gazette*. It was in the pages of this newspaper that Allodi became aware of the dispute with Turnbull. In a good-sized advertisement, Schipper charged that Turnbull's print was an inferior copy of his own portrait of the governor. Such an imposition was not to be tolerated, particularly when there was a considerable amount of money at stake. Schipper's art was his main source of income, which explains why he did not take kindly to someone like Turnbull cutting in on his profits, and using one of his own portraits to do so. In retaliation, Schipper pledged to deliver a far superior print from a mezzotint engraver in London. By utilizing Turnbull's own marketing strategy and selling these prints through subscription, Schipper was determined to beat the plagiarist at his own game.¹⁵

It is impossible to know if Schipper profited from his attempt to exact revenge, but this much is certain: his response to Turnbull's infringement was a great boon to Mary Allodi. Thanks to all the press coverage generated by this controversy, she was able to identify Schipper as the artist who painted Governor Craig's portrait. And because there was such an obvious similarity between this profile portrait and those thought to have been done by Berczy, she was able to assign them a mass attribution to Schipper.¹⁶ Consequently, they were excluded from his exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada. The implication resulting from the downsizing of Berczy's body of work seems to have been lost on Kosche, perhaps because he had become engrossed with other projects. But while Kosche might have been oblivious to Allodi's revisionism, her idea of an attribution to Schipper appears to have begun taking hold soon after his article on the "Contemporary Portraits of Isaac Brock" was published in 1985. The following year, John Andre acknowledged the possibility, but apparently without telling Kosche.¹⁷ As for Dr. Alan McNairn, he had no further involvement with Brock's profile portrait until 2009. It was then, in a decision heavily influenced by Allodi's essay, that he revised his attribution from Berczy to Schipper.¹⁸

Mary Allodi's revelation was profound, and had she used Brock's profile portrait (fig. 3) to illustrate her argument in favour of an attribution to Schipper, I would have rejoiced at my good fortune. It was clear to me that she was fully justified in giving him credit for all the portraits previously thought to have been the work of Berczy. Brock's portrait, however, was still in need of its own attribution—a problem I hoped to rectify with Allodi's help. In January of 2003, after viewing some very indifferent photographs (and the only ones I had at the time), she agreed that the profile portrait owned by Captain Michael H.T. Mellish "could certainly be by Schipper."¹⁹ This assessment, while heartening, was not as conclusive as I would have liked. But I presumed she was willing to make a more formal attribution at some later date, once I managed to get a better photograph. It soon became apparent that she had more pressing concerns, although she did encourage me to get in touch with an American art historian whose area of specialization was the portraiture of Gerrit Schipper. I could not have asked for a better referral.

Jeanne Riger developed an interest in Gerrit Schipper through her

affiliation with the Museum of American Folk Art in New York City. In 1990, having made Schipper's life her specialty, Riger published an article about it in an issue of the museum's magazine.²⁰ After reading the piece, I was eager to ask Riger for an attribution. But I hesitated to contact her, as I was still lacking a good photograph of Brock's profile portrait. When nothing better turned up by the end of October 2003, I became impatient and decided to go ahead with a letter to Riger.²¹ My gamble paid off with a kind offer of assistance, which was all very fine and well—except that Riger was indeed hesitant to judge Brock's portrait until she saw a high-quality photograph.²² This requirement did not bode well for an attribution, and left me in rather a desperate situation. As such, it called for a desperate measure.

In May of 2004, I made a trip to Guernsey for the express purpose of visiting Belvedere House at Fort George. There, hanging between the windows in the sitting room, was Brock's profile portrait (fig. 3). It was still the prized possession of Captain Mellish, who was by then nearing his ninetieth year.²³ Yet, in spite of his great age and rather fragile health, he had readily consented to a photoshoot including myself, a professional photographer, and a couple of friends acting as assistants. I feared that our group might overwhelm the poor old gentleman, but Captain Mellish soon put me at ease. Still, I was careful not to push my luck by asking too many questions about the portrait's provenance. My earlier correspondence with the captain had warned me against it, and one of his comments was especially revealing. After writing to him about the possible attribution to Gerrit Schipper, Captain Mellish pessimistically replied: "I don't know if we shall ever find out who did the picture of Sir Isaac Brock."²⁴ He did not seem up to rehashing the same old question, and so a photographic copy of the profile portrait became the sole object of my visit. But ultimately there was no avoiding the subject of attribution.

Soon after my arrival, Captain Mellish began to speak about his military service during the Second World War. He then deviated somewhat by relating an incident touching upon Brock's profile portrait. It had to do with the Nazi occupation of Guernsey between 1940 and 1945, when German officers were liable to billet themselves with whomever they pleased. At that time, the portrait was in the possession of Miss Edith Tupper, a cousin of the captain's who lived in a house next to St. Stephen's

Church in St. Peter Port.²⁵ As it transpired, the portrait was never in any real danger of being carried off as a war trophy, for the simple reason that none of the enemy wanted to take up residence with Miss Tupper. As Captain Mellish gleefully blurted out, it was because she “didn’t have the electric!” Her inability to provide this basic amenity compelled the Germans to look elsewhere for their accommodations. It was just as well for the profile portrait, given that Miss Tupper took no precautions to safeguard it or any of her other mementos of Sir Isaac Brock. These heirlooms simply did not rate as highly in her estimation as the family’s silver, which she carefully packed away in cake tins and secretly buried in her garden.²⁶

After hearing this story, I was all the more relieved when the photographs and their negatives came back in perfect order, and I would soon come to appreciate the importance of having secured the best reproduction of the profile portrait then available. Earlier, and just prior to my departure for Guernsey, I happened upon what I considered to be a pretty good snapshot of the portrait, which I hurriedly sent off to Jeanne Riger. Although I had every intention of providing her with a professional grade photograph after my return, I was hoping for a tentative attribution in the meantime. I was surprised, however, when she deferred any opinion whatsoever until she had the optimal image. Happily for me, I was able to meet her exacting standards.²⁷

The photograph was mailed to Riger in mid-June of 2004, and by the end of that same month I had my reply. “The pastel portrait of Isaac Brock is beautiful,” she enthused, and “I do think that the portrait is by Gerritt Schipper.” In elaborating upon her decision, Riger emphasized the identifying characteristics of the portrait: “The flesh tones and the treatment of the [eye] and mouth, the use of the oval spandrel with light above the head and darker shadings below, the button detailing on the uniform, which is almost identical to that in his portrait of Sir James Henry Craig, all seem to indicate Schipper’s hand.”²⁸ I was immensely gratified by this attribution. Kosche might not have been quite so thrilled by the outcome, had he lived long enough to see it. And yet it was Kosche himself who stressed the importance of further research. “Establishing the identity of the artist,” he advised, as well as the portrait’s age, “would be welcome additional evidence for the purpose of underpinning as strongly as possible the authenticity of this profile as a genuine portrait of Brock.”²⁹ This was

the same suggestion I had studiously ignored at the outset of my investigation into Brock's portraits. But now that Berczy had fallen out of favour, I had a new appreciation for the advice Kosche offered.

With Gerrit Schipper established as the artist who painted Brock's profile portrait, I wanted to determine—if only approximately—the date of the work. Knowing as I did, that Schipper ordered all his papers to be destroyed upon his death in 1825, I had no expectations of finding a record of Brock's profile portrait in something like a sitters' notebook.³⁰ But I also knew that itinerant artists often announced their comings and goings in the local press, which I thought might be useful in tracking Schipper's movements. Likewise, there was also a good chance that Brock's military correspondence would allow me to place him in his various postings. By collating all this data, I planned to narrow down the date of Brock's sitting with Schipper. It was just a matter of determining when the two men were in the same place at the same time.

Initially, I thought the search could be limited to the period between 1808 and 1810, when Schipper was known to have been in Montreal and then Quebec City. It seemed unlikely to me that Brock could have met up with Schipper during any of the artist's extensive tours of the United States—although I did recall that Brock had it in mind to partake of the healing waters at Ballston in upstate New York, and this at about the same time that Schipper was in nearby Albany. But in consulting my sources, I saw that Brock was thinking of a jaunt to Ballston in January of 1811, by which time Schipper had already sailed for England.³¹ I then undertook a more exhaustive search beginning with 1802—the same year in which both Schipper and Brock set out for North America. Eventually, I discovered that it was Schipper who crossed paths with Brock, and not the other way around.

In May of 1802, Schipper disembarked at New York City. After spending several weeks there, he began making his way down the eastern seaboard. By the end of March 1803, he was in Charleston, South Carolina, and the following autumn found him at Boston, Massachusetts.³² In the spring of 1804, he travelled to nearby Salem. Later that summer, he went back to Boston and then on to Worcester, Massachusetts.³³ Then, in October of 1804, Schipper introduced himself to the citizens of Albany.³⁴ In the spring of 1805, after short stays in Schaghticoke and Hudson, New

York, he made his presence known in Hartford, Connecticut.³⁵ At the beginning of 1806, there was another stint in New York City for several months. By August of that year, he was back in Hartford and making preparations for the opening of a drawing academy.³⁶ Before embarking on this new venture, however, Schipper made a sudden appearance in Amsterdam, New York, where he was married in late October of 1806.³⁷ He then promptly returned to Hartford with his new wife, who no doubt shared in the management of the academy. Schipper seems to have preferred Hartford as his place of residence, and he might have been ready to settle down there permanently. However, any designs he had on Hartford were soon dashed.

To quote Jeanne Riger, Schipper “was bucking the times” by trying to start a business in New England at the end of 1806.³⁸ The region’s prosperity, which had been adversely affected by the economic warfare being waged between England and France, suffered a further decline after President Thomas Jefferson’s general embargo was enacted in December of 1807. In response, Schipper once again pulled up stakes for the wandering life of an itinerant artist. By the spring of 1808, he was back in Albany; but it was no haven from the hard times. There was little money in upstate New York for such niceties as portraits, and so Schipper had no choice but to seek out fresh markets beyond the Empire State’s borders . . . and the reach of his creditors.³⁹

With late October of 1808, Schipper and his family were heading north to the British province of Lower Canada (now Quebec).⁴⁰ Upon their arrival in Montreal, they found a merchant class prospering from its lucrative commercial ties with the mother country. There was also a thriving illicit trade with New England, thanks to the many smugglers who traversed the border without much difficulty.⁴¹ Business was good, and Schipper took full advantage of the situation to pursue his artistic vocation.⁴² However, Brigadier General Isaac Brock was not among his Montreal clientele. Although Brock had been posted to Montreal in March of 1808, he was transferred to Quebec City the following September—nearly two months before Schipper arrived.⁴³ And once Schipper established himself in Montreal, he was content to remain there until the demand for his services began to wane.⁴⁴ The following spring, in May of 1809, Schipper finally decided it was time for a change.⁴⁵ His next destination was Quebec

City, and it was there that he would meet with the most famous of his Lower Canadian sitters.⁴⁶

Sir James H. Craig was governor-in-chief of the several colonies comprising British North America, and also captain general (or commander-in-chief) of the military forces therein. Unquestionably, he held the most exalted position in the land, and his patronage surely gave a boost to Schipper's reputation.⁴⁷ It can only be speculated as to how this commission originated, but the resulting profile portrait was well received by Governor Craig, and his favourable opinion of Schipper's work must have brought in other people looking to have their portraits painted. Perhaps it was the governor's influence that prompted Brock to sit for his own profile portrait. There is also the possibility that it was a gift from Sir James. The governor is known to have been fond of Brock and exceedingly generous towards him.⁴⁸ But regardless of how it came about, Brock's profile portrait could only have been painted in Quebec City.

As my research had shown, Brock was already in Quebec City when Schipper arrived there in late May of 1809. I also ascertained that both Schipper and Brock remained in relatively close proximity with one another until the summer of 1810. Brock was the first to take his leave, and by mid-July of 1810 he was en route for his new posting at Fort George in Upper Canada.⁴⁹ As there was no other opportunity for a sitting with Schipper, I was confident that Brock's profile portrait (fig. 3) dated to sometime between late May of 1809 and early July of 1810. Schipper intended to set out for England in June of 1810, but his plans were considerably delayed.⁵⁰ He was still in Quebec City during the first part of August, when he received a letter of introduction from the governor.⁵¹ However, it must not have been long afterwards that Schipper and his family departed, as they arrived at Portsmouth near the end of September 1810.⁵²

Despite my confidence in having narrowed down the date of Brock's profile portrait, I began to feel the need for verification. And thanks to Kosche, I believed a test was possible. His analysis of the uniform Brock wore to his sitting gave me reason to believe that I could use a similar means to test the accuracy of my own time frame. I envisioned a fairly straightforward exercise, as I knew there were dress regulations for officers of the British army during Brock's time.⁵³ But unlike Kosche, who made use of the same source, I had the benefit of a correct attribution.

To Kosche, the portrait's age was "naturally of the greatest interest to determine," especially if it was shown to be more accurate than John Andre's date of 1811—or even Captain Mellish's date of 1806.⁵⁴ Kosche was convinced that he could make a better job of it by interpreting the dateable attributes of the uniform, or the coatee as it was more properly known. The dark blue facings and collar patch, for example, were emblematic of Brock's elevated status as a general officer, and also his appointment to brigadier general on the staff of Governor Craig, both of which came early in 1808.⁵⁵ But the buttons were not so easily understood. In fact, they were downright confusing. As decreed by a general order of 1804, the buttons on a brigadier general's uniform were to be set in pairs. And yet Schipper depicted the buttons in Brock's profile portrait as being evenly spaced.⁵⁶ This was the arrangement for lower ranking regimental officers in the 49th Regiment, whose buttons were placed "as for the regiment" (or according to established usage). With evenly spaced buttons evoking Brock's former rank as a colonel and a date prior to 1808, Kosche was understandably confused. In the end, he had to accept that Brock's old uniform must have been altered—at least to the extent that it was given new facings, collar patches, and epaulettes.⁵⁷

Initially, Kosche surmised that anything less than a proper brigadier general's coatee meant that Brock's profile portrait must have pre-dated the arrival of his new uniform, a delivery that might not have taken place until 1809 or 1810.⁵⁸ This "time-lag" was an important consideration, as Kosche had to accommodate the attribution to Berczy. However, 1810 was too late, given the possibility of an earlier meeting between Brock and Berczy at Montreal in late 1808, or at Quebec City sometime in 1809.⁵⁹ The year 1809, it will be remembered, was singled out for another reason: Brock's fortieth birthday. This was a milestone that warranted a portrait, no matter the state of Brock's uniform.⁶⁰ Thus, the period between late 1808 and sometime in 1809 looked right for an attribution to Berczy, and also the altered colonel's uniform.

Like Kosche, I believed that Brock had reused his colonel's uniform by replacing the full green facings with new ones of dark blue, adding collar patches of the same colour, and substituting new epaulettes.⁶¹ There was really no other explanation, and alterations such as these could have been made by any competent tailor.⁶² I could also accept that the buttons were

left in their original settings because the corresponding buttonholes made them too difficult to move, and so they remained a vestige of Brock's colonelcy—just as the profile portrait suggested.⁶³ It was perfectly logical, and so too was the “time-lag” used to explain the slow delivery of Brock's new brigadier general's uniform. Unfortunately for Kosche, and as Brock's new uniform revealed, he was far too accommodating of Berczy.

Although Brock was appointed a brigadier general early in 1808, Kosche thought it unlikely that he could have received his new uniforms before the end of that same year.⁶⁴ This was a reasonable enough assumption. An officer's wardrobe was ordered from England, and given the closing of navigation on the St. Lawrence River each winter, Brock might have been kept waiting for his new uniforms until well into 1809 or even 1810, depending on when the order was placed. Eventually, I found a reference to the delivery of the new uniforms, which Brock acknowledged at the beginning of the second week of July in 1810.⁶⁵ The date of this delivery was significant, as it completely overturned the period Kosche assigned to the profile portrait—namely late 1808 or 1809.

While I had evidence to show that it had taken nearly two years for Brock's new uniforms to be delivered, it did seem an awfully long time. Nagged by self-doubt, I felt obliged to go after some additional evidence. I began by checking to see when Brock received confirmation of his appointment to brigadier general, as he was not likely to have ordered a new set of uniforms in advance of it.⁶⁶ As I soon discovered, Brock got his official notification by early September of 1808.⁶⁷ Consequently, he had sufficient time to place an order for his new uniforms before the close of navigation. In which case the tailors in England should have been able to complete their work by the summer of 1809, with plenty of time for a consignment to Quebec City. But there must have been a glitch somewhere, as the delivery was not made for another year. Given the great expense of a new set of uniforms, I could well imagine that Brock was in no hurry to place his order. The delay, therefore, was not necessarily the fault of some lax tailoring, but more likely the result of procrastination on the part of Brigadier General Brock.

During the course of my impromptu study of early nineteenth century British army uniforms, I began to think that Kosche was far stricter in his reading of the dress regulations than even Governor Craig.⁶⁸ Admittedly,

some commanders were sticklers for proper attire, but Brock appears to have enjoyed a fair leeway—as witnessed by the muddled uniform he wore to his sitting with Schipper. As Brock himself would have understood, new uniforms were an inescapable component of his new status as a brigadier general and staff officer. But since this appointment was limited to Upper and Lower Canada, he must have been loath to purchase expensive new uniforms and accoutrements, knowing that his rank would revert to that of a colonel once he left the Canadas.⁶⁹ Governor Craig was probably sympathetic to Brock's plight, perhaps even to the point of ignoring the dress regulations for as long as possible. Such a favour would have allowed Brock to put off doing anything about his new uniforms until the spring or summer of 1809, thereby delaying their arrival—as it turned out—until July of 1810. Ironically, such an end date would have agreed with Kosche's "time-lag," had he not tried to make allowance for Berczy. But in doing so he effectively undermined his own research.

After clarifying the fine points of Brock's brigadier general's uniform, I turned my attention once again to the profile portrait. Now that I knew when, where, and by whom it was painted, I found myself becoming interested in the artist's style and technique. As Mary Allodi observed, there was a "rigid" and "formula-bound" appearance to Schipper's profile portraits, which was evident in the surviving examples of his work.⁷⁰ Accordingly, she proposed that Schipper might have used a physiognotrace.⁷¹ I was taken with the idea, as there was a definite draftsman-like quality to Schipper's work that seemed to suggest a drawing instrument of some kind. But whereas Allodi had a feeling it was a physiognotrace, Jeanne Riger had evidence of something else. Citing a newspaper advertisement dating to January of 1804, she could point to Schipper's endorsement of the camera obscura for "imitating Nature correctly."⁷²

In Schipper's day, the camera obscura was a well-known optical device. Some versions were as large as a good-sized room or marquee. But given that Schipper was an itinerant, his camera obscura would have been much smaller and portable. It was most likely a rectangular wooden box with a small opening at one end (fig. 32). As light passed through this opening, or aperture, the image was inverted and reversed. An angled mirror reflected the image upwards to the bottom of a ground glass plate. Viewed from above, it appeared right side up and could be traced onto a sheet of

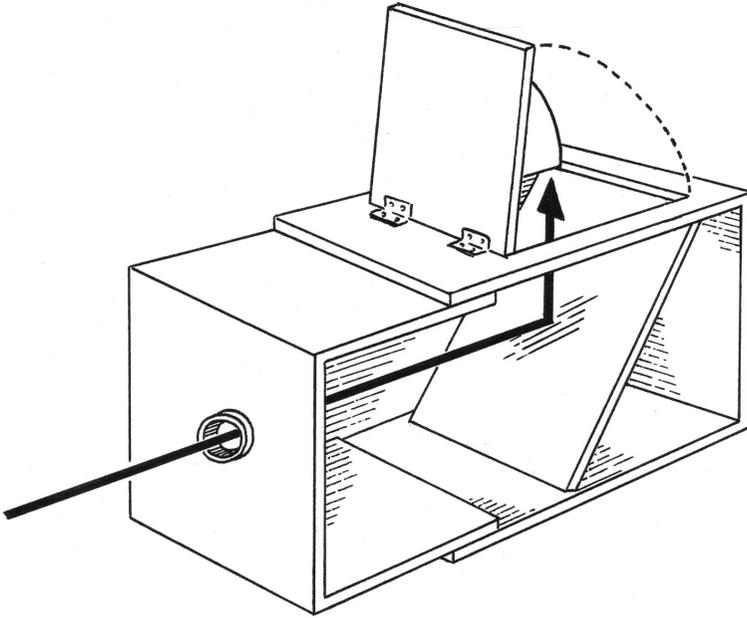


FIGURE 32.

paper. Schipper's camera obscura was also achromatic, meaning that the lens was corrected to diminish chromatic aberration (or colour distortion), thus producing a sharper image.⁷³ With the better optics of the achromatic camera obscura, Schipper was able to expeditiously trace the sitter's profile in a proportionally reduced size. He then used his artistic ability to finish off the portrait, all of which took about three quarters of an hour.⁷⁴ This melding of technology and art combined for a striking likeness, which was so true to life that Schipper was willing to guarantee it. On the off chance that the sitter disapproved of his handiwork, no payment was required.⁷⁵ As a cocksure Schipper boasted, the achromatic camera obscura was "highly valued by the first Artists in *Europe*."⁷⁶ In effect, he adapted an early form of photography to his artistic pursuits.

When Schipper first arrived at Boston in October of 1803, the physiognotrace was all the rage.⁷⁷ Invented some twenty years earlier by a French court cellist named Gilles-Louis Chrétien, the physiognotrace

was essentially an easel with a vertically mounted pantograph. By looking through an eyepiece attached to the pantograph and carefully tracing the sitter's profile, Chrétien was able to draw a reduced outline onto an attached piece of paper.⁷⁸ The profile was then completed freehand, with Chrétien drawing in the sitter's face and attire. Some physiognotrace operators made quite a profitable business out of this invention, which they accomplished by engraving the finished profiles. This innovation allowed them to reproduce multiple copies for increased sales.⁷⁹ Theoretically, anyone could use the physiognotrace to make a faithful outline of a sitter's profile, but a pleasing portrait still called for a talented artist and Gerrit Schipper was just such an artist.

As noted, Mary Allodi was the first person to propose that Schipper might have used a physiognotrace. This she inferred from an advertisement, which Schipper placed in the *Montreal Gazette* at the end of November in 1808. In it, he informed his readers of a "new experiment adopted to take likenesses."⁸⁰ But unlike Allodi, who interpreted Schipper's "new experiment" as a veiled reference to a physiognotrace, I thought it had something to do with the way he prepared his pastels. Notwithstanding this difference of opinion, Schipper's use of a physiognotrace was soon confirmed. During a search of the *Quebec Mercury*, I caught sight of the following auction notice from August of 1810: "On THURSDAY, the 9th, at the house of Mr. G. HUOT, No. 7, St. John street, The Household furniture of Mr. G. Schipper, a new fashionable Stove for coal, a Physiognotrace upon a new construction, a quantity of picture-frames gilt and plain, a few boxes of Crayons, and a variety of other articles."⁸¹ Needless to say, Allodi was delighted with my find, as it provided strong evidence that Schipper's Lower Canadian profile portraits were made using a physiognotrace. For me, there was also the very real possibility that Schipper began his portrait of Brock with one of these drawing instruments. It looked to be a given, but then I began to contemplate the disturbing possibility that he might have gone back to using his camera obscura.

Making sense of the mechanized nature aspect of Schipper's portraiture was proving to be far more complicated than I had anticipated. Did he use a physiognotrace, or a camera obscura? There seemed to be no way to tell, at least not until the spring of 2009. By then, Schipper's profile portrait of Brock (fig. 3) had been sold to the Guernsey Museum and

Art Gallery.⁸² This sale could not have come at a better time, as I hoped to verify Kosche's assertion that Brock had a "wart," or mole, on his right cheek.⁸³ Because this mark was not visible in any of the old photographs of the profile portrait, I concluded that Kosche was mistaken. But wanting to be sure, I looked to a friend in Guernsey for some help. I expected that Gillian Lenfestey would be permitted to scrutinize the so-called wart, if only through the antique glass protecting the portrait's fragile surface. But upon enquiry, Gillian was informed that the portrait had been removed from its frame for some much-needed conservation work. With word of this development, she was able to arrange for a complete "non-destructive" examination of the portrait. It was conducted by Helen Conlon, the Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery's fine art curator, and Gillian was invited to watch.

As Gillian later reported, the mole was actually nothing more than a discolouration in the pastels.⁸⁴ As well, a search for the artist's signature failed to produce a specimen of Schipper's "spindly handwriting."⁸⁵ Neither was there an inscription to confirm the sitter's identity. However, a certain amount of smudging was detected in the pastels. This damage was thought to have occurred gradually over time, after the mat supplied by Schipper had been discarded.⁸⁶ Otherwise, the portrait was in a good state of preservation. There was some migration of the red pigment from Brock's uniform into the upper right background, possibly the result of some injudicious swipe of a hand, but fortunately the blurring missed his face.⁸⁷ In examining the four sheets of laid paper used as a backing for the portrait, one of them was seen to have a few test marks of various colours—as if Schipper was trying out his pastels. There was nothing else worthy of note, other than a pinhole in each of the portrait's upper corners. Gillian thought they were probably made by Schipper himself, and that he must have pinned the sheet down while working on Brock's portrait.⁸⁸ I saw the pinholes in much the same way, but more in keeping with a physiognotrace. While I knew there were variations in its construction, one feature of the physiognotrace remained constant. The sheet of paper had to be held firmly in place, and from what I had seen in various illustrations, the preferred method was to use tacks or pins.

To my mind, the pinholes held great potential as evidence of a physiognotrace. But I also recognized the need for additional evidence, and there

was one course of action that suggested itself almost immediately. Riger first suggested an X-ray of the portrait. In December of 2005, about a year and a half after she made this attribution, Riger recommended the use of electromagnetic radiation “to see if there is the telltale profile outline over which [Schipper] blended the pastels.”⁸⁹ Although I could well appreciate the importance of an underdrawing, I was reluctant to ask Captain Mellish for the loan of Brock’s profile portrait. But I had no hesitation in seeking the same indulgence of the Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery, once I had word that the portrait was liberated from its frame. Helen Conlon was receptive to the idea, although she thought an ultraviolet lamp might work just as well. When its black light proved ineffective, she tried a specialized hand-held “torch”—or flashlight. The pencil line delineating the profile then became “as clear as day.”⁹⁰ Without all the bother of an X-ray, Conlon had come up with the additional evidence of a physiognotrace—or so I thought. Before long, I had to admit that Schipper could also have traced Brock’s profile using a camera obscura, as pencil lines were not exclusively a by-product of the physiognotrace. I was back to square one.

In returning to the pinholes, I decided to contact the process historian at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. As an authority on pre-photographic imaging processes, Mark Osterman was well qualified to offer an opinion. But instead of agreeing that the pinholes were indicative of a physiognotrace, Osterman countered with a disheartening “Hmmm.” He then described the different ways in which the sheet of paper could have been held in place, and how they were “completely variable.” Whether it was a physiognotrace or a camera obscura, “people used whatever worked.”⁹¹ Osterman thought it more likely that thin metal straps might have been installed to stabilize the paper—although pins or tacks could have functioned just as well, and possibly along with the metal straps.⁹² It looked as though it would be impossible to say what caused the pinholes in Brock’s portrait, but then I recalled the auction sale notice. Prominently mentioned among the more outstanding items up for offer was Schipper’s “Physiognotrace upon a new construction.” Suddenly, I realized that it was the best evidence I was ever likely to find, because if Schipper had a physiognotrace to sell in August of 1810, then he was probably still using it when Brock sat for his portrait a short time earlier (sometime between late May of 1809 and early July of 1810). Moreover, the physiognotrace

was just the type of technology that Schipper would have found most serviceable.

While Schipper was an accomplished profile artist, his talent was not well suited to full-length portraits requiring larger formats—as evidenced by the few surviving samples.⁹³ In each of these larger works, Schipper’s awkward treatment of anatomy and perspective is reminiscent of early American folk art. While such naivety is now looked upon as charming and desirable, it was a serious handicap for an artist in the early nineteenth century striving to produce accurate likenesses of his sitters. Challenged by the complexities of form and depth, Schipper opted for half-portraits in profile. But achieving the correct proportions of a sitter’s head and shoulders appears to have required more time than he could afford. By resorting to a camera obscura, Schipper was able to reduce a profile more quickly. However, distortion and a lack of focus made for poor images that were difficult to trace. The achromatic camera obscura corrected these problems to a degree, although the image it produced was still far from ideal. Schipper nevertheless considered it to be a vast improvement, and so the achromatic camera obscura became the tool of his trade. In time, however, it would be superseded by a slight variation on Chrétien’s physiognotrace.⁹⁴

In the United States, the physiognotrace was frequently converted into a silhouette-making machine. It was easily done, and required very little in the way of new materials. The frame was simply reworked to hold a pane of glass, which was covered on the outer side with gauze or oiled paper. With the light from a nearby window, or perhaps even a candle, the sitter’s shadow was cast upon on the translucent coating. Then, by means of a stylus connected to a vertically mounted pantograph, the shadow was traced from the other side of the glass, which remained uncovered and smooth. As in the case of Chrétien’s original physiognotrace, the sitter’s profile was simultaneously reduced and drawn onto a piece of paper attached near the top of the instrument. The profile was then cut out, and because the paper’s reverse side had been blackened, the sitter received a proper-looking silhouette. It was certainly a quick and easy way of making these desirable little keepsakes, but Schipper had no need of a silhouette-making machine. However, he must have seen the advantage in a further reconfiguration of the physiognotrace.

By removing the covering from the pane of glass, Schipper had a clear

view of the sitter's profile (fig. 33).⁹⁵ With this minor modification, he was able to do his tracing in short order—as there was none of the distortion and lack of focus inherent with the camera obscura.⁹⁶ After retrieving the sheet of paper with the reduced profile outlined on it, Schipper sketched in the sitter's features. He then painted the background, contrasting it between light and dark for the best effect. Next came the hair, which was completed in advance of the face to safeguard against any contamination by darker pigments. Once Schipper had achieved an accurate likeness, the portrait was finished with a depiction of the clothing.⁹⁷ If the sitter was pleased, then the portrait was matted and framed under glass.⁹⁸ Most sitters were very pleased. Regardless of the blank expression that signified his style, Schipper's "mastery of facial modeling and natural flesh tones" gave his profile portraits a presence seldom achieved by itinerant artists.⁹⁹ That there was an element of mechanization to his art was of no consequence, although Schipper himself seems to have been more than a little self-conscious about his use of a physiognotrace.

Schipper was slow to embrace the greater utility of the physiognotrace. By late January of 1804, he still employed an achromatic camera obscura—and this at a time when the physiognotrace was becoming a sensation in the United States.¹⁰⁰ While Schipper did eventually abandon his old ways, it appears that much of his resistance to change was the result of an unfortunate association. Many physiognotrace operators worked alongside carnival-like attractions, and the vulgarity of these entertainments might explain why he never acknowledged his own physiognotrace.¹⁰¹ Although he was by no means a famous artist, Schipper took great pride in being a man of respectability.

Having concluded that Brock's profile portrait (fig. 3) started out as a mechanically traced outline, and that it was therefore a reliable delineation, I began to conceptualize a modern rendering of his silhouette (fig. 34). My goal was to test the authenticity of the bronze profile (fig. 8) and the Jarvis silhouette (fig. 18). But even before the new silhouette was finished, I could see that there was no comparison between it and the bronze profile. As for the Jarvis silhouette, it fared somewhat better except that the sitter appeared to be wearing civilian clothing. This tends to rule out Brock, and so neither of the original silhouettes can be trusted to convey an accurate representation of Brock's profile. That distinction falls to the

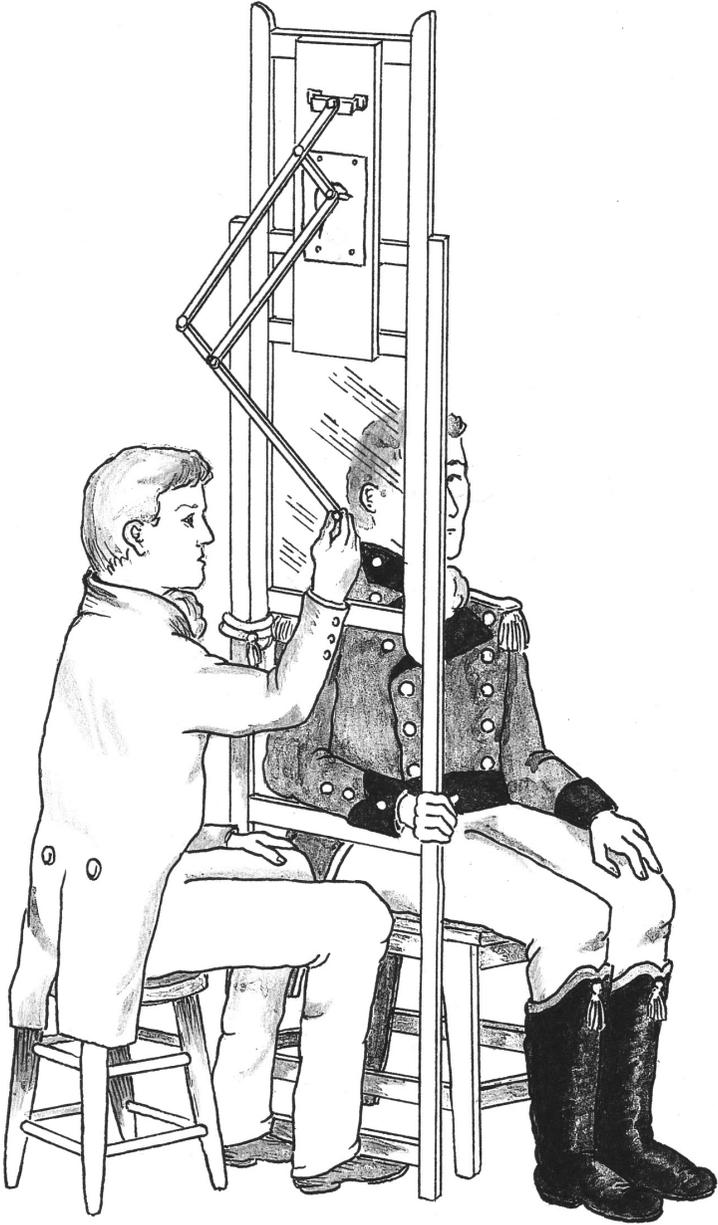


FIGURE 33.



FIGURE 34.



FIGURE 8.



FIGURE 18.

recreation derived from the profile portrait. Although commissioned nearly two hundred years after Brock's death, the precision that went into the making of Schipper's portraiture ensures an accurate silhouette.

My exploration of the largely forgotten world of the physiognotrace was a very rewarding experience, as it brought me to a better understanding of the probable means by which Gerrit Schipper painted his profile portraits—including that of Brigadier General Isaac Brock (fig. 3). With the attribution provided by Jeanne Riger and my investigation into the date of Brock's sitting (not to mention various other asides), I thought every detail surrounding the portrait's creation had been fully considered. But despite my best efforts, one issue remained unresolved. It arose from research carried out by Kosche in which he attempted to explain how the profile portrait made its way to Guernsey.

