




historiCITY SPECIAL EDITION

WAR OF 1812

A publication of the Hamilton Historical Board
www.hamiltonhistoricalboard.ca

historiCITY COMMEMORATES**THE WAR OF 1812****IN A THREE PART SPECIAL SERIES**

The War of 1812 was arguably the most dramatic and momentous conflict in Canadian history, one that shaped our destiny and identity as a nation. We are commemorating this conflict in three special editions: 1812, 1813, and 1814 and, given the dramatic nature of the events, is presented in the form of a dramatic playbill.

				
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EDITORIAL COMMENT



WHAT IS HISTORICAL “TRUTH” ?

Canada is currently commemorating the War of 1812, which on the world stage in the early 19th century was relatively insignificant, which in Canadian history was the decisive event that shaped our modern nation and identity.

This war was waged in many battles on many fronts, both land and sea. However, most of the truly significant action occurred along the borders of the Province of Upper Canada. So, this “relatively insignificant war” takes on particular historical significance for us here in Ontario. Although Hamilton still did not exist in 1812, this part of the Province of Upper Canada became a significant part of the “theatre” of the war, and played a significant role in its outcome.

It is not the intent that these special commemorative editions retell the entire story of the War of 1812. The broad mandate of the Hamilton Historical Board, and of this publication *historiCITY*, is to present local history. This special edition of *historiCITY* is the first of three commemorating the War of 1812. Each will focus on the role that this region and its people played in the “theatres of war” along the borders of the Province of Upper Canada.

In soliciting materials for these special editions, and in designing a "dramatic" format in which to present the material, the *historiCITY* Editorial Team were often faced with a challenge of presenting the “truth” about the War of 1812. The word “truth” has a variety of meanings, perhaps the most concrete one being, “the state of being in accord with fact”. The word “fact” is most often defined as “something that has really occurred”.

We all possess biases that result from influences such as upbringing and life experiences. In recording the “truth” of an event, be it in words or in images, the first-hand observer hopefully can be relied upon to have accurately recorded the facts of “where” and “when”. However, even the most conscientious observer will bring some degree of bias to the record, by consciously or unconsciously selecting precisely what to record, and exactly how to record it. This slant is exacerbated when the observer surmises the “why” of the event. Thus, the final record of an event may contain the facts as “seen” by the observer, and therefore be to varying degrees more or less “true”.

Historians, even as first-hand observers, are no exception. In addition, historians most often deal with interpreting events after the fact, using facts and truths that have been further distorted by the intervention of time and opinion. Thus, “historical truth” tends to change from time to time, depending upon how successful were attempts at reaching consensus by historians at any given time. Sometimes, historians fail to reach consensus, and debate results.

In preparing the content for this special bicentennial edition of the War of 1812, there have been some lively debates among contributors about some of the historical facts and truths put forward, as well as about how they should be presented. There will be some readers, as well, who may dispute some of the history being presented. Such debate is healthy from a historical perspective, and may even lead to a clearer understanding of exactly what happened and why it happened.

Hopefully however, there is one historical truth upon which all can agree. The War of 1812 was the defining event in history that led to the development of our Canadian nation and identity.

As a footnote to the theme of "historical truth", these commemorative issues of *historiCITY* contain images to complement the text. The majority of these pictures are artists’ interpretations of the people and events depicted in the stories, and are therefore creative, artistic compositions, which may or may not always “paint a true picture”.

Bill Manson

Editorial Committee

The views and opinions expressed by the contributors to *historiCITY* do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or of the Hamilton Historical Board.

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PROLOGUE

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR OF 1812

Commentary by Robert Williamson



Napoleon Bonaparte
by Jaques Davide

What Caused the War of 1812?

In "the big picture" it was three things: the spin-off of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe; the "Second War of Independence" in North America; and the Indian Wars of the Michigan Territory.

In 1806 when Napoleon closed all European ports to British ships, or ships that had ports of call in that country, Britain replied with a form of blockade known as the "Orders in Council". This required all neutral ships to enter British ports before sailing to Europe – an obvious "Catch 22" for the Americans. The

situation was inflamed when the British infringed on American maritime rights by inspecting neutral ships at sea, and impressing any sailors that they deemed to be Royal Navy deserters. Continuing British "arrogance" towards their former colonies and lack of respect for their emerging position as an independent nation on the world stage, justified the use of the term "Second War of Independence" in the eyes of the American government. However, as inflammatory as this situation may have appeared, the US overplayed the factor of impressments as the cause of the war. This is evident from the fact that all of the US maritime states directly affected by impressing sailors and by the Orders in Council actually voted against the war.



King George III from
CRL Fletcher's *Historical Portraits*

Overlooked as the principal cause of hostilities were the Indian Wars in the Michigan Territory. As a term of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the British had ceded these lands to the United States. As the Americans pushed westward, they developed a philosophy of expansion that would later be called the "Doctrine of Manifest Destiny". The Americans were determined to extirpate the Indians that stood in their way and to appropriate their land, and the Americans perceived the British as aiding the Indians in their resistance. The fact that all of the interior states voted for war supports this argument. Clearly, however, it was more appropriate for American historians to point to the infringement of American maritime rights as the main cause of the war, rather than the eradication of the Indians.

On June 1, 1812, President James Madison asked Congress to declare war against Great Britain, giving as his reasons the British impressment of United States seamen, British interference with United States trade, and British involvement in the Indian warfare in the Northwest. Congress declared war on June 18, 1812. Ironically, two days earlier, the British had announced that the Orders in Council would be repealed, but word of this announcement did not reach the US until after the war had commenced.



James Madison 1828
by Chester Harding *National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institute*

Commentary by John Nixon

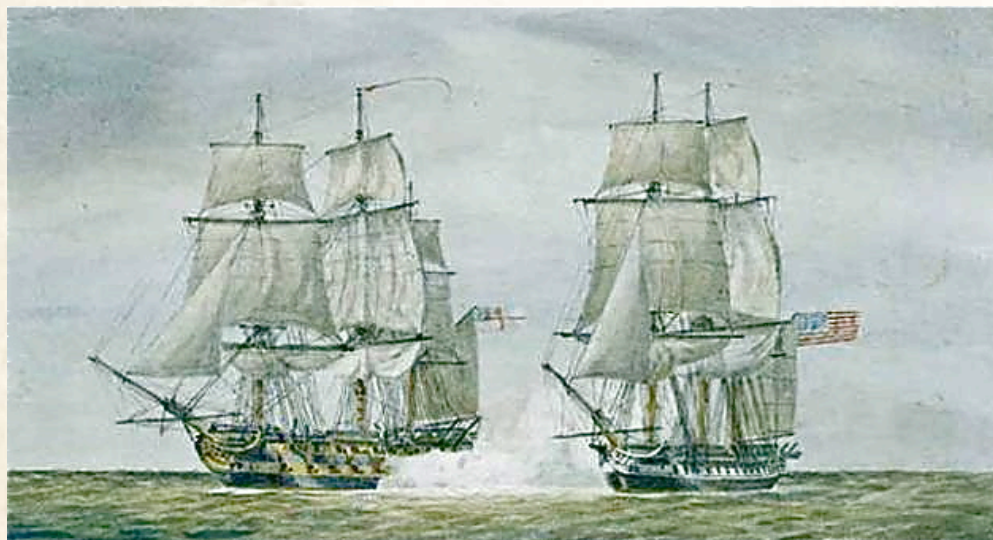
If there had been no Napoleonic War in Europe there would have been no war in North America. Britain, perceiving itself to be in a life-or-death struggle with the French, made decisions that antagonized the United States, and ultimately led to the War of 1812.

The first decision Britain made was to counter Napoleon's trade restrictions on them with a series of barriers of their own. In 1806-1807, the French attempted to damage the British economy by barring their goods from European ports under French control, even if carried by the ships of a neutral nation like the United States. To retaliate, the British government issued a number of 'Orders in Council' between 1807 and 1809 that blockaded French ports. No goods could be imported from, or exported to, Continental Europe.

Both the French and British measures hurt the American economy, which had been enjoying considerable prosperity based on commercial maritime activity. Effectively U.S. merchants were no longer able to trade with Europe. President James Madison and the Republican Congress hatched an ill-conceived plan to force the British to drop trade barriers against them by imposing some of their own. Between 1809 and 1811 a series of laws were passed that prohibited commerce with France and Britain until they permitted free trade. As an instrument of foreign policy, the plan was a disaster. Now American merchants had even fewer markets. Less trade meant less profit, less employment, and less government revenue as customs duties on imported goods were the prime source of income.

American resentment for its financial woes grew and was focussed on the British. After all, the French had supported the Americans during the American Revolution, Napoleon had sold them Louisiana, and taking war across the ocean with a fledgling American navy was problematic. Britain was a more appealing enemy. Residual anger from the Revolutionary War remained. The British trade restrictions were seen as just another sign of continuing interference in American affairs. And British Canada lay just to the north.

The second British decision that antagonized the Americans was connected to the first. In order to carry out a trade blockade and prevent Napoleon from invading England, it was essential to have a powerful navy. By 1812, the Royal Navy had increased in size to 584 war ships and 114,000 sailors. Ships required sailors, but recruiting, replacing and keeping them were not easy. Naval life was harsh; pay was poor and frequently six months in arrears to discourage desertion; conditions were dangerous. The Royal Navy often resorted to impressing unwilling British citizens into service on its ships.



HMS Leopard (left) and USS Chesapeake (right) by F. Muller *Library of Congress*

As well, American merchants' ships offered a safer, better paying alternative for discontented British sailors. As many as 10,000 men were estimated working on these merchant ships. Britain reserved the right to retrieve British citizens in open waters, and proceeded to do so. In the most famous incident, His Majesty's Ship *Leopard* stopped the U. S. Frigate *Chesapeake* off the coast of Virginia searching for four deserters that spies had told them were on board. The *Chesapeake*, refusing to give them up, was fired upon by the *Leopard*, and the sailors were forcibly retrieved. This alone could easily

have been a cause for war. What infuriated the Americans even more was Britain's rejection of the concept of the right of the United States to bestow citizenship on immigrants whenever it wished. To them the British concept of "British-by-birth, British-for-life" was unacceptable.

Diplomatic negotiations over free trade and sailors' rights continued for years, both sides underestimating the resolve of the other. Britain was locked in a war of survival with Napoleon, and needed to take desperate measures. The Americans, with their struggling economy, perceived British actions as disrespectful, and some began to argue that a "Second War of Independence" was necessary.

What also ignited American resentment was the British willingness to supply muskets and ammunition to Tecumseh's confederacy of western tribes, as the Native peoples attempted to resist American westward expansion. Proof of their support was found when General William Harrison, Governor of the Indiana Territory, destroyed *Prophetstown*, the main settlement of the budding confederacy in 1811. The weapons discovered were seen as another example of British interference in American affairs.

Congressman Henry Clay, leader of the War Hawks, pushed President Madison as a matter of honour to declare war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. But only sixty-one per cent of congressional votes were cast in favour of the war. The Federalist Party, popular in the New England States, was opposed, wishing only to restore prosperity through renewed trade with Britain.

The British government rescinded its “Orders-in-Council” days before the American declaration of war, but word did not cross the Atlantic Ocean in time. When the news was received, the Americans had no intention of changing their minds as the issue of sailors’ rights was not resolved. Britain was forced to reply, and on October 13, 1812 declared war on the United States.

If Britain hadn’t been preoccupied with Napoleon would the Americans have declared war? It would have been extremely unlikely. Both militarily and financially, the United States was remarkably unprepared for war. There was considerable unwillingness to pay for war with Britain. Ultimately, the Americans spent less than 150,000,000 American dollars on the entire war effort. To put things in perspective, in 1815 alone Britain spent on its two wars more than that amount of money just paying the interest on its one billion dollar war debt.

Either the United States thought capturing Canada would be “a mere matter of marching”, or just intended to cause enough commotion to extract concessions from the enemy. There never was any serious plan to ‘liberate’ Canadians nor add northern territory to the United States. As Henry Clay stated, ‘Canada was not an end, but a means’.

Commentary by James Elliott

This war was a conflict that might have been averted but for the bitter ideological residue of the American Revolution that afflicted the governments of both Britain and the United States.

In Washington, the ruling Republicans resented the British for their arrogance and condescension, while Conservative government ministers in London regarded American republicanism as a dangerous political virus. Out of this mutual antagonism grew the ostensibly mercantile and marine impetus to war. British insistence on the right to search American ships for Royal Navy deserters and American territorial ambitions on Indian and Crown lands further fueled the animosity.

US war strategy was predicated on the belief that Britain, locked in a life-death struggle with Napoleon requiring all her resources, would forego any serious defence of Canada. That dovetailed nicely into the first stirrings of what would later become known as “Manifest Destiny”. Nearly two centuries later, largely forgotten or ignored out of excessive politeness or fear of giving offence, is the undeniable fact that the United States’ strategic aim was to conquer and occupy what are today the most populous and prosperous parts of Ontario and Quebec.

It was by most standards, a small war, one that hardly registered globally when it occurred and in the public’s mind today is seen as an inconclusive border dust-up that, after all the shouting died down and the armies went home, had absolutely no effect on national boundaries or consciousness on either side of the border.

What careless hindsight misses, however, is just how profoundly perilous this war was for the embryonic colony that would become Ontario, and by extension the confederation that would become Canada.

Commentary by Mike McAllister

At the end of the American Revolution, the United States had successfully severed the ties that bound the former Thirteen Colonies to Great Britain. From an American perspective, the War of 1812 was an attempt to capture territory in British North America that could be used as a bargaining chip to force Britain to recognize and respect American rights as a neutral trading nation. It was the ongoing pursuit of American sovereignty, and therefore a continuation of the revolutionary struggle to remove the overarching paternalistic influence of Great Britain from North America.

The causes of war stemmed from several grievances. First, Great Britain was intentionally inhibiting the expansion of the United States territorially by encouraging attacks by First Nations on American homesteaders in the Western Territories, and economically by hampering trade between France and the United States.

Second, the rights of American sailors were frequently violated through the British practice of illegal impressments, as well as by the seizure of suspected Royal Navy deserters from American ships. **(continued on page 24 ...)**



British impressments of US sailors by Peter Rindlisbacher



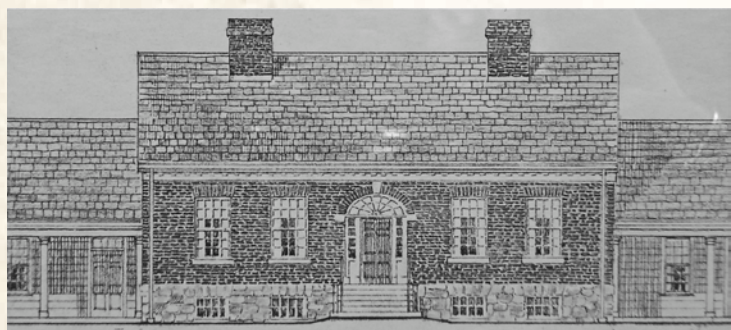
THE HEAD OF THE LAKE IN 1812

BARTON TOWNSHIP

by Bill Manson

Records are scant for the year 1812 here at the Head of the Lake. As near as we can tell, Barton Township was still a “frontier wilderness” in the Province of Upper Canada. The town of Hamilton would not come into existence for another four years. The population of the township at the time numbered around 650 men, women, and children. Apparently, there were fewer than 100 rate payers, living in some 90 log or frame homes. Some of the family names still ring a note today.

Under the Niagara Escarpment, there were the Aikmans, Askins, Beasleys, Depews, Hornings, Hesses, Fergusons, Lands, Lottridges, Secords, Springers, and Stewarts. Above the Escarpment, the Burkholders, Flocks, Filmans, Hornings, Ryckmans, and Rymals. Many of these families were United Empire Loyalists or descended from them.



Richard Beasley's Farmhouse HPL Archives

There were neither schools nor churches in Barton Township in 1812. Children were schooled at home, and people of like religious persuasions still worshipped informally in each other's homes.

To our knowledge, there was virtually no industry in Barton Township in 1812, certainly none like those in the neighbouring mill towns of Albion, Dundas, and Ancaster. There appears to have been only one grain-chopping mill in Barton Township,



Sketch by B Manson *Footsteps in Time*

which supplied grain to a distillery nearby. There were however, several inns and taverns spread strategically across the Township, like Smith's Tavern on the northwest corner of the King's Road (King Street) and Land's Lane (Wellington Street).

Most families in Barton Township lived a subsistence existence, eking out a living from their farms, as they continued clearing more land in the hope of better prospects. The war in Europe, and the impending war between Canada and the USA, was far removed from the daily lives and the daily thoughts of these pioneer families in Barton Township in 1812.

In 1812, there was only one brick home in Barton Township that we know of. It stood on Burlington Heights overlooking Burlington Bay, and served as Richard Beasley's farmhouse and trading post. As well, we know that there was one new stone home, *Belle Vue*, standing majestically at the head of the Mountain Road (John Street South). It had recently been built by entrepreneur, James Durand, who hoped to be making a fortune in the trading business, like his commercial rival Richard Beasley.



James Durand's Belle Vue HPL Archives

ANCASTER TOWNSHIP & ANCASTER

by Jennifer Linton assisted by Jim Green

In 1812, Ancaster was still a young community. It had become a growing centre for agriculture, due to its rich soil, and the creeks flowing over the Niagara Escarpment made the geography ideal for industrial development. In 1791, James Wilson and Richard Beasley built the first grist and saw mill in Ancaster. The interest in the area for industry had led to the development of the community's borders through census, and the official naming of the village of Ancaster in 1793. The addition of the Hatt brothers' "Red Mill" in 1799 assured the economic viability of the area.

With the onset of the war, the fledgling community had its share of difficulties. The majority of the British forces were militiamen without any formal training or structured organization. For this reason, coupled with theft, poor transportation routes, and enemy interception, the men enlisted to protect the Empire were often without proper shelter and supplies. This eventually led to contention among the soldiers who felt civilians took advantage of their desperation by increasing prices, and the civilians who often had their possessions stolen or destroyed by members of both the British and American forces. It was not uncommon for fencing to be pulled up and used as firewood or to have gardens dug up.

The community as a whole suffered the loss of James Wilson's original mill by fire in 1812 and lost one of its most prominent members, Jean Baptiste Rousseaux while in service of the Crown in the same year.

Beyond the setbacks in overall community development, individual citizens suffered on their own home fronts. After the war, at least 93 members of the community claimed compensation from the British government. Items claimed ranged from livestock such as pigs, cattle and sheep, to supplies for war such as wagons, horses and guns. Records detail compensation claims ranging from Jacob Hess' £5 loss due to the seizure of one pig and 700 feet of boards by the British, to Richard Hatt's claim of £4738 for the destruction of his sawmill and garden and the occupation and destruction of his land by an estimated 2000 soldiers.

During the war, the land and people of Ancaster Township were pillaged mostly by the Indian warriors and British soldiers that were fighting for the Crown. Out of all the claims from the community, only one was for goods taken by Americans. In addition to the hardships during the war, the British government only compensated a percentage of the damages from the claims after the war. For example, Jacob Hess only received £3 for his £5 claimed, while Richard Hatt was only awarded £1219 of the initial £4738 claimed.

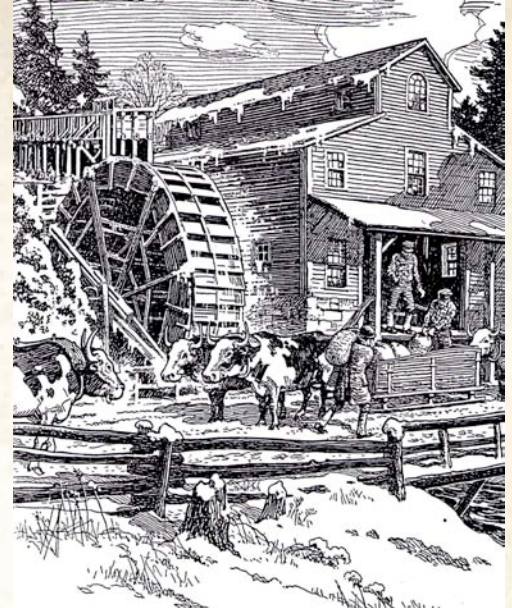
ANCASTER TOWNSHIP & DUNDAS

by Sandra Kiemele

In 1812, the small group of families who lived in the area of Coote's Paradise was just beginning to establish a community and to develop a civic consciousness.

The first settlement in the area occurred in the 1780s by the Morden and Showers families who were followed by the Hatts, Overfields, Hares, and Heads. In 1793 Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe ordered that a road, known as Dundas Street, be built from Coote's Paradise to the Thames River on the western frontier of the Province of Upper Canada. Dundas Street ran through the Morden lands and it was around this road that the community began to grow.

By 1812, the population of the area was approximately 230, and Richard Hatt, owner of the first gristmill in the area, emerged as a leader in the development of the community. Hatt's gristmill and its clientele of farmers proved profitable for other businesses: a tavern, distillery, blacksmith, and general store sprang up around the mill. Hatt was able to build a larger grist and flouring mill, the Dundas Mills, that became the centre of community life. It was around the Dundas Mills that the community built homes and operated businesses. One of the earliest organizations in the area was the Masonic Lodge, Unity Lodge No. 24, which received its charter in 1810. Members came from adjacent townships, and they met first at Overfield's Tavern and later at Peer's Inn before a new charter was issued and the group moved to Ancaster in 1821.



Wilson's Mill, Ancaster adapted
by R Williamson from the original sketch
by CW Jeffreys



Richard Hatt's Mill Dundas Museum and Archives Digital Collection

Dundas Street proved a quick and safe means of transportation between the lakes in 1812. However, when news reached the community of the declaration of war, it was greeted with a sense of unreality, until a supply of muskets and uniforms arrived. Dundas was spared military action, but wounded men were brought to homes in the Dundas Valley.

The name of Dundas was adopted as the name of the community in 1814, when the government established an official post office, which was located at Richard Hatt's Dundas Mills store. Although a petition had been made to the government for Dundas to become the Wentworth County administrative centre, the War of 1812 delayed government action. When the matter was finally settled in 1816, Hamilton was granted that status.

SALTFLEET TOWNSHIP & STONEY CREEK

by Susan Ramsay and researchers from Battlefield House and Museum

At the time of the outbreak of war in 1812, Saltfleet was a growing township that had been established approximately twenty-five years earlier, mainly by people who had remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution. Some of the first settlers of Saltfleet Township were the Green, Corman, Gage, Jones, Davis, and Petit families. In 1796, Elizabeth Simcoe wrote in her diary about visiting the home of Adam Green:

We went to Adam Green's. He shewed us a spring of salt water which looked thick & blue as it fell into a tub from whence I tasted it. He & his daughter guided us to see the fall of Stoney Creek from the bottom. They prepared me some refreshment at his House, some excellent Cakes, baked on the coals, Eggs, a boiled black squirrel, tea & Coffee of Peas which was good, they said Chemists Coffee was better. The sugar was made from black Walnut trees which looks darker than that from the Maple, but I think is sweeter.

Stoney Creek was a typical early settler community, made up of hard-working people toiling in a heavily forested area to generate productive farms in order to feed their families. The Gages, for example, had approximately 60 acres of cultivated land, along with two horses, two oxen and eight milk cows. When War was declared, many of the male heads of households joined the local militia, resulting in periodic absences from their homesteads.

The citizens of Saltfleet Township would have socialized with their neighbours mainly during the various "bees", such as apple paring, corn husking and logging. These work parties usually ended with a dance and a chance for the youth of the community to interact. There were also opportunities for socializing at religious meetings, such as the Methodist sermons and meetings that were common in Stoney Creek at the time. Once every two or three months, a Methodist circuit rider would arrive to deliver a sermon. The Reverend William Case is said to have "made his headquarters at the commodious house of Mr. James Gage at Stoney Creek".



Gage House, Stoney Creek Archives of Ontario

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE 1812 WAR

Excerpted from articles by Anne Jarvis and Bill Manson



Richard Pierpoint by Malcolm Jones
Canadian War Museum

In the early summer of 1812, Black settler Richard Pierpoint petitioned the government of the Province of Upper Canada to raise a company of black troops in order to help protect the Niagara frontier. There were only about 100 free black men in Upper Canada at the time, and their fear was what might happen if the British colony was conquered by a country where slavery was more entrenched than in Upper Canada.

Richard Pierpoint, whose idea it was to form a Coloured Corps, was born in Africa. When he was sixteen he was captured by slave traders and shipped to America, put on the auction block and purchased by a British colonial officer. He came to Canada in 1780, one of ten black people on the United Empire Loyalist list. By 1784 he was enlisted as a private with Butler's Rangers, a troop of Loyalist soldiers who served as wilderness fighters in the Wars of 1784.

Major General Brock initially turned down Pierpoint's request to raise a company of black troops, but by July 1812 he was growing desperate for volunteer soldiers because so few volunteers were coming forward from the white population. So, reluctantly Brock formed a company of black soldiers under the command of a white officer, Captain Robert Runchey -- the "Captain Runchey's Company of Coloured Men", as it became known. Over 30 men eagerly joined, including Robert and Thomas Crisler from Wentworth County. This may not seem like a lot of recruits, but there were probably only about 100 free black men in Upper Canada at the time.

"Captain Runchey's Company of Coloured Men" was the earliest all black Company in Canadian military history, and was to see action in some of the best-known battles of the War of 1812, most notably the Battle of Queenston Heights. Runchey's Company arrived at Queenston Heights in October 1812 after Brock had died. They engaged in the battle, which brought about the surrender of the American troops on the Canadian shore. With the frontier secured the unit spent the winter at Fort George.

In 1813, the company was officially transformed into the Provincial Corps of Artificers under the command of Lt. James Robertson, this time a black officer. Artificer is an old English word for people with special artisan skills. The unit served as infantry during the Battle of Fort George, where they suffered a number of losses. After that battle, the Corps retreated, with the rest of the army commanded by Brigadier General John Vincent to the Head of the Lake, and set up camp on Burlington Heights. Although the black unit did not participate in the action at Stoney Creek, it had already proven its worth as a fighting force and was retained to participate in several other engagements on the Niagara peninsula in 1813. In 1814, the Corps moved to St. Davids, and was engaged in the construction of Fort Mississauga, which was built to prevent American vessels coming up the Niagara River.

Following the end of the war, the black veterans were promised six months pay, but along with other veterans probably never received it. After the unit disbanded, the veterans were offered land grants in Simcoe County, the black soldiers receiving half the acreage offered to veteran whites. When Pierpoint fell on hard times, he petitioned the government to send him back to Africa. His plea was denied, and instead he was offered 100 acres of land near present-day Fergus. Although he was by then 71 years old and had no family, he managed to clear five acres and build a house, therefore receiving full title to the land.

A plaque honouring the Coloured Corps for their role in the War of 1812, stands at Queenston Heights. As a footnote, the Corps was called up for duty again in the 1837-38 Rebellion, and was involved in policing the building of the first Welland Canal.

THE FIRST NATIONS IN THE 1812 WAR

by Mike McAllister

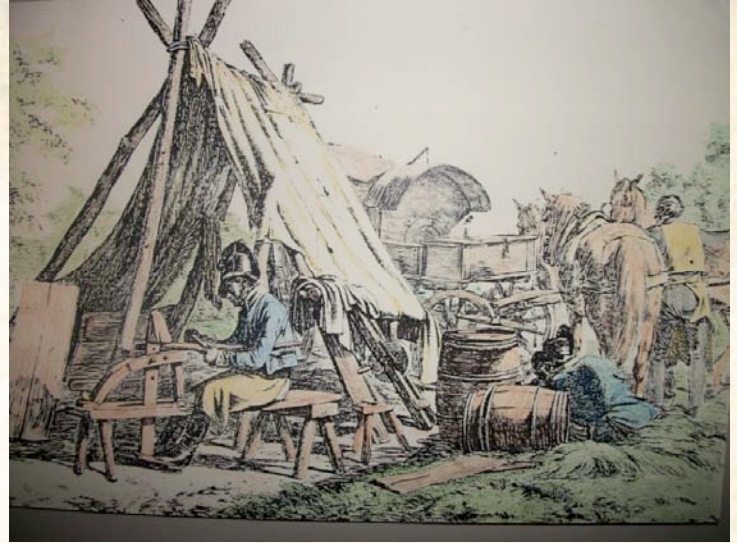
Warriors of First Nations fought alongside British and American forces during the War of 1812, and they wore a mixture of traditional and European dress, as well as using a mixture of traditional and European weapons including flintlock muskets, rifles, tomahawks, knives, and clubs .

Each Warrior had his own personal objectives in going to war. Common to most was the notion of proving to their nation that they were skilled and fearless fighters. First Nations adopted a system wherein they advanced and fired muskets using local cover until they were able to engage in single combat to defeat an enemy. Once their personal objectives were met in battle, it was time to

withdraw to perhaps fight another day. To many British and American observers, this behavior made Warriors unreliable because they could not be depended upon to stand their ground in order to see the battle through to the end.

The style of warfare engaged in by First Nations is often referred to as “savage” by white observers. Wildly screaming Warriors, fearsomely painted brandishing tomahawks and scalping knives, instilled horror in the hearts of their opponents, and at times were enough to scare an opponent into surrender -- as was the case at the battles of Detroit and Beaver Dams. In both cases British officers on the scene indicated to their American counterparts that they could not be responsible for the actions of the Warriors once they were unleashed on the warpath.

The fear of Native savagery had a long history in the Old Northwest of the United States where back-country settlers often clashed violently with First Nations over land use. Such clashes in the western territories were blamed on the British who were charged with inciting warfare by trading firearms to First Nations. What is interesting is that while the charge involves providing warriors with guns and ammunition, contemporary images almost always emphasize the use of the tomahawk and the scalping knife.



Downriver Dispatches by Peter Rindlisbacher

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK

by Robert Williamson



Young Isaac Brock from Ferguson's
The Good Soldier

The story of Isaac Brock, the general, begins in 1791 when he was a 21 year-old officer in the 49th Regiment on station in Bridgetown, Barbados. Brock faced down the regimental bully, a senior officer who was an excellent pistol shot, by establishing the duelling distance as the width of a handkerchief instead of the usual twelve paces. This removed the bully's advantage and meant certain death for both parties. The bully declined and resigned from the regiment in disgrace. The incident illustrates two of Brock's character traits that made him a successful general: his boldness, and his ability to understand the weakness of his opponents.

Brock was born on the Isle of Guernsey, Oct 6, 1769, the 8th of 9 brothers and 4 sisters. Brock grew to be a large man, 6 feet, 2 inches tall, and became a champion swimmer and boxer in Guernsey. An avid reader, he was sent to school in Rotterdam, Holland where he learned to speak French fluently. Although he left school at the age of 16, his love of books helped him become a reasonably well-educated man.

In 1799, when Britain invaded Holland to liberate her from French occupation, Brock and the 49th Regiment were chosen for the expedition. Unfortunately the British army, in general, suffered from timid and cautious leadership, and his experience in Holland confirmed in him the belief that a commander should be bold and daring.



Isaac Brock *Canadian Archives*

To prevent the Danish and Russian fleets from joining the French during an alliance in 1801, the British navy mounted an expedition against Copenhagen. Brock was appointed second in command of the troops, including 760 men of the 49th Regiment. Admiral Nelson led the attack with 12 ships, and Brock and the 49th were landed to capture one of the principal Danish batteries. Returning to *HMS Elephant*, Nelson's flagship, Colonel Brock witnessed how Nelson had refused to admit defeat and turned an apparently hopeless battle into victory. He saw how a timely ultimatum to a shaken enemy could bring unexpected success.

Brock sailed for Canada with the 49th Regiment in 1802. He was rather reluctant to be leaving the real theatre of war for a garrison duty, guarding the backwater frontier between the United States and the Province of Upper Canada where the greatest danger was boredom and desertion.

In 1805, Brock was promoted to the rank of full Colonel and returned home for a rest. While on leave in England, he submitted a report to his commander-in-chief, the Duke of York, proposing how to deal with the problem of desertion of British troops in Canada. He recommended that a regiment of veterans be raised for service in Canada on the condition that at the end of their term of enlistment, they be given a grant of 200 acres of land. Such an agreement would help populate and defend the country at the same

time. As a result, the 10th Royal Veterans Battalion was formed and sent to Canada the next year.

In June 1806, Brock returned to Canada and was made temporary commander-in-chief of all armed forces there until a more senior officer could be found. He seized the opportunity to improve Canada's defences for what he believed was an inevitable war against the United States. He improved the fortifications at Quebec City, raised a Canadian militia and ordered the building of a number of troop transports, mostly bateaux, as well as three ships for the Provincial Marine on Lake Ontario. Since the Duke of Wellington assessed that the defence of Canada depended on naval control of the Great Lakes, this action by Brock may have been his greatest contribution to the preservation of Canadian sovereignty.

Two years later, Brock was posted to command the garrison of Montreal, and promoted to Brigadier General and in 1810, he was posted to Upper Canada as Commander in Chief of that province with headquarters in York. The following year, when Lieutenant Governor Gore went on leave, Brock, at age 42, was promoted Major-General, and became the military governor of the province.

At the time, the American army was composed of 35,000 regular troops to Brock's 5,000. His plan for the defence of Canada was both bold and brilliant. Since he did not have enough troops to defend the 1,200 miles of border, he decided to concentrate his forces and take the offensive. He used two of the basic principals of war: concentration and surprise.

On the other hand, Governor Prevost in Montreal, knew that the Americans were very divided over support for the war, and he did not want to take any action that might unite their war effort. When the United States voted for war on June 18, 1812, Brock learned of the decision through a secret agent, even before the American commanders who were being entertained at dinner by the British at Fort George.

Brock put his offensive policy into effect immediately ...

*... for the rest of the story of Brock's life, and of his death, please refer to
The Capture of Fort Detroit on page 15 of this issue, and The Battle of Queenston Heights on page 18.*

BATTLES OF 1812

ACT I: THE FIRST SHOTS FIRED

by Robin McKee

Since April of 1812, United States Brigadier General William Hull of the Army of the Northwest, and Governor of Michigan, had been planning an attack on British North America. His orders were to build a road from Ohio to Detroit, thus securing the frontier so that the Americans would not have to rely on shipping goods, arms, and men on British-controlled Lake Erie.

On June 1, Hull's 2000-man army, which consisted of the 4th US Infantry and 3 Regiments of Ohio Volunteers, started their march. It was not until June 18 that United States President James Madison signed the Bill declaring war on England. The next month on July 1, General Hull's army left the Rapids of the Maumee River, still headed for Detroit. Hull reached Detroit on July 7, and 5 days later crossed the Detroit River to invade Canada where he landed unopposed in Sandwich (Windsor).

British commander at nearby Amherstburg, Lieutenant Colonel St. George was out of position to meet the unexpected attack at Sandwich, and was heavily outnumbered. He had no choice but to pull his pickets back from Sandwich and retreat into Fort Malden in Amherstburg. Back in Sandwich, Hull proclaimed that he had come to liberate Upper Canada from the British oppression, and commandeered Francois Baby's house for his headquarters. Mr. Baby protested, but Hull replied that "circumstances" had changed between the United States and Canada.



Canard Defence *War of 1812 Southwestern Ontario Website*

On July 15, General Hull ordered some of his troops south to secure the bridge over the Canard River near Amherstburg, and the first shots fired in anger during the War of 1812 on Canadian soil occurred there the following day. A British picket consisting of Regulars from the 41st Regiment, Canadian Militia and some Indians under the command of Lieutenant John Clemow were attacked by the US advance guard under the command of **Colonel Lewis Cass**. His force was made up of one company of Ohio volunteers, four companies of Ohio rifleman, and some Dragoons - in all about 300 men. Cass left a covering force at the bridge and, utilizing the knowledge of a local guide, marched up the Canard River to a nearby ford where he crossed the river and flanked the British.

The British, outnumbered and surprised by the flanking maneuver, fell back to their main position at Amherstburg. During the confusion of the skirmish, two British soldiers, **Private James Hancock** and **Private John Dean**, were left on the north side of the bridge. When the American units advanced, Hancock and Dean defended the position and both were wounded. Dean kept firing, even after being wounded, until an American mini ball broke one of his arms. Both privates were captured and Hancock died later that evening from his wounds. These two privates were the first to shed their blood in the defense of Canada during the War of 1812.

In August, British Major General Brock staged a counter-offensive, and the uninvited visit of General Hull and his occupation was abandoned. Hull withdrew his troops on August 7 to the safety of a defensive position back in Fort Detroit.

ACT I FOOTNOTES

Colonel Lewis Cass As a reward for his service, Cass was appointed Governor of the Michigan Territory by President James Madison on October 29, 1813, and served until 1831.

Private John Dean was taken prisoner to Detroit where his left arm was amputated due to wounds. He would be liberated with the capture of Fort Detroit by the British one month later.

ACT II: THE CAPTURE OF FORT MACKINAC

by Susanne Noordyk



Fort Mackinac by Seth Eastman, soldier

When the British had to cede control of the Michilimackinac to the Americans in 1796, they built a new fort on St. Joseph Island in the St. Mary's River. The fort was important for trade and commerce in the region and served the British Empire as its most westerly outpost.

The construction of the outpost began in 1796 but by 1807 was still not finished. Tensions were running high between the British and the Americans over control of the Great Lakes and the fur trade. The Americans deemed it to be of no threat to them as Fort St. Joseph was understood to be under equipped and not capable of defending itself during an attack. In short, the Americans wrote Fort St. Joseph off and this would prove to be a major error on their part.

Congress declared war on Great Britain in June of 1812. Major General Sir Isaac Brock, fully appreciating the positioning of Fort St. Joseph, directed **Captain Charles Roberts**, the military commander of Fort St. Joseph, to immediately begin preparations for an attack on Michilimackinac (1). Roberts had received his commission as ensign in 1795 when he was sent out to the West Indies and served there for 10 years. He attained the rank of captain 'by purchase' in 1801. Enduring on-going bouts of fever, in 1806 he requested an easier assignment but was sent to Canada instead, where his duties were "no less odious than before".

On July 16, 1812 a strange flotilla consisting of Captain Roberts, some 40 regular soldiers, 150 or so Voyageurs and 400 Indians from various tribes left Fort St. Joseph on its way to Michilimackinac. They arrived in the morning on July 17, 1812 and positioned themselves above the American fort (1) so that their guns were aimed down on the American fort. The American commander, **Lieutenant Porter Henks**, had only 61 men under his command in the fort and he had not been told that the United States had declared war on Great Britain. He faced annihilation by fighting to the last man or he could surrender to the British.

He did the latter and agreed to the British terms which said all his men would be 'paroled' (sent home) and that the men would not fight anymore. Henks is reported to have said "War! what war?"

The Americans paid a great price for not informing all their forces about the declaration of war. The British gave up Fort St. Joseph which was later burnt to the ground by the Americans in 1814. The British held on to Michilimackinac for the remainder of the war. However when peace came the fort was handed back to the Americans. The British did not rebuild on St. Joseph Island but erected a new fort on Drummond Island.

The news of the victory of the British at Michilimackinac spread and the Indians began to assemble around other American forts and it was well known how much the Americans feared the Indians.

ACT II FOOTNOTES

Captain Charles Roberts was born in England around 1772 and received his commission as ensign in 1795. He was sent out to the West Indies immediately and served there for 10 years. Roberts attained the rank of captain 'by purchase' in 1801 but unfortunately endured on-going bouts of fever. In 1806, he requested an easier assignment but was sent to Canada instead where his duties were no less odious than before. After the capture of Michilimackinac, Captain Roberts' health failed and he had to request leave. He traveled to Montreal to make his report and to seek medical help in 1813. Roberts finally returned to England in 1815 and was given retirement with full pay. He died on May 4, 1816 in London England, barely a year since returning home from Canada.

Porter Henks commanded the fort at Michilimackinac in 1812. Little is known of his life before this date. After Hanks surrendered the fort to the British, he was allowed to make his way back to the American military post in Detroit. He was subsequently to be tried for cowardice for surrendering the fort so quickly. The trial never took place as the British attacked Fort Detroit before the court martial began. In the fighting that followed it is said that Hanks "lost his life thanks to a British cannonball". One way or another it is certain that Hanks died in this battle on August 16, 1812.

ACT III: THE CAPTURE OF FORT DETROIT

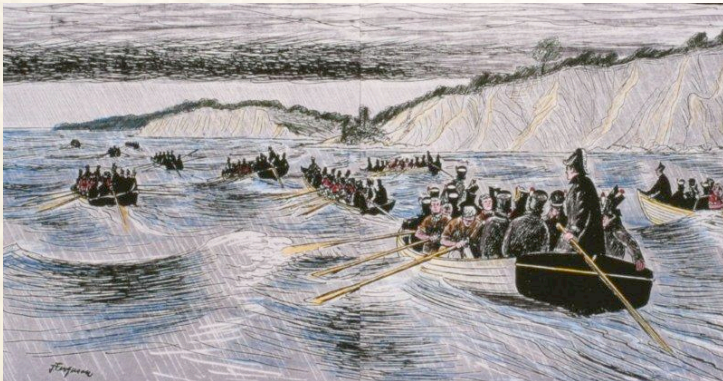
by Robert Williamson

In 1812 Major General Brock's plan for the defence of Canada was both bold and brilliant. Since he did not have enough troops to defend the 1,200 miles of Canada's border, he decided to take the offensive by employing two of the basic principals of war - concentration of force, and surprise.

On the other hand, Governor George Prevost in Montreal knew that the Americans were very divided over support for the war, and did not want to take any action that might unite their war effort. When the United States voted for war on June 18, 1812, Brock learned of the decision by June 25 through a secret agent - even before the American commanders, who were being entertained at dinner by the British at Fort George. Word did not reach Britain until July 30 and the government did not make a formal declaration of war until several months later.

Brock put his offensive policy into effect immediately, sending an order to Captain Charles Roberts and the 10th Royal Veterans at Fort St. Joseph on the northwest frontier, to attack the Americans in Fort Michilimackinac at the head of Lake Michigan. Caught by surprise, on July 17, 1812, the Americans surrendered without a fight. As Brock had expected, this success encouraged the Indians in the northwest to flock to the British colours.

On August 6, he set out from York to take up the offensive on the southwest frontier. Careful not to weaken his Niagara front, he took a light force of 40 men from the 41st Regiment, 60 Indians and 250 militia volunteers including **Captain George Hamilton** from Queenston as well as several local men from Samuel Hatt's 2nd Flank Company of the 5th Lincoln Militia. Their march to Port Dover took them past **Captain James Durand's** home here at the Head of the Lake, following what would later become the John Street Mountain access in Hamilton.



From Ferguson's *The Good Soldier*

On August 7th at the Grand River, General Brock took council with the Six Nations Indians who at this point were non-committal. Knowing that Upper Canada inhabitants lacked confidence, Brock made it a point to "speak loud and look big". From Port Dover, his forces made a 200-mile (over 300 kilometers) voyage along the north shore of Lake Erie in 10 open *bateaux* from Long Point to Amherstburg. This impossible journey was completed in five days, and would have been undertaken only by a man like Brock, accustomed to sailing small boats around his native home as a boy.

Arriving at Amherstburg, on the Detroit River on August 13, Brock assembled 250 men of the 41st Regiment, 50 troops from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 400 militia dressed in discarded scarlet British uniforms, and 600 Indians under the Shawnee Chief Tecumseh.

Opposing him in a strongly fortified position in Fort Detroit were over 2,000 troops under Brigadier General Hull. However, Brock had one important advantage. From correspondence in a captured American mail convoy, he learned that morale in Fort Detroit was low and that the troops there lacked confidence in General Hull. Most importantly, he discovered that Hull appeared obsessed with the fear of Indian barbarism.

Appealing to common sense, Brock sent a message to Hull calling for his surrender "in the name of humanity", implying that he was concerned about losing control over the Indians once the battle began. As Brock expected, his request was rejected, but the seed of intimidation had been planted. That night the Indians were instructed to put on an exaggerated display of ferocity in view of the fort. To the unnerving beat of war drums they danced and whooped around their campfires all night.

The next morning the bombardment of Fort Detroit began from the Canadian shore. Two ships of the Provincial Marine, *Queen Charlotte* and *General Hunter* provided supporting fire for the river crossing on August 15. Brock, at the head of a purposefully extended column of redcoats over half of which were really militia in disguise, advanced in full view of the fort. Meanwhile the Indians feigned attacks from various parts of the forest, making their number appear far in excess of 600. Hull lost his nerve and surrendered.



Hull Surrenders to Brock from Ferguson's *The Good Soldier*.

increased their invasion force along the Niagara River. Because of the political intervention of Prevost, the Americans were given the opportunity to use the principals of war that Brock had employed so successfully. Their concentration of force and surprise was to come during a rain storm in the dark morning hours of October 13, 1812.

Morale in Upper Canada soared, and the Indians of the Six Nations dropped their policy of neutrality with very important consequences for the outcome of the war. For his extraordinary success at Detroit, Brock was appointed Knight of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath.

However, as Brock hurried back to the Niagara frontier to catch the Americans off balance there, he received a message from Governor Prevost ordering him to suspend offensive operations. Prevost, having heard that the British Orders-in-Council had been repealed, was hoping to negotiate an armistice.

Brock was more of a realist than Prevost, but all he could do was watch his advantage slip away as the Americans steadily

ACT III FOOTNOTES

Tecumseh by John Nixon



Tecumseh Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

Following the War of Independence, the encroachment of American settlers into the traditional lands of the Indians increased. Beginning in the early 1800s a Shawnee warrior named Tecumseh came to prominence arguing that successful armed resistance was possible only if all the tribes allied themselves in a powerful confederacy. He was a charismatic orator and a skilled conciliator who was able to persuade many warriors to join the cause.

The British had been secretly supplying the Indians with weapons and ammunition to assist with their resistance, but the declaration of war changed everything. Isaac Brock and Tecumseh met in Amherstberg in 1812. Brock admired Tecumseh's leadership and referred to him as the "Wellington of the Indians", promising to advocate in London for an independent Indian homeland, perhaps the Michigan Territory in exchange for his support. Together they attacked Detroit, and the Americans were so terrified of Indian attack that they surrendered with hardly a shot being fired.

In 1813 Tecumseh, with British forces under Colonel Proctor, defeated an American army at Frenchtown on the River Raisin. Another attack was launched against Fort Meigs, and although the siege was unsuccessful Tecumseh's warriors ambushed a Kentucky regiment that pursued them too vigorously. After the defeat of the British navy on Lake Erie, Proctor abandoned Amherstberg, and an angry Tecumseh was forced to lead his people away too. Eventually, he persuaded Proctor to make a stand at Moraviantown (Chatham), where their combined forces were defeated, and Tecumseh was killed. Without him, the Indian alliance and resistance collapsed.

Captains Durand and Hamilton by Bill Manson

James Durand was an entrepreneur, politician, and militia officer in the Province of Upper Canada. During the War of 1812-14, he served as captain of a flank company in the 5th Lincoln Militia and later distinguished himself at the Battle of Queenston Heights. In 1812 while Major General Isaac Brock was en route to Detroit, Durand likely entertained him at his home and trading post at the Head of the Lake. It was then that Durand met Captain George Hamilton, who was serving with Brock, and revealed that he wanted to establish an administrative centre for Wentworth County at the Head of the Lake after the war. In 1814, Durand had to billet British troops on his property and suffered considerable property damage. He also deplored the abuse of civil liberties associated with a military presence, and later censured aspects of military conduct when he successfully ran for office and entered the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada in 1815. In the meantime Durand sold his Barton lands to George Hamilton for £1,750, and Hamilton and Hughson, with Durand's political help, were well on their way to establishing a new county administrative town called Hamilton.

George Hamilton was a businessman, politician, and militia officer in the Province of Upper Canada. During the War of 1812 Hamilton, who had received a commission in the militia in 1808, held the rank of captain in Thomas Merritt's Niagara Light Dragoons. At the conclusion of the war, Hamilton returned to Queenston to find that his home had been destroyed, and immediately brokered the deal with James Durand to purchase his house and lands at the Head of the Lake. The rest is "Hamilton" history.

ACT IV: THE RAID ON GANANOQUE

by Susanne Noordyk



Mill at Gananoque by Lady Simcoe Ontario Archives

As dawn spilled over the horizon on September 18, 1812, a flotilla of boats left the American shores carrying roughly 200 regulars and militia under the command of Captain Benjamin Forsyth. It took three days of slinking through the 1,000 Islands, so as not to be seen by either patrols or observers from the British side, for them to reach their destination - the town of Gananoque. According to some accounts, Colonel Joel Stone, the founder of Gananoque, was absent at the time of the raid on September 21.

When the combatants did meet, the British were badly outnumbered. After a brief skirmish, the British turned tail and disappeared west over the bridge spanning the river, which divided the town. The American forces then proceeded to Colonel Stone's home and fired into the house. The only occupant, Mrs. Stone, was wounded in the hip.

The soldiers ransacked the home, burnt the bridge and a store, destroyed the British Government warehouses and walked off with guns and ammunition. Captain Forsyth and his forces then beat a hasty retreat back to the American side with their plunder before the British forces at Kingston, who had been alerted about the raid, came to investigate.

ACT V: THE CAPTURE OF THE *DETROIT* AND *CALEDONIA*

by Robert Williamson

In the early months of 1812, Major General Brock, following the mandate passed through Governor General Prevost from the *Duke of Wellington*, took steps to improve the strength of the Provincial Marine on the Great Lakes. President Madison and his advisors failed to heed the importance of establishing a naval presence on the Lakes, and for their negligence, the Americans were to pay dearly in the opening phases of the war.

Mackinac Island was seized in a bloodless but significant amphibious action that secured British communications with the western native nations. Two American merchant sloops and two merchant brigs were captured as prizes in this action. The 125-ton American merchant brig, *Adams* was captured when Brock forced General Hull's surrender at Detroit, and the British renamed the brig *Detroit*, putting her to work as a British transport.

On October 8, 1812, Lieutenant Jesse Elliott USN in charge of a small naval detachment at Buffalo, was eager for action and desperate for any kind of ship. He organized a "cutting out" night expedition (commando raid) against the brigs, *Detroit* and *Caledonia* anchored at Fort Erie. The 86-ton brig *Caledonia*, armed with two guns and loaded with a commercial cargo of furs, was the property of the North West Company.

Elliott attained surprise in the dark and succeeded in capturing the two vessels, but neglected to take into account the lack of wind and the strong current in the mouth of the Niagara River. Consequently, both ships, when cut loose, failed to gain the open water of Lake Erie and were carried downstream. The *Caledonia* managed to reach the American shore and safety under a gun battery at the village of Black Rock where she remained in isolation until the British later abandoned Fort Erie as a result of later American successes on Lake Ontario. She was refitted as a naval vessel, and later sold back into the merchant service in 1815. *Detroit*, however, ran aground on Squaw Island just above Grand Island and was burned by the Americans to prevent its recapture by the British.



A brig of the 1812 period

ACT VI: THE BATTLE OF QUEENSTON HEIGHTS

Victory and Tragedy -- A Historical Drama in Three Acts by Bill Manson

Prologue

In the aftermath of Major General Isaac Brock's victory against the U.S. forces at Detroit, the Americans and British agree to a temporary ceasefire, which allows both sides to regroup. In October 1812 as the ceasefire ends, Major General Brock is encamped at Fort George, closely monitoring the Niagara frontier. With 1500 British regulars and Canadian militia, supported by 300 Mohawk and Delaware allies, Brock has his forces spread along the Niagara River unsure of where the next attempted American invasion may occur.

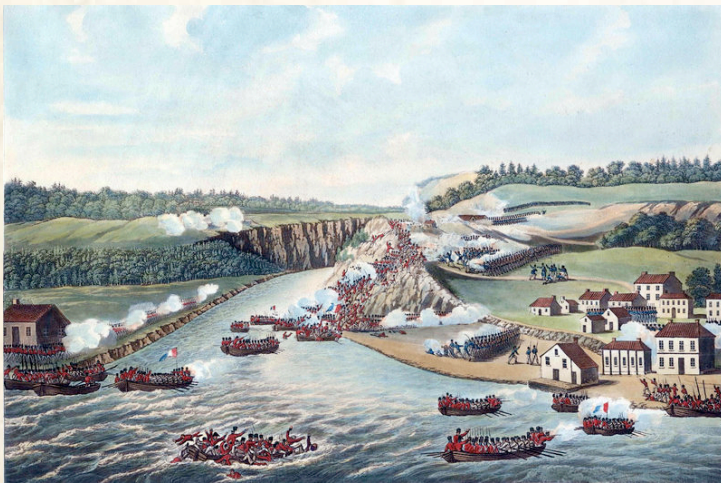
Under pressure from Washington and from the American public to “reverse” Brock’s victory at Detroit, **Major General Stephan Van Rensselaer** chooses to launch an invasion from Lewiston across the Niagara River to the village of Queenston. Van Rensselaer, an aspiring politician, has never commanded troops in battle.

On the night of 12 October 1812, the New York militia under Van Rensselaer launches an attack from Lewiston across the Niagara River. This initial attempt is so badly organized, that it proves unsuccessful.

Act I Scene 1: the British defences at Queenston are not reinforced

Because General Brock is convinced that Van Rensselaer’s attempted invasion on October 12 is only a feint and that the Americans will cross further downriver at Fort George, he makes no move to reinforce the village of Queenston.

The British detachment at Queenston consists of the grenadier company of the 49th Regiment of Foot, a flank company of the 2nd Regiment of the York Militia ("The York Volunteers"), and a detachment of the 41st Regiment of Foot. An 18-pounder and a mortar are mounted in a battery halfway up the Heights above Queenston, and the Light Company of the 49th is posted in tents at the top of the Heights.



US forces attack Queenston *Library and Archives of Canada*

Act I Scene 2: the second American invasion attempt succeeds

Brock’s failure to reinforce Queenston allows Van Rensselaer to re-attempt his first assault. At 4 a.m. on October 13, American forces under Van Rensselaer begin crossing the Niagara River in 13 boats. Three of the boats are immediately swept downstream by the current and return to the American side of the river. Ten minutes after they begin crossing, the remaining ten boats begin disembarking at Queenston.

A British sentry immediately spots the landing, but instead of firing his musket to raise an alarm thus warning the Americans, the soldier runs back to headquarters in Queenston to report the incident.

Act I Scene 3: the American achieve a foothold at Queenston Heights

A few minutes later, the alerted British troops fire a first volley into the Americans as they are still coming ashore. As he alights from his boat, General Van Rensselaer is hit by a musket ball, and in trying to muster his troops he is wounded five more times. This effectively takes him out of the action. Captain John E. Wool of the 13th U.S. Infantry, though wounded, takes command and fights to retain the foothold. Shortly, discovering a path to the top of the escarpment, the American forces capture the battery half way up, and gain control of both the battle and the Heights.

Act II Scene 1: Brock takes command at Queenston

Back at Fort George, Brock is awakened by the sound of artillery fire at Queenston, and learns that the Americans have taken command of Queenston Heights. He is followed by his aide de camp, Lieutenant Colonel John Macdonell, ride to Queenston, where Brock begins to regroup his troops.

Act II Scene 2: Brock is killed

Brock, in what proves to be a foolhardy gesture, personally leads the charge to regain the battery gun position. His red coat, gold epaulettes and colourful sash given him by Tecumseh, along with his imposing figure and energetic gestures, make him a very conspicuous target for American snipers. A musket ball first hits Brock in the wrist of his upraised sword arm but Brock continues the attack. Suddenly he is shot at point-blank range by an unknown American soldier who steps forward from a thicket. Struck in the chest just above his heart, Brock dies almost instantly. Brock's aide-de-camp, John Macdonell, is also mortally wounded in the charge. Carrying the bodies of Brock and Macdonell, the British retreat through Queenston to Durham's Farm a mile north near the British fortified Vrooman's Point.



The death of Isaac Brock c. 1908 by C. W. Jefferys *Government of Ontario Art Collection*

Act II Scene 3: the Americans secure the Heights

By 10 a.m., the Americans are opposed only by the 24-pounder at Vrooman's Point, which is futilely firing at very long range. By noon, the wounded Major General Van Rensselaer orders the position on Queenston Heights to be fortified, and appoints **Lieutenant Colonel Winfield Scott** to take command of the American regulars in Queenston. However, little more than a thousand of General Van Rensselaer's men have successfully crossed the Niagara River, and there are only a few completely formed American units at Queenston - the rest being disorganized detachments, many without officers.

Act II Scene 4: the British launch a holding offensive

At about 1 p.m., some 300 Mohawk and Delaware warriors under Captains **John Norton** and John Brant climb to the top of the Heights, and attack Scott's outposts. Even though the warrior forces are driven back into the woods, they do prevent a further American advance. American troop morale is profoundly affected by fear of the natives, so much so that militia waiting in Lewiston to cross the river refuse to do so, claiming they are not legally obligated to fight on foreign soil.

Act II Scene 5: Van Rensselaer seeks reinforcements

The American forces in Queenston are running low both on ammunition and on the will to continue the fight. Leaving Brigadier General Wadsworth in command, Van Rensselaer decides to re-cross to Lewiston in order to personally muster reinforcements and munitions, and refugees and stragglers crowd into his boat nearly capsizing it. Finally landing in Lewiston, Van Rensselaer finds that his troops have become a disorderly crowd, and he is unable to convince any of the remaining militia to cross the river. He sends a message to Wadsworth leaving the decision whether to stand and fight or to retreat, with him. Van Rensselaer vainly promises to dispatch boats from Lewiston should Wadsworth decide to withdraw.

Act III Scene 1: British reinforcements arrive

At around 2 p.m. **Major General Roger Hale Sheaffe** arrives at Queenston with reinforcements from Fort George. In all, he commands over 800 men, including 300 soldiers, 250 militia, a contingent of Indians, and Captain Robert Runchey's "Company of Coloured Men", a regiment of black free men and indentured servants.

Act III Scene 2: the tide of battle turns

As Sheaffe's forces reorganize, Wadsworth receives Van Rensselaer's message. Sheaffe immediately orders a general advance, and the entire British line fire a volley, and charges. Out of sight of the American forces on the Heights, Sheaffe's troops ascend the escarpment, trapping the enemy between them and the escarpment. The American militia, hearing war cries from the Mohawks in the detachment and believing themselves doomed, retreat in disarray. Two of the Mohawk chiefs are killed during the British assault and the American retreat.

Act III Scene 3: the battle of Queenston Heights is won

With no boats arriving to evacuate his men, and with the Mohawks enraged over the deaths of their two chiefs, Lieutenant Colonel Scott fears a massacre, and orders a surrender. The first two American officers who try to surrender are killed by the Mohawks. Now desperate, Scott waves a white flag of surrender, but the natives continue to fire from the Heights into the crowd of Americans below. When the smoke finally clears Scott has successfully surrendered, and General Sheaffe immediately imposes a temporary truce.

Epilogue

Official records and succeeding generations of historians disagree on the actual casualty figures at the battle of Queenston Heights, but there is some consensus that almost 1000 Americans are taken prisoner, including General Wadsworth and Colonel Scott. Some 300 American soldiers are listed as killed or wounded. British and Canadian victors lose 21 killed, 85 wounded, and 22 captured - regulars, militia and Indians.



Major General Van Rensselaer resigns immediately after the battle to return to politics where he is moderately successful. The question of who is “officially” responsible for the U.S. defeat at Queenston is never resolved.

Lieutenant Colonel Winfield Scott, promoted after the Battle of Queenston Heights, continues to serve on active duty as a general longer than any other soldier in American history, rated by many as the ablest American commander of his time.



Major General Roger Hale Sheaffe receives a baronetcy for his role in the victory, but is also censured for not having followed up the victory at Queenston Heights with an immediate attack on Fort Niagara. In 1813, he is defeated at the Battle of York. The Assembly of Upper Canada and the population of York feel both abandoned and aggrieved, and he is relieved of all his appointments.

Captain John Norton (*teyoninhokarawen*) is an adopted son of the Mohawks. His father is Cherokee, and his mother emigrated from Scotland where John was born and educated. Never shy about voicing views contrary to government policies, Norton is welcomed into the tribe by Chief Joseph Brant, and elected War Chief of the Mohawks who are one of Britain’s strongest allies during the War of 1812.



The loss of **Major General Brock** is a major blow to the British both from a moral and a tactical standpoint. He is originally buried with great ceremony at Fort George but, on the anniversary of his death, 12 years later, re-interment takes place at Queenston Heights, where the most imposing monument ever erected to any individual in Canada now stands as a measure of the esteem that Canadians have for this great British general.

General Van Rensselaer: *Historical Association of Lewiston Inc*

Winfield Scot: *National Gallery, Washington DC*

Roger Hale Sheaffe *Library and Archives Canada*

John Norton by Mary Ann Knight *Library and Archives Canada*

General Brock c. 1808 by William Berczy *Brock University Archives*



COMMEMORATING THE WAR OF 1812



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ACT VII: THE BATTLE OF KINGSTON HARBOUR

by Susanne Noordyk

In November of 1812, **Comodore Isaac Chauncey** USN, learned that three of the British ships (*Royal George*, *Prince Regent* and *Duke of Gloucester*), sailed from Kingston to the aid of Fort George. In anticipation of the British ships' return to their base in Kingston, Chauncey assembled a group of seven vessels (*Oneida*, *Hamilton*, *Tompkins*, *Julia*, *Pert*, *Growler* and *Conquest*) to lie in wait for them. He was taking a chance that the dispersion of his guns and their longer firing range could defeat the British convoy.

Chauncey seeing only the *Royal George*, although the other two ships were anchored only few miles away, followed her into Kingston Harbor. There four of the American ships opened fire on the anchored British vessel in the harbor. The *Royal George* was forced to cut her anchor cables and tie up at a wharf. The engagement has been described in this way:



Isaac Chauncey
en.wikipedia.org

The Royal George ... slipped her anchor and drifted deeper into the harbour under the protection of the shore batteries. Only one man was killed aboard the George which had received little material damage apart from its rigging being somewhat cut up. Two unarmed schooner transports were captured, the 'Two Brothers' and the 'Mary Hatt'.



Battle at Kingston Harbour by Peter Rindlisbacher

Chauncey made sure there was no actual damage done to the town of Kingston. One isn't sure whether he was being gallant or simply smart, so as to avoid a British retaliatory attack on his base at Sackett's Harbour. Chauncey and his assemblage of vessels withdrew from Kingston Harbour and anchored in Lake Ontario, planning to attack again the next day. However, the onshore wind proved unmanageable, and he was forced to return to Sackett's Harbour.

This was the one and only occasion on which the Kingston Harbour defenses were breached by the Americans although they were able to keep Kingston Harbour blockaded until the end of 1812, when winter weather set in.



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ACT VIII: THE BATTLE OF La COLLE MILL

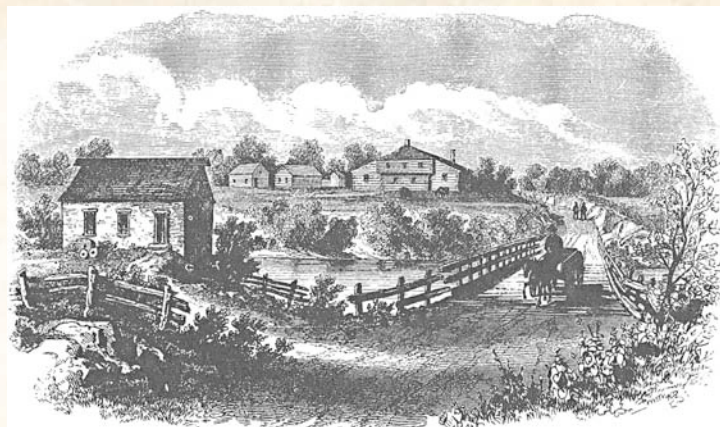
by John Nixon

Following the American defeat at Queenston Heights, President James Madison ordered General Henry Dearborn to attack Montreal. Anticipating this possibility, Quebec-born British officer **Colonel Charles de Salaberry** took 300 of his grey uniformed *Voltigeurs*, the mostly French-speaking light infantry recruited in Lower Canada, and 230 *Kahnawake Mohawk* warriors to the village of La Colle Mill, south of Montreal in the Eastern Townships near the border where he positioned his forces around a log blockhouse.



Charles de Salaberry collectionscanada.gc.ca

At pre-dawn on November 20, 1812, US Colonel Zebulon Pike invaded Lower Canada with a force of 600 regulars. Initially, de Salaberry's forces were pushed from the blockhouse. However, when American militia arrived in the darkness they mistook Pike's soldiers for the enemy, and began a musket battle with them. Taking advantage of the confusion, de Salaberry counter-attacked and drove the Americans back across the border, thus ending the first invasion of Lower Canada.



La Colle Mill many-roads.com

ACT IX: THE SKIRMISH AT FRENCHMAN'S CREEK

by Robin Mckee



Photo by Wayne Adams www.ontarioplaques.com

On November 9, 1812, American Brigadier General Alexander Smyth, loudly boasted that he would invade Canada along the Niagara River. The British were well prepared, and on November 17th they launched a heavy bombardment of Smyth's headquarters at Black Rock, New York.

By November 27th, Smyth had mustered 4,500 men at Black Rock for the impending invasion. At 3 a.m. on November 28th he sent an advance force of about 400 men, composed of detachments from the 12th, 13th, 14th, 20th, and 23rd US Regiments, across the Niagara River to destroy the bridge at Frenchman's Creek, thus cutting British communications between Fort Erie and Chippewa and silencing the battery of cannons positioned there.

Although the British were waiting, Lieutenant Thomas Lamont and 30 soldiers stationed at the battery were badly outnumbered. In the darkness confusion reigned, and the

Americans were able to seize the battery, spike the guns, and reach the bridge. However, they were unable to destroy the bridge, having left their axes in the invasion boats.

When the British launched a counterattack some 40 of the American advance party were captured, and the remainder re-crossed the Niagara River accomplishing very little by their incursion.

And so ends the first year



of the War of 1812.

EPILOGUE

Commentary by Robert Williamson

This edition of *historiCITY* has introduced the War of 1812-1814 as a dubious conflict, a by-product of the mayhem left over from the French and American Revolutions and stoked by the quest of Napoleon Bonaparte for European domination.

As we have seen, it was an unnecessary war imposed on British North American colonists and Loyalists, who wanted nothing more than to be left in peace to build a new life for themselves in the Canadian wilderness. It certainly was the last thing that the British Government wanted, its hands full combating the megalomaniac French dictator. In fact, for the first six months after June 18, 1812, when the United States declared war on Great Britain, the British desperately tried to negotiate their way out of the conflict, even arranging a temporary ceasefire after Brock's victory at Detroit. Negotiations failed, proving that the Orders in Council were not the primary cause of the war. Reluctantly, after the armistice ended on September 8, 1812, Britain belatedly had to declare war officially with the United States.

As for the United States, at least 40% of its citizenry were strongly opposed to the war, It drew support primarily from the ambitions of the interior states' War Hawk faction, which was absorbed in westward expansion and exploitation of Native American lands. Thus it was a war that the Americans could not win: a war of a deeply divided nation, and a war where there was no logical military strategy for conquest, no money, resources, or equipment, no competent military leaders, and state militias committed to self-defence only.

On the other hand, the British had the experience of superior military leadership, seasoned professional British troops, citizens motivated by self-preservation, fierce and determined allies led by Chief Tecumseh, and a military strategy that the best defence was a good offense. However, these advantages were worthless without an effective means of communication and transportation. In preparation for war, General Brock had built up the Provincial Marine on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, and when the Americans declared war he was able to move troops and supplies at liberty, a basic principal of war that the Americans, at their peril, failed to establish in the beginning.

All this would change in 1813 as the Americans learned from their mistakes. With more time to prepare and motivated by the prospect of failure the Americans began mustering their resources, and with improved military coordination began pushing the defences of British North America to their limit.



The *Charlotte* and *General Hunter*, ships of the Provincial Marine bombard Fort Detroit by Peter Rindlisbacher

(... continued from page 6)

Third, the "manifest destiny" of the United States involved total political and economic control of the continent. The views of many Americans were mirrored by former President Thomas Jefferson's assertions: "If the English do not give us the satisfaction we demand, we will take the Canadas". In Jefferson's mind, the successful invasion of Canada would have been "... a mere matter of marching." This last assertion was shown to be incorrect shortly after war was declared.

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Compiled by James Elliott

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