OFFSET FOR THE CHESAPEAKE,

OR THE CAPTURE OF FORT GEORGE,

AND REPULSE OF THE ENEMY FROM

SACKET'S HARBOR :

BAD news was the cry, on the second of June,
And the Chesapeake lost, put us all out of tune,
We wonder'd, hemm, for we ne'er saw the like,
That a Yankee should e'er to an Englishman strike.
But Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

On the ocean Great Britain has been forc'd to yield,
Five times out of six, on the watery field,
Columbia's bright Eagle in triumph has wav'd,
And the deeds of her valor by fate are engrav'd.
And Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Does the loss of the Chesapeake bid us despair ?
Is no remedy found the sad blow to repair ?
Yet LAWRENCE, while fate favor'd him, would
ne'er think,
Of striking his flag 'till his frigate should sink.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Then let not our tories thus chuckle and grin,
That for ONCE by the British we've been taken in,
Though a frigate we've lost, it was not by fair play,
And in spite of their " Stick Pat" we'll lather away.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

To balance the ship, we have taken a Fort,
Our soldiers, hemm, are quite us'd to such sport,
And their feats near the lakes long remember'd will be
For the brave fellows fight for a nation that's free.
And Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Long, long shall our arms, triumphant by land,
The assaults of the enemy bravely withstand,
For while Dearborn and Chauncy command on the
lake,

No post will the white and red savages take.
And Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Though dead is the brave and belov'd General Pike,
Yet we've heroes to whom our proud foe will still
strike,
When they see our lov'd Eagle bright beaming aloft,
Depend on't the evil crew will quickly be doff'd.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Full well may the tories look out and demure,
For by land and by sea is our character sure,
And Britain we challenge full boldly to wrest,
The honors which beam on our Eagle's bright crest.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

O'er Canada's line shall bright liberty's star,
Send its soul-cheering rays, and its lustre afar,
While the gloom of the tyrant shall in lightning dis-
play,
And the sceptres of tyrants be taken away.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Then join'd to the nation our Washington sweet,
To dalliance while a blade of grass grew on our shore,
Canadians our freedom full gladly shall share,
No longer be kept in a tyrant's fell snare.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Thus long may our soldiers be crown'd with success,
And our sailors contribute their country to bless ;
And Columbia's shall shine on the land and the sea,
Brave, generous, and noble, and happy and free.
For Columbians their standard will never disgrace,
Nor flinch when their duty the foe bids them face.

Offset for the Chesapeake, or The Capture of Fort George and Repulse of the Enemy from Sacket's Harbor, *published in 1813. Broadside ballads and songs were common in the United States and Great Britain during the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. Along with topical and political cartoons, these widely circulated prints helped inform the public, boost patriotic feeling and ridicule enemies and political opponents. This ballad celebrates recent American military successes as payback for the ignominious "Chesapeake Affair" of 1807, as well as the desire to bring "liberty's star" to Canada.*

CONTENTS

Introduction

The War of 1812 is little remembered and even less understood. Not surprisingly, the perspectives of the participants are vastly different. In Great Britain the war is vaguely recalled, if at all, as an insignificant brushfire distraction from the main business of defeating Napoleon. Canadians proudly regard the war as a victory. Defending themselves against invasion by the United States helped forge a Canadian identity. The great majority of Americans manage to combine both of these attitudes in remembering next to nothing about the war while remaining convinced it was a great victory. For Native Americans — First Nations — the war was the last catastrophic episode in a sixty year's war, the series of wars beginning in the 1740s. These wars included the French & Indian War, the American Revolution, the Ohio Indian Wars, and finally the War of 1812. Each was a loss for the native peoples in a series that determined which group of Europeans was going to displace them and exploit the resources of the entire Ohio-Mississippi system, the heart of the North American continent.

The route into this vast heartland was the St. Lawrence River and connecting waterways and portages to the Great Lakes. Today, the system of locks, dredged channels and aids to navigation known as the St. Lawrence Seaway, gives ocean-going ships from all over the world access to these inland seas. In the War of 1812, the primary challenge facing both sides was logistics. The difficulty of moving large numbers of men and supplies through what was principally wilderness, was consistently underestimated by both sides. The cheapest and most practical way to move any weight has always been to float it. In a land characterized chiefly by dense forest, interspersed with swamps, the lakes were the only option for military movement.

That the impetuous Americans had the slightest chance of prevailing against the might of the Royal Navy was due almost entirely to two geographic facts. Ocean-going ships could be worked up the St. Lawrence River only as far as Montreal. Beyond lay the Lachine Rapids, and another lesser set at Cornwall, dictating a laborious portage to reach Lake Ontario. At the western end of Lake Ontario another great portage was required to get around Niagara Falls which flowed out of Lake Erie. Any ships wanted on either lake had to be built there, and here is where both sides were starting from scratch.

As covered in many good works, the war raged for two and a half years — at which point both sides were exhausted and ready to end the conflict. Except for two American forts captured and held by the British, and returned with the peace, the territorial lines were the same as at the start. Militarily the war was a draw. Politically the Americans obtained no redress for any of the grievances stated in the declaration of war, but the defeat of Napoleon and subsequent peace in Europe had made the causes moot. In a larger sense, however, the primary reason America declared war on Great Britain was to be taken seriously as a sovereign nation. While the written record reflects nothing more than a return to the pre-war *status quo*, the fact is that both sides gained a wary respect for each other. All subsequent disputes have been settled by negotiation. Having stood up to the world's foremost power, and survived (however slender the margin), the United States had learned to take itself seriously. The nation had weathered a severe trial, emerged stronger, and knew it.

Walter P. Rybka
Senior captain of the U.S. brig Niagara
Site administrator, Erie Maritime Museum

The Erie Maritime Museum, on the Great Lakes Seaway Trail, is owned and operated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, through partnership with the Flagship Niagara League, a non-profit corporation. The War of 1812 on the Great Lakes is a primary focus of the museum's exhibits, as well as the Sailing School Vessel voyages of Niagara.


The Great Lakes Seaway Trail
1. Erie, PA
2. Buffalo, NY
3. Lewiston, NY
4. Youngstown, NY
5. Charlotte/Rochester, NY
6. Pultneyville, NY
QUÉBEC, CANADA
ONTARIO, CANADA
MASSENA
OGDENSBURG
PLATTSBURGH
VERMONT
Lake Champlain
KINGSTON
WATERTOWN
SACKETS HARBOR
TORONTO
Lake Ontario
Lake George
OSWEGO
Lake Oneida
NIAGARA FALLS
ROCHESTER
SYRACUSE
Mohawk River
BUFFALO
Lake Erie
SCHENECTADY
NEW YORK
ALBANY
ERIE
BINGHAMTON
MASSACHUSETTS
PENNSYLVANIA
KINGSTON
Hudson River
CONNECTICUT
NEW JERSEY
NEW YORK CITY
Atlantic Ocean
N
Lakes to Locks Passage
15 Plattsburgh, NY
16. Troy and Greenbush, NY
LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE
War of 1812 sites along New York and Pennsylvania Byways
7. Sodus Point, NY
8. Oswego, NY
9. Sandy Creek, NY
10. Sackets Harbor, NY
11. Clayton, NY
12. Alexandria Bay, NY
13. Ogdensburg, NY
14. Massena, NY

The War of 1812 (1812–1815)

Often referred to as "America's Second War of Independence," the War of 1812 remains a curious conflict to this day — one in which neither side was truly prepared for war, there were no significant changes as a result of the war, and, even today, both sides make claim to having emerged victorious. This was a war in which a totally unprepared and militarily inferior United States challenged the world's most potent armed force for reasons which were far from unanimously supported. Sections of the country did everything they could to undermine the war effort, including feeding enemy troops across the border and threatening secession. State militias, a major source of American manpower, frequently cited constitutional protections in refusing to cross into enemy territory. Lake fleets danced uncertainly — and relatively benignly — around each other for three years, neither side willing to risk its precious ships. A national government fled its flaming capital. Probably the most celebrated battle of the war was fought after peace had been agreed upon.

Certain events likely stand out in the minds of most Americans when they think of the War of 1812 — perhaps Francis Scott Key penning *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the burning of Washington, the first appearance of Uncle Sam, or Andrew Jackson emerging victorious in the Battle of New Orleans. Though most Americans would likely be hard pressed to recall further details, the war was an important one for the young American nation — the first time the United States had declared war on another nation.

A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the humane British and their worthy allies, *political cartoon published in Philadelphia in1812. Anti-British sentiment in the U.S. was intensified by charging British authorities with promoting supposed atrocities by native tribes allied with Great Britain.*

View of his majesty's ship Shannon, hove too, & cooly waiting the close approach of the American frigate Chesapeake…, *painted by R. Dodd, 1813. The ill-fated USS* Chesapeake *was captured by HMS* Shannon *off Boston, on June 1, 1813.* Chesapeake's *captain James Lawrence was mortally wounded — his last words said to be "don't give up the ship."*

The war's origins lay shrouded in the tumultuous politics, both nationally and globally, of the early American republic. Britain, its military resources committed to thwarting the continental aspirations of Napoleonic France, had no interest or desire to engage the upstart American nation in war. In order to satisfy the vast manpower demands of the war with France, Britain asserted its perceived right to board American ships to look for, and retrieve, British deserters, a process known as "impressment." Britain did not recognize naturalized United States citizenship, so in addition to recovering actual deserters, it considered United States citizens born British liable for impressment. Americans viewed these actions as a demonstrative lack of respect for U.S. sovereignty. American anger at impressment grew when British frigates stationed themselves just outside U.S. harbors in view of U.S. shores and searched

American Generals, *a print published in 1814, showing a composite of bust portraits of American generals during the War of 1812, including Henry Dearborn (1), Winfield Scott (2), Andrew Jackson (3), William Henry Harrison (4) Jacob Brown (5), and Zebulon Pike (6). Pike was killed by falling debris from an explosion during the Battle of York on April 27, 1813.*

ships for contraband and impressed men in U.S. territorial waters.

Tensions had been running high since 1807 when HMS *Leopard*, having been refused permission to send a search party aboard USS *Chesapeake* to check for, and remove, deserters, fired three broadsides into the American ship, killing three seamen. Boarding the stricken ship, British sailors removed four men, one of whom was subsequently hanged. Apologies and reparations followed, but the unprovoked attack off the coast of Virginia was not forgotten as the two nations drifted toward war.

Following on the heels of the *Chesapeake* affair, France and Britain embarked on a trade war that proved devastating to American shipping. Britain's Orders in Council, restricting American trade with the European continent, proved particularly onerous. In the mistaken belief that American imposition of economic sanctions would force Britain to ease its own restrictions, Jefferson's response was to adopt a total embargo on international trade, prohibiting any American ship from leaving port. Not surprisingly, with all trade at a standstill and with merchants and farmers unable to access their normal foreign markets, the embargo backfired, throwing the American economy into a deep depression. Ships lay idle in port. Thousands lost their jobs and businesses. Given the financial distress caused by the sanctions, they were soon lifted. Recovery was slow, however, and by 1812, with the war in Europe continuing unabated, the commercial picture really had not improved much for Americans trying to market their wares abroad.

Relations with Britain were complicated by the discovery that suspected British weapons were being used by Indians in the Northwest against American soldiers. In an effort to stave off the inexorable spread of white Americans into their lands, Indians had formed a confederacy under the leadership of the Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother, Tenskwatawa, known as The Prophet. In November 1811, while Tecumseh was absent from the confederacy's principal encampment at Prophetstown on the Tippecanoe Creek, William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, led an armed force of more than a thousand men into Indian country to attack the settlement. The Indians, however, took the initiative, launching a preemptive surprise attack against Harrison's camp in the pre-dawn hours of November 7. Stumbling from their bedrolls in the dark, Harrison's men put up stiff resistance, even-

On April 27, 1813, an American force supported by a naval flotilla landed at York (Toronto) on the Lake Ontario shore (on left), drove off the British defenders and captured the fort, town, and dockyard. The Americans suffered heavy casualties, including Brigadier General Zebulon Pike, and carried out several acts of arson and looting before withdrawing. Although an American victory, York was an unimportant military objective and had little impact on the course of the war. Kingston, the base for British naval forces on Lake Ontario was strategically far more important.

After the French and Indian War, the British occupied the French Fort Mackinac but thought it was too difficult to defend. In 1780–1781, Lieutenant Governor Patrick Sinclair constructed a new fort of stone on the 150-foot limestone bluffs of Mackinac Island. The British held the outpost throughout the remainder of the Revolutionary War. After the Treaty of Paris (1783) ended the war, the British were to give the fort to the United States, but did not do so until 1796. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.

tually beating back the attack. With the coming of daylight, the Indians scattered, abandoning Prophetstown to Harrison's army, who moved through, trashing and burning the village, but not before discovering a cache of weapons. Alleging that the arms had been supplied by the British, and that the British were actively supporting the Indians in their efforts to stem westward expansion into their territory, Harrison added one more British transgression to be addressed.

Picking up on that theme were a group of young Congressmen who came to be known as the War Hawks. Led by Henry Clay of Kentucky, they took over leadership roles in Congress and pressed President Madison into a declaration of war in June 1812. It was a combination of grievances, then, rather than one overriding concern that propelled America into war. Trade restrictions, impressment, territorial ambitions in the West, and a general feeling that America was not being treated with the respect it deserved all came together to bring about the war declaration. An unpopular war from the start, however, the declaration passed by the closest war vote in American history — 79 to 49 in the House, and 19 to 13 in the Senate.

Despite the War Hawks' bellicose assurances, America was totally unprepared for war. Reluctant to maintain a standing army and determined to cut defense spending, Jefferson's government had decimated the armed forces. The peacetime army had been cut to 3,300 men and construction halted on all ships-of-the-line. Appointments to the officer corps had become political prizes distributed to military amateurs. By 1812, the country was being defended by an insufficient number of poorly trained troops commanded for the most part by — as General Winfield Scott characterized them — "imbeciles and ignoramuses."

War planning for the Americans was confused from the start. Strategic goals were poorly defined. How, exactly, was America to win a war against one of the most powerful military machines in the world? Where was Britain vulnerable? Where could she be attacked that would wring from her any concessions? With so few meaningful targets in sight, the only clearly identifiable substantive war aim seemed to be the conquest of Canada. Options were limited. Here was an accessible foe, and the invasion of Canada took on a life of its own. As blithely perceived by Thomas Jefferson: "The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent." Easier said than done.

The first significant encounter of the war — the capture of Fort Mackinac on an island in the strait between Lakes Huron and Michigan, giving the British control of an important thoroughfare in the Old Northwest — injected a harsh dose of reality into the mix and put America's lack of preparedness on display. A month after the June 18 declaration of war, a mixed British force of regulars, Indians, and employees of the North West Company put itself in position around the unsuspecting fort whose commanding officer, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, had not yet even been notified that a state of war existed between the two countries. That notification came on the morning of July 17, 1812, in the form of a single cannon shot announcing the British presence. A demand for surrender followed, and Lieutenant Hanks capitulated. The British would maintain occupation of the strategically important fort for the duration of the war.

Following that initial confrontation, two-and-a-half years of fighting spread over much of eastern North

Detail from The life and public services of William H. Harrison*, from a Whig presidential campaign broadside of 1840, illustrating Harrison's exploits during the War of 1812. Of the three great military leaders to emerge from the war — William Henry Harrison, Andrew Jackson, and Winfield Scott — two rose to the presidency. Jackson served two terms in office, 1828 to 1837. Harrison — "Old Tippecanoe" — was the first president to die in office, at age 68, just 23 days after his inauguration in March, 1841, the shortest tenure of any American president. Winfield Scott ran for president as a Whig in 1852, but was defeated by Democrat Franklin Pierce.*

In a ship-to-ship battle fought soon after the start of the war on August 19, 1812, the heavy frigate USS Constitution *defeated HMS* Guerrière*. Within 15 minutes,* Constitution's *superior gunnery battered* Guerrière *into wreckage — so badly that she sank the following day. Though of little strategic importance, the victory was great morale boost for the nation and the U.S. Navy.*

America, much of it inconclusive, but all of it destructive to person and property. Separate theaters emerged, each characterized by distinctive tactics.

Strategically of little importance, but psychologically of incalculable value, were early American victories in ship-to-ship conflict on the high seas. At the onset of the war, the United States Navy could muster only 17 ships compared to more than 600 in the Royal Navy. In the first year, however, the United States humiliated the British navy, scoring three emphatic victories over British frigates. Included among those triumphs was that of the USS *Constitution* over the HMS *Guerrière*, during which British cannon balls bouncing off the *Constitution's* thick oak planking earned her the affectionate sobriquet *Old Ironsides.*

In the Old Southwest (today's Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi), Andrew Jackson would put the Creek Indians to flight. The Creeks scored an initial victory at Ft. Mims in August 1813, in what is now Alabama, when a militant group of Creek warriors known as Red Sticks massacred more than 200 defenders. In retaliation, Jackson crushed

Tecumseh

Tecumseh (c. 1768–1813) was a charismatic leader of the Shawnee and later of a large tribal confederacy he fostered, vigorously opposed to the expansion of the United States into Indian lands.

Tecumseh experienced fighting against George Rogers Clark in the Ohio Country in 1782, and later against U. S. forces in Ohio led by St. Clair and Wayne in the 1790s. He soon became a trusted leader of the Shawnees, and strongly advocated resistance to further white settlement of native lands. Although the Indians lost the Ohio Country by treaty after their defeat at Fallen Timbers in 1794, many, including Tecumseh, vowed to fight on.

Tecumseh realized that a confederacy of Indian tribes could better resist white settlement. Highly respected and a powerful orator, Tecumseh visited many Indian tribes west of the Appalachian Mountains, from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, encouraging them to unite.

This portrait is based on the engraving of Tecumseh in Lossing's The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812 *(1869), said to be taken from an 1808 drawing by trader Pierre Le Dru. There is still doubt as to the authenticity of the portrait.*

Tecumseh's younger brother, Tenskwatawa, known as The Prophet, had a vision — by giving up all white customs and goods, the Great Spirit would reward them by driving white settlers from the land. The Prophet's message was eagerly received and many Indians joined the brothers at Prophetstown, their village in the Indiana Territory, established in 1808.

William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory grew alarmed at the Indians' growing power at Prophetstown, and in the autumn of 1811 he led an army towards the village. Tecumseh was away, but left orders not to attack American troops. However, The Prophet, in another vision, claimed bullets would not harm the Indians—and in the hard-fought Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, the Indians were defeated and Prophetstown was burned—an event that seriously weakened the fragile unity of the tribes.

Tecumseh began rebuilding his confederacy, but tribal and cultural divisions among tribes continued to make this a frustrating task. During the War of 1812, Tecumseh and his remaining allies joined with the British. Tecumseh reasoned that if the British won, they would return Indian lands, a view encouraged by the British, in desperate need of additional forces. Tecumseh and his followers were active during 1812 and 1813; at times he led over 1,000 Indians in battle. Native forces served on both sides during the war, but as in past conflicts, Indians did not easily adapt to European-style military operations. However, many American troops in the region, especially militia, were terrified of Indians and fled at their approach.

After Perry's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie, the British position in the region collapsed. Tecumseh and his followers were forced to retreat eastward along with the remaining British forces. Many dispersed along the way. At the brief Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813, the outnumbered British forces were routed and Tecumseh was killed. His death spelled the end of united Indian resistance against American settlement of Indian lands east of the Mississippi River. RT

The British Army in the War of 1812

Since 1792, Great Britain had been at war with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, with one brief hiatus in 1803. By 1812, a large British and allied army commanded by the great Duke of Wellington contested control of Spain with the armies of France — a conflict known as the Peninsular War. The Royal Navy was fully committed to the blockade of France and her allies, as well as securing the oceanic commerce of Britain's world-wide empire. As a result, land and naval forces available for the defense of Canada were few.

The British Army was made up of long-service rank-and-file, usually from the lowest levels of British society, led by "gentlemen" officers who bought (and sold) their commissions. Recruiting was at times deceptive, and discipline was harsh — even minor offenses were punished by flogging. But almost 20 years of continual warfare had forged a superb, well-led professional army that was arguably the best in the world.

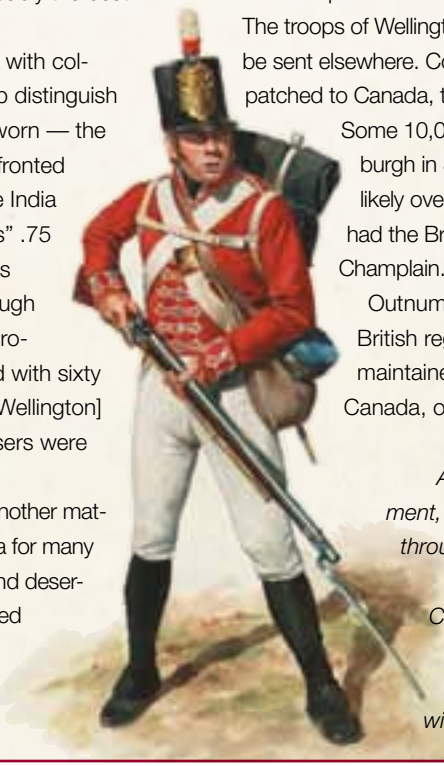
Soldiers wore a red woolen coatee, with colored facings and distinctive lace to help distinguish over 100 regiments. A felt shako was worn — the "stovepipe" style giving way to a false-fronted version after 1812. The firearm was the India pattern of the well-known "Brown Bess" .75 caliber musket. In general the army was well-dressed, equipped, and fed, although one of Wellington's officers claimed, "Provided we brought our men into the field with sixty rounds of good ammunition each, he [Wellington] never looked to see whether their trousers were black, blue or grey…"

The army stationed in Canada was another matter. Some regiments had been in Canada for many years where discipline was often slack and desertion rife. The 6,000 regulars were scattered far and wide — Upper Canada had only 1,500 regulars available when war officially began in June 1812.

Canada was barely self-supporting in terms of food, and the maintenance of a large peacetime garrison would have been burdensome. As in the United States, there would have to be great reliance on local militia. There were several "fencible" Canadian units raised for service in North America who were roughly equal to the regulars. But most of the 86,000 available militia were often as poorly armed and organized as their American counterparts. Of 11,000 militia enrolled in Upper Canada, only about a third were considered reliable enough for active service. Some of these men were "embodied" into semi-permanent units and given better training and leadership. They served well in the defense of their homeland. Some additional regiments were sent to Canada in 1813, and several more were raised in Canada, bolstering the defense.

In April 1814, Napoleon abdicated the throne of France and Europe was soon at peace for the first time in 11 years. The troops of Wellington's victorious army were now free to be sent elsewhere. Contingents of veteran troops were dispatched to Canada, the Chesapeake, and the Gulf coast. Some 10,000 veteran regulars marched on Plattsburgh in September 1814, and would have likely overwhelmed the American land defenses had the British not lost the naval battle on Lake Champlain.

Outnumbered everywhere until 1814, the British regulars and their fellow militiamen maintained a spirited and effective defense of Canada, often against great odds. RT



At left, a regular soldier of the 41st Regiment, stationed in Canada since 1799. Active throughout the war, the 41st won four battle honors, more than any unit serving in Canada. He wears the "stovepipe" shako and is equipped for active service in the field. The coatee facings are red, with lace sewn in "bastion" shaped loops.

The taking of the city of Washington in America*, published by G. Thompson, London, October, 1814. A propaganda war was waged by both sides, both to keep up morale at home and vilify the enemy. This print was done shortly after word of the event arrived in England — two months typically being needed for news to cross the Atlantic. The artist clearly knew little of the location or the event — the image recalls the burning of Moscow in October 1812 during Napoleon's invasion of Russia!*

them in March 1814, at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, a defeat from which they would never recover.

Along the Atlantic Coast, and especially the Chesapeake Bay region, British ships adopted slash-and-burn tactics, making what were largely hit-and-run strikes against vulnerable small coastal towns and villages and culminating in the 1814 attacks on Washington and Baltimore. Marching in August into Washington, which had largely been abandoned by a fleeing populace, a group of British officers entered the White House and sat down at the interrupted meal they found set out in the dining room. Once their appetites were satisfied, they set fire to the "President's House," the Capitol building (which housed the Library of Congress), the Treasury, and several other federal buildings. The sky's illumination from the flames was visible 40 miles distant. The excuse frequently given for the destruction of Washington was that it was in retaliation for Americans having torched York, the capital of Upper Canada. Unfortunately, however, arson had become a commonplace weapon in each army's arsenal. Besides Washington and York, the list of communities put to

the torch included Dover, Newark, Lewiston, Black Rock, Buffalo, and Sodus Point. The incendiary demolition of Washington, as well as other communities, seemed to stem more, perhaps, from a general frustration at the lack of meaningful military targets and the desire to mark military victories with a tangible symbol of success.

For America, despite the humiliation of having its capital occupied and destroyed, the burning of Washington did, at least, produce a genuine heroine. With a British army advancing on the city, First Lady Dolley Madison, sacrificing her personal belongings, arranged for the removal of government records as well as irreplaceable White House memorabilia including Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington.

Continuing up the Chesapeake Bay, the combined fleets of Admirals George Cockburn and Alexander Cochrane carrying 5,000 British regulars next set their sights on Baltimore, a major commercial center and home to many of the privateers which had harassed British shipping throughout the war. On September 12, 1814, the British launched a combined land and sea attack against the city. It failed. Crucial to the Americans' victory was the stiff resistance put up by Fort McHenry, the target of a concentrated naval cannonade. A young lawyer watching from a distance, Francis Scott Key, was inspired by the sight of the American flag flying over the fort's ramparts after a night of shelling to pen the words of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The successful defense of Baltimore, combined with the American victory a few days earlier at Plattsburgh, enabled American diplomats at Ghent, Belgium, to take a harder stand that winter with their British counterparts. And it had reached the point where both sides were ready to talk.

The war along the Canadian border had ground to a standstill. The American invasion of Canada had stalled in late July at the Battle of Lundy's

"By God, those are Regulars!," *painting by Charles H. McBarron. Brigadier General Winfield Scott leads his superbly-trained brigade to victory over British troops at the Battle of Chippewa, July 5, 1814. Seeing American troops in grey roundabout jackets, British General Phineas Riall at first mistook Scott's men for militia.*

A Pressing Business

Impressment is generally understood to be the taking of men into a navy by force, with or without notice. In Great Britain, the practice reached back to the Middle Ages and was set into law in the early 18th century.

The Royal Navy in wartime had a voracious need for men, and never more so than during the long Napoleonic Wars when the navy was stretched thin. Impressment was routine in the port cities of the British Isles, and unwary seamen, as well as just about anyone who fell into the clutches of a press gang, could find themselves involuntarily in the navy. Wages for merchant seamen in wartime were high, so relatively few sailors cared to volunteer for naval service. Royal Navy captains were therefore empowered to stop any merchant ship, including British, to fill out their crews. In theory, only British subjects were liable for impressment, but sailors of any nation could be fair game, so great was the need.

In a further twist, the laws of Great Britain at this time maintained that anyone born a subject of the Crown was always a subject — and required to serve in the armed forces if needed. Crown subjects who became naturalized American citizens were not recognized as such, and were looked upon as deserters. These sailors, when found aboard American merchant ships, were almost always taken into the Royal Navy — and in some cases made to fight against their adopted countrymen. By 1814, some 9,000 of these men had been impressed. RT

Merchant sailors are forcibly pressed into service by an officer in the Royal Navy. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.

General Winfield Scott

In the years between George Washington and Ulysses Grant, one personality dominates U.S. military history — Winfield Scott (1786–1866). In a 47-year career, he was considered the best American military commander of his time, serving as a general in the War of 1812, the Black Hawk War, the Seminole War, and the Mexican War. Scott was the senior general in the U.S. Army at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

Despite the relatively poor showing of the U.S. military in the War of 1812, Scott emerged as one of the most capable and inspirational leaders. Insistent on correct military appearance and discipline, he was later known as "Old Fuss and Feathers." However, he was always concerned with the health and welfare of the men under his command, and had little tolerance for officers who were negligent or incompetent.

After the War of 1812, Scott remained in the army, traveling to Europe and publishing several books. As a brigadier general, he participated in several campaigns against Native Americans. Upon the death of General Alexander Macomb in 1841, Scott was promoted to major general and assumed the office of general-in-chief.

His military reputation was greatly enhanced in the Mexican War as a result of his brilliant campaign that captured Mexico City in 1847 — the Duke of Wellington proclaimed Scott "the greatest living general."

Scott failed in his bid to become president in 1852 but was later made a lieutenant general, a rank only held previously by George Washington. Too infirm to take the field when the Civil War began, his strategic insights were an important factor in the defeat of the Confederacy. RT

Lane, the bloodiest contest of the war, near Niagara Falls. Although the fighting had been inconclusive, American casualties were sufficient for General Jacob Brown to call off the campaign. A British invasion of the northeastern U.S. had stalled on September 11 after the Battle of Plattsburgh. With Master Commodore Thomas Macdonough's destruction of the British Lake Champlain fleet at Plattsburgh, British General George Prevost's 10,000-man army turned around and fled back to Montreal.

Without any meaningful territorial objectives, and with the two armies ensconced on their own sides of the border, peace talks accelerated. There were good reasons for both sides to seriously contemplate an agreement. The United States knew that it faced a more powerful foe than in the early months of the war. Freed from the demands of defeating Napoleon, Britain could now turn its attention to the war with the United States, sending troops and equipment across the Atlantic to strengthen its forces there. War-weary Britain, on the other hand, exhausted both militarily and financially from 20 years of fighting on the continent, needed a break. Original contentious issues had long since been overtaken by events. American resentment at impressment and trade restrictions had been rendered moot by Napoleon's defeat. Neither side had anything to gain. On Christmas Eve, 1814, British and American diplomats signed the Treaty of Ghent, providing for a return to the *status quo ante bellum*.

Although both nations had agreed to peace, news spread slowly in the early 19th century, and one of the more memorable events of the War of 1812 actually occurred after its official end. In January 1815, Andrew Jackson led a ragtag force of Tennessee and Kentucky volunteers, freed black slaves, fishermen, creoles, Choctaw Indians, some U.S. regulars, and even pirates to successfully fend off a full-scale attack of seasoned British regulars, fresh from victory over Napoleon. Jackson's force suffered fewer than 50 casualties to the British's more than 2,000. Among the dead was their commander, General Sir Edward Pakenham, brother-in-law to the Duke of Wellington. Jackson's victories, both here and at Horseshoe Bend, made him a household name and were a major factor in propelling him to the presidency in 1828.

The debate about winners and losers continues today. A convincing argument can be made that the biggest winner was Canada, who retained its territorial integrity and went on from there

The Signing of the Treaty of Ghent, Christmas Eve, 1814, *by Amédée Forestier. Lord James Gambier, British Admiral of the Fleet is shaking hands with John Quincy Adams, United States Ambassador to Russia. Henry Goulburn, British Under-Secretary of State for War and the Colonies is carrying the red diplomatic box.*

Genl. Andrew Jackson: the hero of New Orleans, *published by Nathaniel Currier, c. 1840.*

to establish nationhood. And in providing military support that helped Canada preserve its boundaries from incursion by the United States, Britain can also claim to have been successful. The United States' success is perhaps best seen in the long-term. Going into the war, its army and navy had been in shambles. The demands of war, however, had resulted in the dismissal of incompetent commanders, the emergence of a young cadre of professional officers, and the realization that maintaining a strong military presence would be essential to the young nation's security. By challenging the military might of Britain, and in many cases having undeniable successes, the United States had injected itself onto the world stage, in the process displaying confidence, gaining respect, and becoming a player of consequence in international politics.

Without question, the biggest loser of the War of 1812 had been the Indians, or First Nations. With the death of Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames, the Indian confederacy that was to have challenged the United States government with respect to control of western lands fell apart. Tecumseh had been the Indians' last best chance. From that moment on, the march of white settlers to the Pacific Coast moved inexorably across the continent.

The United States Army in the War of 1812

The United States Army that fought the War of 1812 was plagued by serious deficiencies. The Jefferson administration (1801–1809) was generally anti-military, but as tensions with Great Britain grew, steps were taken to begin expanding the army. Still, by early 1812, the army numbered a paltry 6,750 officers and men out of the 10,000 authorized. However, with war clearly imminent, Congress decided to authorize an additional 25,000 men in ten regiments of infantry, two of artillery, and one of cavalry. The president was also given authority to recruit up to 30,000 men from the state militias for one year's service, plus 80,000 more to be kept in readiness. An impressive force — on paper.

The majority of the senior ranks were held by relatively aged veterans of the Revolution, most long past their prime. The regimental officers, many of them political appointees, were little better — in the words of Winfield Scott "swaggerers, dependents, decayed gentlemen and others fit for nothing else… unfit for any military purpose whatsoever."

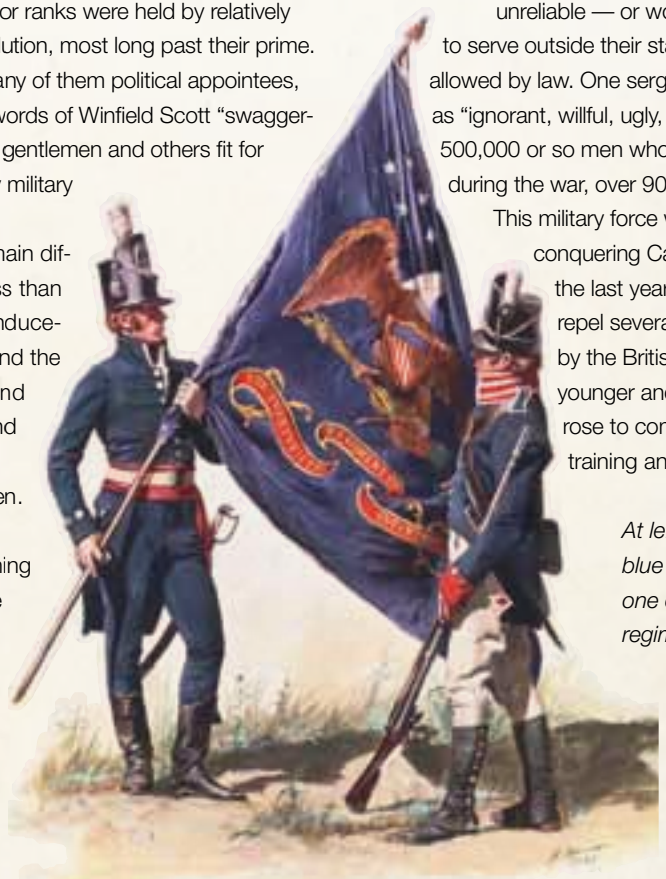
Recruitment would remain difficult, as army pay was less than that of a laborer, despite inducements like a $16 bounty and the promise of 160 acres of land upon discharge. By the end of 1812, the regular army had fewer than 20,000 men.

Along with the shortage of regular troops, clothing and supply difficulties were common throughout the war; the army was never completely clothed and equipped in a uniform manner. Poor clothing and food, incompetent officers, and inconsistent training and discipline severely hampered the effectiveness of the army until improvements in leadership and training were achieved in 1814.

The regulation uniform was a blue wool coatee — the red facings were costly and a simpler all-blue uniform was introduced in 1813. Even so, shortages meant regular units had coats of black or drab or were clothed in inexpensive grey jackets. The felt shako, which did not hold up well, was replaced with a much sturdier leather version the same year.

The lack of regulars made militia units a necessary part of almost every military operation. The state militias, many of which were large organizations, were often unreliable — or worse. Militia units could refuse to serve outside their state borders (or country), as allowed by law. One sergeant described his officers as "ignorant, willful, ugly, ill-natured puppies." Of the 500,000 or so men who could claim some service during the war, over 90% were militia.

This military force was ultimately incapable of conquering Canada, and was fortunate in the last year of the war to successfully repel several invasions of American soil by the British. As the war progressed, younger and more competent leaders rose to command, and standards of training and discipline improved. RT



At left, a regular officer in the all-blue coat holds the "national color," one of two flags carried by each regiment (the "stars and stripes" were not carried). At right is a soldier wearing the earlier red-faced coatee. Soldiers' shoulder belts were often black due to a shortage of white leather.

The War Across the Lakes

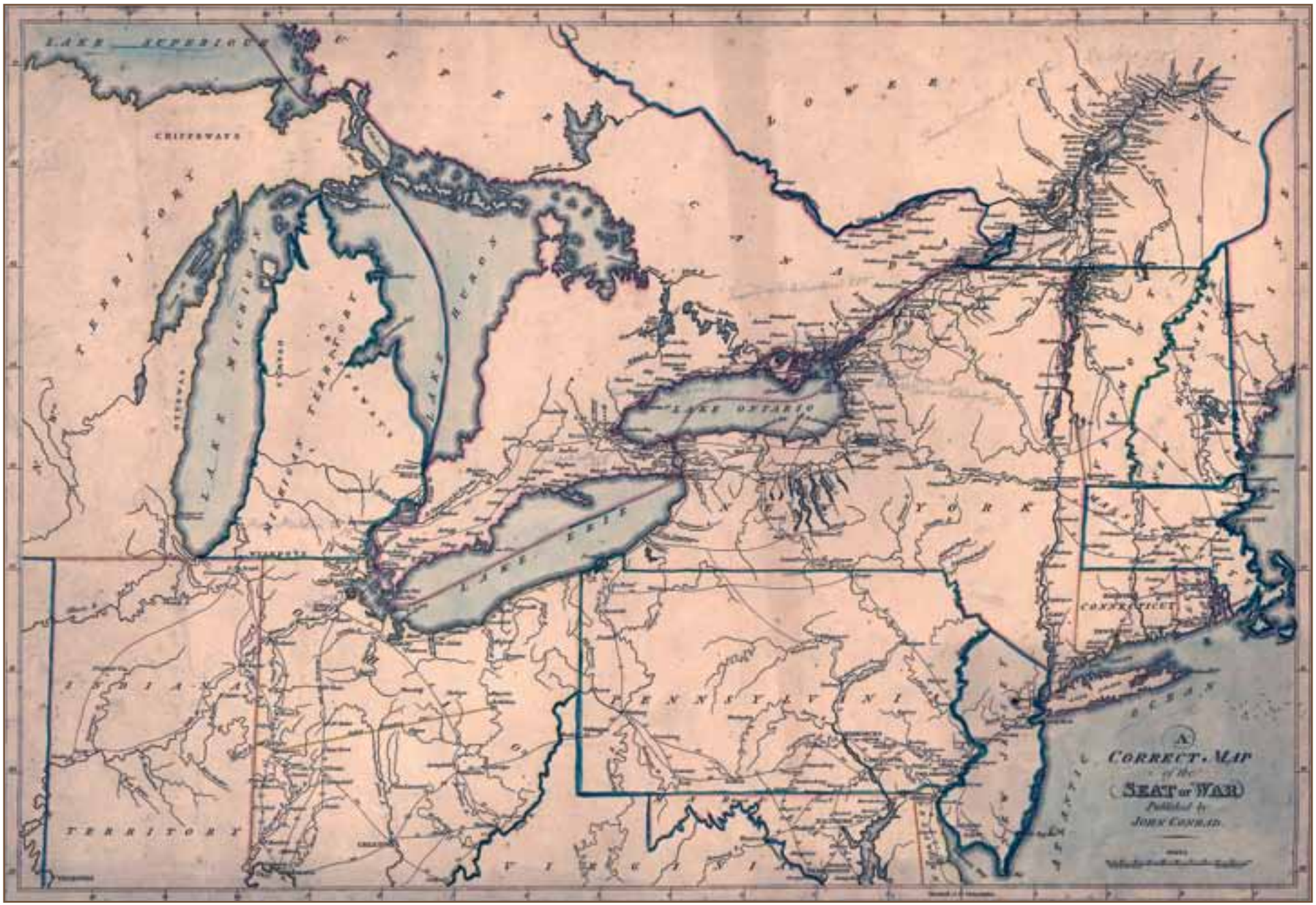
Arguably the most critical theater of the War of 1812 unfolded along the boundary between the United States and Canada in New York and Pennsylvania. It was along the lakes and rivers constituting the boundary that, for two-and-a-half years, a grinding struggle played out between British and American forces attempting to secure whatever sliver of borderland territory they could. It was along these waterways that major naval engagements took place. There were significant land battles and countless raids and skirmishes. A scorched-earth policy left communities in rubble. Civilian populations lived in constant fear for their lives. This area, far removed from the populated Atlantic Coast and thus sometimes slighted in historical accounts, proved to be the epicenter of the war.

The population of Upper Canada (which gets its name from its position relative to the flow of water from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic — and is, in fact, actually south & west of Lower Canada) was largely made up of two waves of American emigrants — (1) Loyalists who had fled the colonies during the American Revolution, and (2) an even larger contingent of "Loyalists" who had arrived later, attracted by low taxes and offers for free land amounting to 200 acres per family. Both America and Britain made serious miscalculations with respect to this population. Americans assumed that, because of their cultural ties to the United States, the inhabitants of Upper Canada would welcome being "liberated" from the British Empire. Britain assumed that, because the farmers had fled American soil, they would enthusiastically embrace their British ties. By 1812, however, most of the people of Upper Canada were farmers with no ties to the United States and little, if any, love for the British Empire. For the most part, they just wanted to be left alone. With the armies of both nations ranging — and raging — back and forth across the land, this dream proved a chimera.

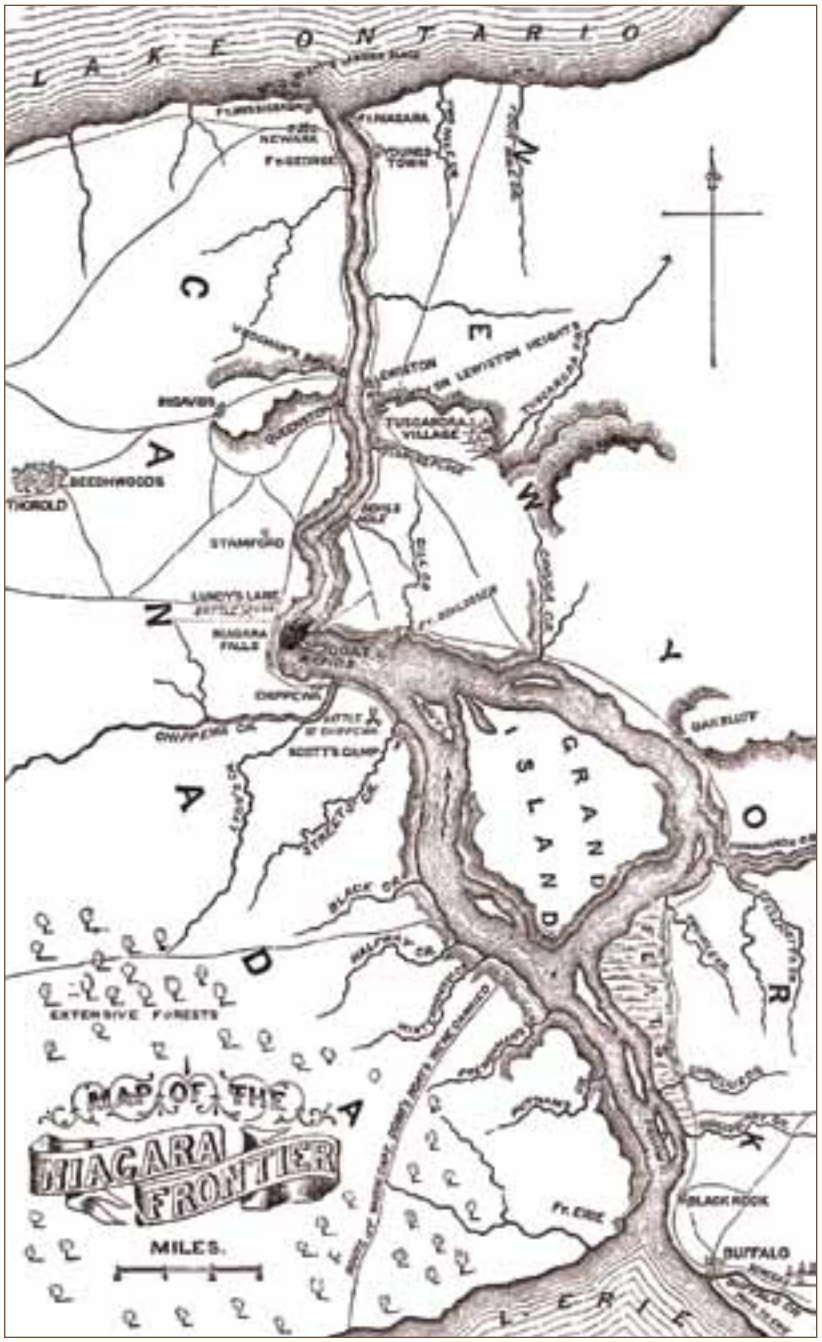
The fighting in the north was concentrated along the Niagara frontier, the shores of Lake Ontario, and the upper

Return of the Victors, *painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. The entire British fleet on Lake Erie was captured at the Battle of Lake Erie. As was customary at the time, the victor's flags are flown above the loser's on captured ships — the Stars and Stripes above the Royal Navy's red ensign.*

John Bull making a new Batch of Ships to send to the Lakes, *by William Charles, published in Philadelphia, 1814. This satirical cartoon pokes fun at the many difficulties the British had in replacing warships lost on the Great Lakes, especially Commander Robert Barclay's British fleet captured as a result of Commodore Perry's victory on Lake Erie.*



A Correct Map of the Seat of War, *published by John Conrad, c.1812. This map shows roads and distances in the northeastern United States and southern Canada. Operations in this vast theater of war ranged from Mackinac Island at the northern tip of Michigan Territory to the regions north of Lake Champlain and south of Montreal. The coasts of New England were raided by the Royal Navy, whose supremacy at sea was never seriously challenged by the tiny U.S. Navy despite several notable victories in individual ship-to-ship combats.*



Map of the Niagara Frontier *from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812, *showing the forts, towns, battle sites and physical features relevant to the campaigns.*

Capture of Fort George (Col. Winfield Scott leading the attack), *by the well-known 19th-century American painter of historical subjects, Alonzo Chappel. Chappel (1828–1887) was a prolific artist whose paintings and engravings brought American history to broad audiences. His work has great dramatic effect, though not always accurate as to uniforms and locations. This print shows American soldiers storming the gate at Fort George, Ontario during the May 1813 attack.*

St. Lawrence River. The Lower Canada border had never really come into play. Here, the St. Lawrence River went deep into Canadian territory and was accessible only through New England states dominated by anti-war Federalists more concerned with profits from smuggling than with fighting the British. Beef cattle and grain flowed unimpeded across the borders of the New England states and New York State from Ogdensburg east, providing sustenance to hungry British soldiers.

Perry's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813 not only ensured control of that lake, but shut off supplies to Detroit which had been captured by the British in the early days of the war. With his supply situation bleak, Major General Henry Procter, commander of the British forces on the Detroit frontier, to the dismay of his Indian allies ordered removal of the army to the east along the Thames River. Pursued and caught at Moraviantown on October 5 by a force of Kentucky volunteers under the command of Major General William Henry Harrison, Procter was soundly defeated in what became known as the Battle of the Thames. Not only did this loss along with Perry's victory cede control of the Lake Erie region to the Americans, but the death of Tecumseh and an accompanying sense of abandonment felt by the Indians initiated the decline of the British-Indian alliance.

With Lake Erie secured, action on the Niagara Peninsula and Lake Ontario took on greater urgency, though neither side demonstrated enough will to win. The fighting took on a fragmented look. Campaigns fell victim to incompetent leadership, bad weather, sickness, poor training, and low morale. Spies operated with impunity, filtering easily back-and-forth across a border where friends and enemies looked the same. Raiders took out their frustrations on hapless civilians, burning and looting their way across the region. Navies preyed on lakeside communities in their search for supplies and provisions.

If one were to seek a focal point, what might be called the vortex of military activity in the two-and-a-half years of war with Britain, one could not do any better than to consider the Niagara frontier. A look at a map of the northern theater reveals why.

The weather on the Great Lakes was always capricious and could quickly become dangerous. In a series of actions on September 28, 1813, the opposing Lake Ontario fleets came close to a major battle. The American General Pike *brought down the main and mizzen topmasts on the British* Wolfe*. In a confused fight and 90-minute running chase — "The Burlington Races" — American Commodore Chauncey's ships attempted the capture of two British ships. As the weather worsened, British Commodore Yeo's ships were able to escape and drop anchor near Burlington (Ontario), and Chauncey, fearing his ships would be driven ashore by the gale winds, called off the action. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.*

Isolated fighting in the theater's western reaches occurred early in the war at Fort Dearborn on the site of present-day Chicago, at Fort St. Joseph in the Straits of Mackinac linking Lakes Michigan and Huron, and, notably, at Fort Detroit near the western end of Lake Erie, where, in that first summer, General Isaac Brock bluffed General William Hull into surrendering the fort. At the eastern terminus of the theater, fighting approached — but never reached — Montreal. Set mid-way along the front, dead in the physical center of the fighting, lay the 35-mile long Niagara River, cutting through the Niagara Escarpment and traversing the isthmus connecting Lakes Erie and Ontario. Hemmed in by bodies of water both north and south, this confrontation along the river of protruding land masses of British and American territories encouraged a concentration of forces within a severely circumscribed area. Poised at either end of the Niagara River were strategically sited military installations. In the south, where the waters of Lake Erie funneled into the river, British Fort Erie on the west bank kept a wary eye on Buffalo and Black Rock across the way. And where the river ended its short but spectacular northward passage, spilling its waters into Lake Ontario, Fort George on the west bank confronted Fort Niagara on the opposite bank, in such close proximity that they spent a day lobbing shells inside each other's perimeter in an 1812 artillery duel. For two-and-a-half years, armies marched along the riverbanks, at intervals crossing to make forays into enemy territory. Major battles were fought at Queenston Heights, Chippawa, and Lundy's Lane, where the din of battle competed with the roar of Niagara Falls.

Possession of the forts changed hands with some regularity. Fort George was captured by the Americans and later abandoned to the British. Fort Niagara fell to the British in December 1813. Fort Erie saw some of the fiercest fighting of the war and changed hands several times. Abandoned by the British after their retreat from Fort George in May 1813, it was reoccupied six months later. Falling again to an American invasion force in July 1814, in August it became the scene of the bloodiest battle of the northern war, accounting for more than 2,500 casualties, as the Americans successfully fended off

Peter Rindlisbacher's dramatic painting of the nighttime battle of Stoney Creek (June 6, 1813) captures the fury of the British attack on the unsuspecting American encampment. By daybreak the battered Americans still held the field, but soon began their retreat back to Fort George, abandoning a considerable amount of military supplies to the pursuing British.

A New York Soldier at War

Captain (brevet major) Mordecai Myers (1776–1871) was born to immigrant Jewish parents in Newport, Rhode Island. His loyalist family moved to New York City during the American Revolution and then to Nova Scotia before returning to New York in 1787. As a young man, unsuccessful in business, Myers became involved in New York politics as an anti-Federalist. Interested in the military, he served in a New York artillery company, and when the war began in 1812 he was commissioned a captain in the 13th U.S. Infantry. Myers was a distinguished officer — at Sackets Harbor he organized the rescue of several hundred men whose boats had foundered near shore, and fought in several engagements during Wilkinson's failed invasion of Canada in the autumn of 1813. At the Battle of Crysler's Farm in November 1813, he was severely wounded in the shoulder, ending his military career. Recovering from his wounds in Plattsburgh, he met and married Charlotte Bailey in 1814 — they eventually had 10 children.

After the war, Myers again entered politics — he was a member of the New York Assembly from 1829 to 1834 and mayor of Kinderhook, New York in 1838 (hometown of president Martin Van Buren). After the death of his wife, he moved to Schenectady in 1848, and served as that city's mayor for several terms — 1851–52 and 1854–55. During his long life, Myers was a Master Mason and continuously active in both New York politics and Jewish organizations — even running for Congress in 1860 at the age of 84! He died in Schenectady in 1871 at 94 years of age. RT

Battle of Niagara from a sketch by Major Riddle, *published in Philadelphia, 1815, showing an American infantry charge against British guns during the Battle of Lundy's Lane, fought a few miles from Niagara Falls, July 25th, 1814. The rising moon is indicative of the fact that the later stages of the battle were fought in darkness.*

The British 41st Regiment of Foot, stationed in Canada since 1799, advances in line of battle. The 41st was in the Niagara peninsula in 1814 — the regiment's light company fought with distinction at Lundy's Lane and the regiment participated in the siege of Fort Erie, taking heavy casualties in the night assault. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.

British troops attempt to storm American-held Fort Erie on the night of August 15–16, 1814. In a war notable for several hard-fought night battles, this ambitious assault was a catastrophe for the British. A gunpowder magazine explosion at the height of the attack added greatly to British casualties, in all, over 900, including several senior officers — a grievous loss to the besieging army of around 3,000 men. The American garrison of some 2,500 troops, made up of regulars as well as Pennsylvania and New York Militia volunteers, suffered less than 100 casualties.

Sackets Harbor was the center of the American war effort on and around Lake Ontario. Twice attacked by the British but never captured, the military and naval installations around the harbor and town continued to grow. At the time this print was published in 1818, Sackets Harbor remained the seat of American naval power on the lake.

a British attempt to regain the fort. That failed British attack took on particular significance when it was followed within the month by successive failures at Plattsburgh and Baltimore, enormously strengthening the hands of American diplomatic negotiators at Ghent.

The Niagara region was the scene of perhaps the most hard-fought campaign of the entire war. Commanding one of the best trained American armies to take the field, General Jacob Brown's troops swiftly captured Fort Erie on July 3, 1814. Leaving a garrison, Brown advanced north toward Fort George. He was confronted by British forces led by General Phineas Riall at Chippawa Creek, where Winfield Scott's superbly trained brigade drove the British from the field in a fierce half-hour battle.

Brown's men, lacking heavy artillery and naval support from Commodore Isaac Chauncey's Lake Ontario fleet, could not directly attack Fort George. The Americans occupied Queenston for a time, but then fell back to Chippawa. The British, now under the command of Lt. Governor Gordon Drummond, advanced to Lundy's Lane, within earshot of Niagara Falls. On July 25, both armies endured a desperate see-saw battle that lasted into the night. Brown, severely wounded, ordered General Eleazar Ripley to retreat back to Fort Erie. Casualties were heavy on both sides.

Over the course of August and September the British besieged the Americans entrenched around Fort Erie. A massive British assault on the night of August 15–16 was a complete failure, while an American attack on the British lines on September 17 had some success — by which time the British had already planned to abandon the siege. While both sides regrouped, the military situation in the northern region changed, and Brown's men were needed elsewhere. Fort Erie was abandoned by American forces on November 5, 1814 — another campaign that ended in failure.

One hundred fifty miles to the east lay another area of exceptional concern. With only 35 miles separating the enemies' respective naval bases at Kingston and Sackets Harbor, continual vigilance was the order of the day. Squadrons sparred, but managed to keep each other at arm's length, avoiding the pitched battle that might have spelled catastrophe for one or the other of the fleets. Commodore Chauncey went so far as to refuse naval support to army operations, afraid to leave Sackets Harbor undefended or draw British Commodore Yeo's attention to his exposed ships. That his single-mindedness complicated army planning and put soldiers at risk did not concern him. More than anything else, the war on Lake Ontario consisted of a spiraling arms race, with each navy trying to stay one step ahead of the other by constructing the next larger and more heavily armed warship. The advantage shifted back and forth throughout the war, the weaker side always managing to stay out of harm's way. At war's end, the British had just launched a 104-gun colossus, *St. Lawrence*, while, at Sackets Harbor, the Americans were building their own oversized warship, the 120-gun *New Orleans*. The peace agreement, effectively disarming both nations on the lakes, rendered the entire naval construction race meaningless and the remaining warships superfluous.

The winner in the northern theater is certainly debatable. The Americans' victory in the Battle of Lake Erie had enormous strategic importance and was influential in determining the overall course of the war. The British were successful in thwarting American attempts to march into Canada, and they launched an effective and destructive raid on the Niagara frontier. Neither side, however, had distinguished itself militarily. An American campaign against Montreal had foundered on poor planning, bad weather, command incompetence, and battered egos. A British invasion force, at 11,000 men the largest ever armed incursion into American territory, had turned tail and fled back to Montreal at the first sign of determined resistance. The border region had maintained its pre-war configuration. In a sense, nothing had changed.

War of 1812 reenactors perform a sunset ceremony at the Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site.

The War of 1812 along America's Byways

Reenactors portraying American soldiers assemble in front of their camps to drill at Sackets Harbor.

New York State is flanked by two nationally-designated byways that provide a series of signed, easy-to-follow, connecting roads; a one-of-a-kind travel destination of charming waterfront towns and villages with world-famous attractions. The Great Lakes Seaway Trail is a 518-mile route that winds through the port cities of Erie, Buffalo, Rochester, Oswego, and Ogdensburg. The leisure-driving experience includes Niagara Falls and the Thousand Islands, and countless recreational opportunities in New York and Pennsylvania along the shores of Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and the St. Lawrence River. Lakes to Locks Passage flanks 225 miles of the eastern side of New York State, connecting the upper Hudson River, Lake George and Lake Champlain to Quebec's Richelieu and St. Lawrence Rivers.

Two hundred years ago, the War of 1812 ranged along these interconnected waterways where American, British and Native American forces clashed yet again for control of the heart of the continent. Today, the Great Lakes Seaway Trail and Lakes to Locks Passage follow the historic northern frontlines of the War of 1812.

Great Lakes Seaway Trail travelers can visit an exciting collection of historic forts, battlefields, ships, and museums that will bring the War of 1812 to life. In Erie, PA, see the restored brig *Niagara* — the ship Commo-

The brig Niagara *moored dockside at the Erie Maritime Museum in Erie, Pennsylvania.*

Left: Niagara Falls at night; below: Old Fort Niagara, Youngstown, New York.

in New York and Pennsylvania

dore Oliver Hazard Perry used to defeat the British in the Battle of Lake Erie, an important turning point in the war. Visit Fort Niagara in Youngstown, NY, or Fort Ontario in Oswego, NY, and learn about the battles that occurred at each military stronghold. Tour Sackets Harbor, NY, and the Sackets Harbor Battlefield to discover more about this historic village that served as the headquarters for the U.S. Navy on the Great Lakes during the war. Visit quaint waterfront towns that were thrust into the international conflict and subject to raids, pillaging, burning, and battles.

Lakes to Locks Passage welcomes byway travelers through a series of Waypoint Communities and Heritage Centers. The National Geographic co-branded website, www.lakestolocks.com, lists hundreds of sites and stories, all guided by the locals who live here. The thematic "PassagePorts" link landscape features to interpretive signs and historic sites; a 21st-century travel itinerary can be loaded onto your mobile device.

In addition to a fascinating War of 1812 heritage, travel the Great Lakes Seaway Trail and Lakes to Locks Passage to find other unique cultural and historic attractions. Tour historic communities and architectural masterpieces. Learn about the waterways that opened up the North American continent for exploration. Breathe in the fresh aroma of vineyards and orchards. Shop for treasures and unique gifts at farm markets, main street shops, malls, and outlets. Savor the taste of regional food favorites. Experience exceptional natural resources and wildlife. See historic lighthouses that showcase the region's maritime heritage. And enjoy the freshwater with a refreshing swim, superb fishing opportunities, or aboard a scenic boat tour.

Welcome to the Great Lakes Seaway Trail and Lakes to Locks Passage!

Cannon guard the harbor at Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York.

Above left: The Seaway Trail Discovery Center located in the historic Union Hotel c. 1817 in Sackets Harbor, New York; left: scene along the Seaway Trail near Pultneyville, New York.

Building the Lake Erie Fleet & the Battle of Lake Erie

The first week of August 1813 saw a flurry of activity at the navy yard in Presque Isle, Pennsylvania, as the United States Lake Erie fleet emerged from the sheltered harbor behind the protective arm of the curving peninsula onto the open waters of the lake. The appearance of the ships had not come without adversity.

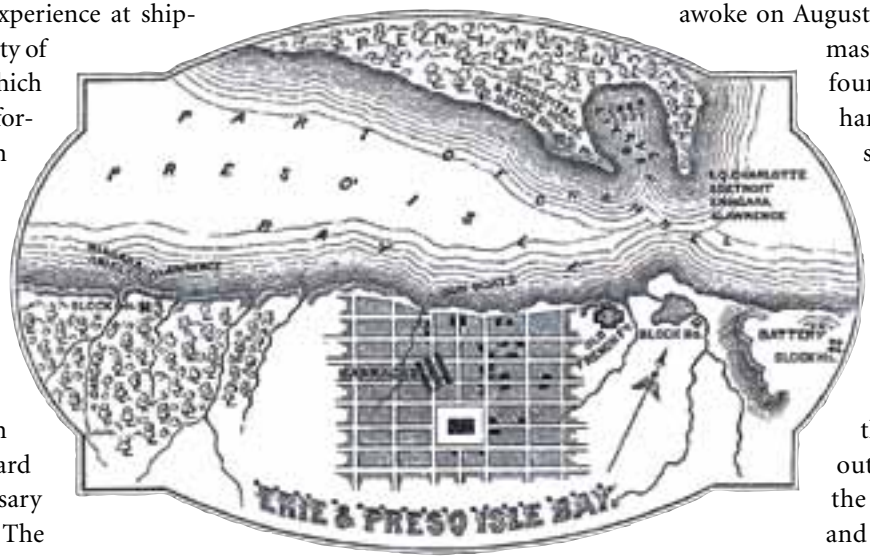
For the past year, the British had maintained control of Lake Erie. With the British capture of Fort Mackinac at the junction of Lakes Michigan and Huron in the first days after the declaration of war, Brigadier General William Hull's hasty capitulation to Major General Isaac Brock at Detroit, and the absence of U.S. warships to counter the British fleet on the lake, the British had experienced little to no opposition in the region.

Recognizing that control of Lake Erie and the accompanying freedom it gave to movement of men and materials along the border were critical to the war effort, Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton instructed master Great Lakes mariner Daniel Dobbins to begin a shipbuilding program at Presque Isle. From September 1812 into the depths of the winter months, Dobbins struggled against his own inexperience at shipbuilding, a lack of skilled workers, a paucity of supplies other than the plentiful wood which was harvested from the thick hardwood forests along the lake shore, and the rough wilderness routes over which to transport other necessary materials — iron, canvas, rigging, and armaments.

To accelerate and refine the building program, master shipbuilder Noah Brown was sent from New York in February 1813 with a crew of skilled shipwrights. The subsequent arrival in March of U.S. Navy Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry put in place all the elements necessary for the rapid creation of several vessels. The three men quickly established an effective working relationship: Brown was placed in charge of construction, Dobbins made accountable for the acquisition of materials, and Perry assuming responsibility for the overall supervision of the undertaking. By July, after ten months of concentrated shipbuilding augmented by the addition of several vessels from a second navy yard at Black Rock near Buffalo, the Lake Erie fleet was assembled and ready for action.

Daniel Dobbins

But by July, as well, the activity at the navy yard had attracted the attention of Royal Navy Commander Robert Barclay who had recently been put in charge of British naval operations on the lake. Establishing a blockade outside the bay at Presque Isle, and aided in his objective by a sandbar extending across its mouth, Barclay's smaller fleet effectively bottled up the American ships, making it impossible for them to exit the bay in any kind of configuration that could be considered battle-ready. The sandbar, moreover, could not be negotiated without significant modifications to the U.S. brigs *Lawrence* and *Niagara*, whose deep drafts substantially exceeded the clearances necessary to pass from the bay into the deeper waters of the lake. A stalemate ensued.



Erie & Presque Isle Bay *c. 1814 from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *The locations of Perry's ships and captured British vessels are shown, as well as various harbor defenses. The sand bar that was such a problem for Perry's ships blocked the narrow entrance to the bay, in the area marked "channel."*

It was with great surprise, then, when the Americans awoke on August 1 to find the horizon clear of British masts. Perry did not hesitate. Over the next four days, the American ships exited the harbor. To overcome the obstacle of the sandbar, *Lawrence* and *Niagara* were stripped of their heavy armament and ballast to increase their buoyancy. Cradled by flotation devices known as "camels," the ships were then lifted over the bar. The process was a fairly simple one — the camels were filled with water, attached to the sides of the ships, and then pumped out, raising the ship high enough to clear the bar — but it was time-consuming and labor-intensive. By the time Barclay's squadron reappeared on August 4, four days later, Perry's fleet was just completing the maneuver, *Niagara* not yet over the bar or re-armed. Finding the American ships lined up in battle array, Barclay,

Camels lashed to either side of the hull raise one of Perry's brigs over the bar in Presque Isle Bay. The water in places is only waist deep — a man stands in the water directing the work. Drawing by Peter Rindlisbacher.

short of supplies, abandoned the blockade, never recognizing the vulnerability of *Niagara*.

With both fleets now free to move about the lake, Commodore Perry moved to utilize his advantage in firepower, eventually catching up with Barclay at the west end of the lake and effectively backing him into a corner. Barclay, not yet resupplied, was forced to try to break out from Amherstburg into the teeth of Perry's guns. The ensuing Battle of Lake Erie at Put-in-Bay on September 10, 1813, reversed the balance of power on Lake Erie, enabling the United States to secure predominance in that theater for the remainder of the war and elevating Oliver Hazard Perry into the pantheon of American military heroes.

Aboard the flagship *Lawrence*, named in honor of his recently killed good friend, Captain James Lawrence, Perry laid a course straight into the heart of the British fleet, taking on *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, the largest and most heavily armed of the British warships. Inexpli-

Sister brigs Lawrence *and* Niagara *lead Perry's fleet of nine vessels. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.*

Oliver Hazard Perry

Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry (1785–1819) was born in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. At 13, he was a midshipman (officer candidate) serving on his father's frigate the USS *General Greene*, and later saw service during the First Barbary War (1801–05). On the outbreak of war in 1812, at his request, he was given command of U.S. naval forces on Lake Erie. With the able assistance of Daniel Dobbins, he constructed the ships that eventually defeated the British fleet at the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813. During this time he was also active in several other naval operations on the lakes. In 1814, the "Hero of Lake Erie" participated in the defense of Baltimore. After the war, a time marred by controversies, feuds, court martials and duels, he served in the Mediterranean as captain of the USS *Java*. To help settle these personal issues, President James Monroe gave Perry the permanent rank of Commodore (highest in the U.S. Navy at the time) and sent him on a diplomatic mission to South America, where he died of yellow fever at the age of 34. RT

The Brig USS *Niagara*

The original two-masted brigs of war *Niagara* and her sister ship *Lawrence* were completed in 1813 as part of the fleet that would contest for control of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. In 1820, *Niagara* was sunk in shallow water (along with most other lake warships) at Presque Isle for purposes of preservation in case war broke out again. The remains were raised in 1913 and reconstructed for the centennial of the Battle of Lake Erie. Further restoration of the *Niagara* was required in the 1930s, but the Great Depression limited funding. This second restoration was finally finished in 1963. A more comprehensive restoration took place in 1988, and at this time almost all of the remaining parts of the original ship had to be replaced.

One of the last remaining ships afloat from the War of 1812, *Niagara* is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The ship is usually docked at the Erie Maritime Museum in downtown Erie and often sails the Great Lakes during the summer. RT

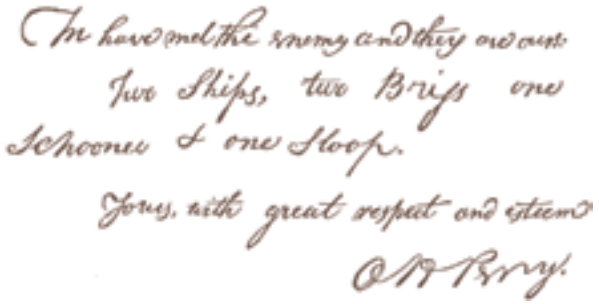
The remains of Niagara *when raised, March 1913, on the north shore of Misery Bay, Erie, Pa.*

Left: the reconstructed Niagara *as she appeared for the centennial in 1913. Right: the* Niagara *today under full sail. A brig has only two masts.*

An idealized 19th century print of Perry's dramatic transfer under fire from the crippled Lawrence *to her sister ship* Niagara.

Niagara*, raking the British warships* Queen Charlotte *and* Detroit*, which are afoul of each other after colliding.* Niagara *is flying Perry's "Don't Give Up the Ship" battle flag at her mainmast peak. Mural by Charles Robert Patterson and Howard B. French, courtesy U.S. Naval Academy.*

cably, *Niagara*, under the command of Lieutenant Jesse Elliott remained clear of the action. After two hours, and with all but one of *Lawrence's* guns silenced and most



Perry's famous message to General Harrison was written on the back of an old envelope:

> *Dear General:*
> *We have met the enemy and they are ours.*
> *Two Ships, two Brigs, one Schooner & one Sloop.*
> *Yours with great respect and esteem,*
> *O.H. Perry*

The Erie Maritime Museum guides visitors through the Battle of Lake Erie, the history of the flagship Niagara, *the USS* Wolverine, *Lake Erie lighthouses, Erie's fishing industry, and more. Discover the rich maritime heritage of Erie and the Great Lakes.*

of her crew killed or wounded, Perry, unscathed amidst the carnage — blood, scattered body parts and shards of twisted metal littering the deck — ordered lowered his battle flag carrying the apocryphal last words of Captain Lawrence, "Don't Give Up the Ship." Taking the flag in hand, he made his way by rowboat amidst heavy fire to *Niagara*, where he once more raised the inspirational pennant.

Given a fresh ship, fresh guns, and fresh crew, Perry returned to the fray. *Niagara* pounded the two British ships into submission as the crippled vessels had collided and become inextricably entangled in the confusion of their maneuvering. All six British vessels in the battle lost — killed or wounded — their first and second in command. In a post-battle message to General William Henry Harrison, Perry wrote memorably, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

The effects of the American victory were swift and long-lasting. Having lost control of Lake Erie, the British largely withdrew from the Old Northwest, relinquishing the territorial advantage they had gained in the early days of the war and abandoning their Native American allies, whose allegiance to their cause had been one of their most valuable assets.

A key element in the establishment of American control over Lake Erie had been the utilization of camels at Presque Isle. Without their availability, Perry would not have been able to take advantage of Barclay's inexplicable four-day absence, the American fleet would not have been able to gain access to the lake waters, and his victory at Put-in-Bay would not have been possible.

The Battle of the Thames

Perry's decisive victory and subsequent control of Lake Erie deprived the British and their Indian allies of resupply in the region. Gathered at Amherstburg, Major General Henry Procter's troops prepared to retreat back to Burlington on Lake Ontario to join British forces there.

In late September, Procter's 800 dispirited men, along with 500 increasingly restive Indians led by Tecumseh, began their retreat up the Thames River valley. The American army of some 3,500 (mostly Kentucky militia), under the command of future president Major General William Henry Harrison, crossed over into Canada on October 2, hard on the heels of the British. Contact was made on October 4, 1813.

Early the next morning, Procter ordered his men to retreat two miles, near Moraviantown, hoping to set a trap for Harrison's advancing troops. Surveying the British position, Harrison ordered Colonel Richard Johnson's Mounted Kentucky Riflemen to charge the line of British regulars. Despite flanking fire from Tecumseh's Indians, Johnson broke through — some of the regulars fled, the rest were captured. The Indians fought on, and during this sharp action Tecumseh was killed, reportedly by Colonel Johnson himself. As American forces pressed on, the news of Tecumseh's death spread, quickly ending Indian resistance.

The victory once again established American control of the Northwest, and the death of Tecumseh broke the power of the Indian alliance he had worked so hard to create. Harrison became a national hero. RT

Battle of the Thames and the death of Tecumseh, by the Kentucky mounted volunteers led by Colonel Richard M. Johnson, 5th Oct. 1813. *Hand colored lithograph, 1833.*

The Niagara Frontier in Flames

When the British burned Washington on August 24, 1814, they employed a practice that had become all too common during the war (and during the American Revolution before that). Although the destruction of America's Capitol, White House, and other government buildings has been consistently interpreted as retaliation for the April 1813 American torching of the Parliament buildings at York (now Toronto), then the capital of Upper Canada, the flames were probably more the continuation of a general scorched earth policy practiced by both sides.

Willful destruction of property, both public and private, had become an unfortunate characteristic of the war. It had begun, admittedly on the domestic front, as early as June 1812 when, within days of the declaration of war on the 18th, a crowd of angry Democratic-Republicans in Baltimore destroyed the offices of an anti-war Federalist newspaper, the *Federal Republican*. The reappearance of the newspaper a month later led to further riots, further destruction of property, and bodily harm to its editor, Alexander Hanson, and to Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, hero of the Revolution and father to Robert E. Lee, who organized a defense of the newspaper's property. Both men were badly beaten by the Democratic-Republican mob. Neither man ever recovered from his injuries, Lee dying in 1818 and Hanson in 1819.

Map of Black Rock (Buffalo) in July 1813 drawn by General Peter A. Porter, showing locations of troops and barracks. Porter's key identifies number 16 as the site of the December 1813 battle. North is to the right.

Buffalo harbor, 1813, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.

The violence against property continued, and the following April, the destruction of the British shipyard and the burning of the Canadian Parliament buildings in York by American forces ushered in a period of intensifying mutual destruction culminating in a month-long December epidemic of fire that erupted along both sides of the Niagara River.

The arson exchange began on December 10, 1813, at Fort George, on the west bank of the Niagara River, directly across from Fort Niagara. Having been captured in May by the Americans, Fort George was progressively stripped of its defending regular troops over the next several months, most being redeployed to Sackets Harbor. Of the remainder, most of whom were militia, many deserted with the onset of winter. When a report came in on the evening of December 9 of the approach of 500 British troops, Brigadier General George McClure of the New York Militia, left with only 80 defenders, ordered his men the next day to evacuate across the river to Fort Niagara. Before leaving, however, he ordered the destruction of the fort and the neighboring village of Newark (now Niagara-on the-Lake). McClure's men drove the villagers out into a blinding snowstorm, after which more than 100 private homes and civic buildings were torched. In retaliation, Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond, the new British commander and chief administrator of Upper Canada, ordered an attack on Fort Niagara and the village of Lewiston, situated just across the river on its eastern shore.

In the bitter cold of the night of December 18–19, 562 British regulars surprised a remarkably complacent guard force and entered almost completely uncontested into the interior of Fort Niagara, where they butchered by bayonet some 65 American soldiers, took 300 more prisoner, and helped themselves to what amounted to almost the entire supply of American

A dramatic depiction of the burning of Buffalo from John R. Spears' History of Our Navy from its Origin to the Present Day, *published in five volumes, 1897–1899.*

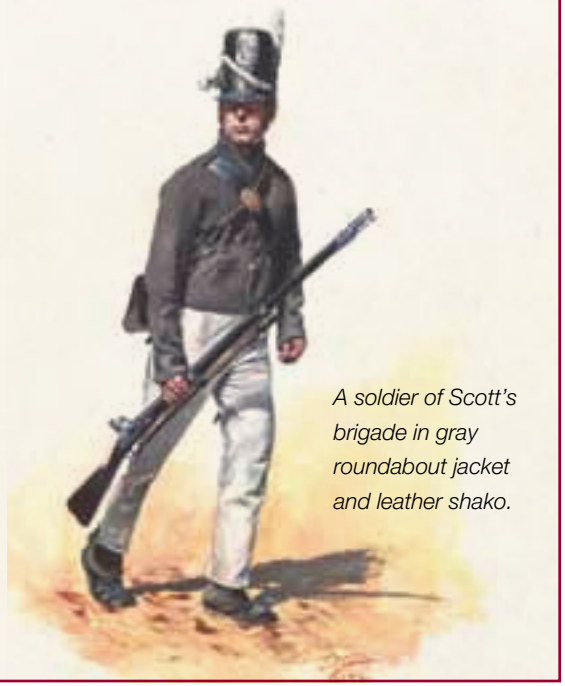
military stores in the Niagara region. From there Drummond ordered another thousand men, half regulars and half Indians, to proceed to Lewiston, which they burned to the ground, including for good measure a nearby Iroquois village of Tuscarora Indians, who had come to the aid of the overwhelmed residents.

Not content with laying waste to Fort Niagara and Lewiston, on December 30 Drummond's army moved south to the village of Black Rock (site of an American shipyard, now part of Buffalo), where many of the 2,000 American militia defenders broke and ran at the first Indian war cry, casting aside their weapons without firing a shot. The remaining contingent of 600 initially confronted the invaders, but they, too, soon gave way and fled

Citizens of Buffalo prepare to flee as British forces advance on the town. The 2,000 defenders were all New York Militia, led by New York Militia Major General Amos Hall. After a half hour's hard fight, the Americans broke and ran. Painting by Raymond Massey.

Scott's Camp of Instruction

Secretary of War John Armstrong established two "Camps of Instruction" in early 1814 to improve the training and discipline of the U.S. regulars, one in Plattsburgh, the other in Buffalo under the command of Brigadier General Winfield Scott. Scott adapted the French 1791 drill manual for his training program, drilling his troops seven hours a day for ten weeks. He also improved camp discipline and sanitation, and removed troublesome and inefficient officers. New blue uniforms intended for his brigade were mistakenly sent to Plattsburgh — 2,000 more uniforms were quickly ordered, but a shortage of blue cloth allowed only gray "roundabout" jackets to be supplied. Units exchanged clothing so as to leave only the 21st U.S. Infantry in blue. Scott's 1,400 troops began the 1814 campaign physically fit and superbly trained—a testament to his energy and desire to meet the British on equal terms on the field of battle. RT



A soldier of Scott's brigade in gray roundabout jacket and leather shako.

Fort Erie, Ontario

The first Fort Erie was built in 1764 to help establish secure communications along the Niagara River region. Twice destroyed by severe winter ice, a third fort was built on higher ground in 1804.

After almost two years of war, the fort was attacked by American forces on July 3, 1814 — the small British garrison had no choice but to surrender. Having captured the fort, the invading American army moved north along the Niagara River, fighting the battles of Chippawa and Lundy's Lane. Their momentum exhausted, the Americans fell back on Fort Erie and entrenched their army. British and Canadian troops under the command of General Gordon Drummond besieged the fort in early August. A powerful early morning assault on August 15 almost succeeded in capturing the fort until a powder magazine exploded causing heavy losses among the attacking British. Suffering over 900 casualties, the assault collapsed. The siege was raised on September 21. The Americans destroyed and abandoned the fort in early November. Never rebuilt, it was sporadically garrisoned until 1823, and later served briefly as a campsite for Fenian (Irish Republican) rebels invading Canada in 1866.

During the Great Depression, the Canadian government decided to reconstruct Fort Erie as a public works project, and the completed fort was opened to the public on July 1, 1939. The fort is under the management of the Niagara Parks Commission and today remains a popular heritage attraction. RT

The reconstructed Fort Erie in Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada.

the field. From Black Rock, Drummond's army, for extra measure, moved on to the village of Buffalo.

In sacking Black Rock and Buffalo, Drummond's force of militia, regulars and Indians set fire to every building but one. Among the casualties in Buffalo was a lone civilian, Sarah Lovejoy. Determined to protect her property, Sarah failed to heed the advice of a neighbor, confronted Indian assailants trying to make off with her curtains or her dresses — depending upon which source one reads — and was summarily dispatched with a tomahawk blow. Her home having been set afire, neighbors rescued her body and doused the flames before returning her to be laid out in her own bed. Two days later, British soldiers returned to finish the job, burning down the house with her in it.

The story of another Buffalo resident, Ralph Pomeroy, an anti-war Federalist, provides a study in miniature of the scope of this plague of retaliatory arson. A year before the British invasion, his inn and tavern had been destroyed by disgruntled Democratic-Republicans, angry at his

Fort Erie in Winter, *painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. Military operations were usually suspended during winter, especially in upstate New York and Canada, where conditions were especially harsh. Armies went into winter quarters, but routine activities like guard duty kept some troops busy. However, during the war a number of military operations were carried out during the winter months despite the difficulties.*

Black Rock in Winter*, painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. Black Rock, with its spacious harbor, was a base for U.S. naval activity along the Niagara and Lake Erie early in the war. Movement by water ceased in winter as the lakes and rivers were frozen solid. Ships and boats were prepared and protected for winter storage, as shown here. In 1853, Black Rock was annexed by the City of Buffalo.*

pro-British stance. His rebuilt inn went up in flames at the hands of the British invaders on December 30, who clearly did not take time to determine the political persuasions of their victims. The following week, when British authorities released sympathetic Federalist prisoners, including Pomeroy, who had been swept up during the attack, Pomeroy erected yet a third establishment to replace the first two.

Following the burning of Buffalo, Canadian Governor-General Sir George Prevost offered to order a cessation of British involvement in the vicious cycle of arson if the American government would reciprocate, a proposal which was readily accepted. Vengeful American troops in the field, however, failed to honor the diplomatic agreement, most notably the following May, when Pennsylvania volunteers under the command of Lieutenant John Campbell razed Dover, a prosperous town on the northern shore of Lake Erie, in explicit retaliation for the burning of Buffalo.

Angered by these American actions, Prevost rescinded the agreement dictating restraint, suggesting to Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane implementation of a policy of retribution along the Atlantic coast. Cochrane thereby issued an "Order for Retaliation" to Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, commanding him "to destroy and lay waste such towns and districts as you may find assailable," thus ensuring a perpetuation of incendiary hostilities right through to the burning of Washington.

Pistols at 12 Paces—Smyth vs. Porter

It had come to this. Two generals of the U.S. Army in the midst of war exchanging pistol shots at 12 paces. The time? The afternoon of the 12th of December 1812. The place? Grand Island in the middle of the Niagara River. The duelists? Major General Alexander Smyth, commander of American forces massed along the Niagara frontier, and his second-in command, Brigadier General Peter Porter of the New York State Volunteers. The dispute? Charges of cowardice leveled against Smyth by Porter.

When Smyth arrived in November, he gathered his forces in preparation for an invasion of Canada. A plan was agreed upon; units were distributed to debarkation points on the night of November 27; and the plan was initiated at 3 AM on the 28th with the departure from the American lines of advance parties, to be followed shortly by the main body of troops. When those advance parties met resistance, Smyth called off the invasion.

With the British now making their own defensive preparations, Smyth first stalled, and then precipitously announced a second attempt for the morning of the 30th. Deficiencies in those hastily wrought plans brought objections from his officers, and the invasion was put off for yet another day. On December 1, troops finally began to move. Porter, waiting a quarter-mile offshore at the head of a flotilla of boats laden with soldiers eager to make the crossing, received his orders from Smyth — not to proceed with the attack, but to bring everybody back to shore. Smyth had decided at the last minute that he did not have enough men, and that he was putting off the invasion indefinitely. Several units, disgusted with Smyth's lack of effective leadership, had pulled out, leaving Smyth with what he considered an insufficient number of men with which to mount an attack.

The New York Volunteers, in particular, were irate. Their homes and families in harm's way were being abandoned, and they felt betrayed by Smyth, who had not only boasted widely of his aggressive intentions, but who, in his final report, blamed Porter for his own failures. Threats were made against Smyth, shots were fired in his direction in camp, and Porter, who had been frustrated time and again by Smyth's indecisiveness and who had not been included in the discussions leading to the final decision, openly accused Smyth of cowardice. Smyth then challenged Porter to a duel.

Peter Buell Porter

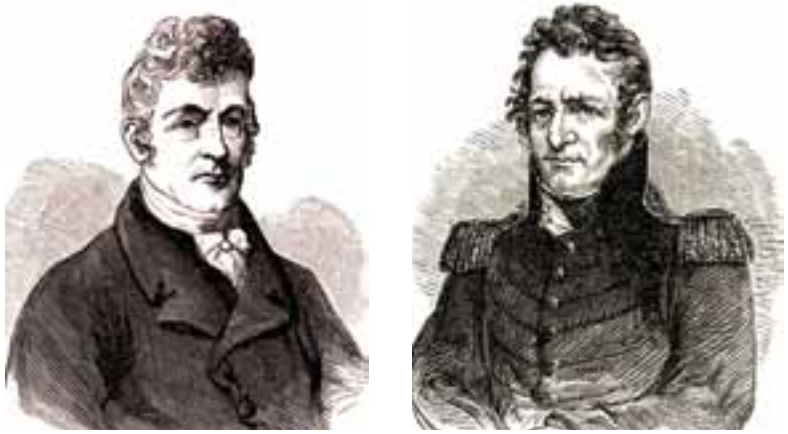
The subsequent encounter was documented by Colonel Winder, General Porter's second. The two generals, with friends, seconds, and surgeons, retired to Grand Island on the afternoon of December 12 to settle the matter. According to Winder's account, the two men each fired a shot "in as intrepid and firm a manner as possible," both shots missing their intended targets. With their respective honors upheld, each general then retracted his accusations, and peace was restored with a conciliatory handshake. Whether Colonel Winder's report was completely accurate, or whether it was merely an attempt to put a positive spin on a sorry spectacle has been debated. SB

The Battle of Queenston Heights

At 3 AM in the cold, dark, misty rain of October 13, 1812, approximately 500 American soldiers piled into 13 boats and left the American shore at Lewiston, heading across the treacherous Niagara River for Queenston Heights, Ontario. The village of Queenston, on the supply road which led from British Fort George on Lake Ontario to Fort Erie on Lake Erie, lay just below the towering Niagara Escarpment at the beginning of the portage round Niagara Falls. Intent on securing a foothold and the subsequent severing of that supply route, the Americans hoped also to create a major diversion from a planned United States attack on Montreal.

Two nights earlier, a first attempt had gone awry when one of the officers involved had absconded downriver with all the boats' oars. On this night there were to have been 600 men in the initial landing force, but there simply was not enough room in the boats for them all, an error in preparation that, unfortunately for the Americans, would characterize the entire enterprise. Ill-conceived from the start, the Battle of Queenston Heights, the first large-scale land action of the war, would expose many of the shortcomings endemic to the American military establishment at the outset of the war.

The 2,300 British forces on the west bank under the command of Major General Isaac Brock had assumed a defensive stance concentrated primarily at Fort George, where they expected an American attack. The 6,300 American forces on the east bank under the command of Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer of the New York State Militia were distributed along the river from Fort Niagara to the north to Buffalo 35 miles to the south, with approximately 3,500 at Lewiston in between. Given his numerical advantage, Van Rensselaer was determined to mount an attack before winter, failing to recognize the disadvantages his troops possessed in their lack of training, discipline, and combat experience. His plan? Send an assault force of 600 men across to Queenston Heights to establish a beachhead, followed by men and arms.



Left: Major General of New York State Militia Stephen Van Rensselaer (1765–1839) and right, Solomon Van Rensselaer (1774–1852) from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *Solomon at least had military experience, rising to the rank of major in the U. S. Army in 1799, though he left the army the next year. He served as a Lieutenant Colonel of New York Volunteers and was several times Adjutant General of the state militia.*

Queenstown [Queenston], Upper Canada on the Niagara, *watercolor by Edward Walsh, 1803. The cliffs, rugged terrain, and treacherous Niagara River current made cross-river military operations a challenge at any time, even for well-trained and well-led troops.*

An odd choice for command, the anti-war Federalist Van Rensselaer lacked any military background whatsoever. It is likely that New York Governor Daniel Tompkins had given him command in order to remove him as a potential political rival to his governorship. Other command choices in the Niagara theater were no more auspicious. Lieutenant Colonel John Fenwick, in command of 1,300 soldiers at Fort Niagara, was known to have a fondness for liquor, and Brigadier General Alexander Smyth at Buffalo, miffed and uncooperative at being responsible to a mere militia superior, refused to commit his 1,600 regulars to any action. Whatever the reasons, the Americans, with inexperienced leaders and green troops, both militia

and regular army, were facing seasoned, battle-hardened British soldiers led by competent officers.

Despite poor planning and the early setbacks during the initial stages of the attack, the Americans did actually manage to put themselves in a position to win the battle. Of the 13 transports setting out from Lewiston, ten arrived at the landing site, the other three having been swept downstream by strong river currents swollen from days of rain. The 300 troops that did land came under withering fire from high ground above. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Solomon Van Rensselaer, cousin to the general, was hit six times, and 53 others were wounded. Captain John Wool, himself wounded in the buttocks, took over command. Learning of a hidden

An idealized 1840s depiction of American troops storming ashore from their boats at Queenston.

Battle of Queenston Heights, c. 1820–30*, unknown artist, © RiverBrink Art Museum, clearly shows the several phases of the battle — the crossing of the river by American forces, the scaling of the heights, and the successful British counterattack.*

Major General Isaac Brock

Major General Isaac Brock (1769–1812) was a native of Guernsey and joined the British 8th Regiment of Foot (infantry) as a junior officer in 1785. By 1797, he was Lt. Colonel of the 49th Foot. After service against the French in 1799 and Danes in 1801, Brock and the 49th Foot were transferred to Canada. An able administrator, Brock was eventually promoted to Major General and, in 1810, given command of all British forces in Upper Canada, which at the time stretched to the western Great Lakes. As the American attitude toward Great Britain grew more hostile, Brock did what he could to strengthen Upper Canada's defenses, including enlisting the aid of Indians led by Tecumseh. When war was declared in June 1812, Brock was ready. He swiftly captured Fort Mackinac in July and engineered the surrender of Fort Detroit in August. These successes gave the British control over most of America's vast Michigan territory.

In the meantime, an American army under the command of New York Militia General Stephen Van Rensselaer was gathering near Lewiston. Under pressure to attack, Van Rensselaer's mostly raw and unreliable troops began to cross over to Queenston on October 13, 1812. Brock, arriving from nearby Fort George, led a desperate charge to drive the Americans back across the river. Brock was killed, his last words reportedly "Push on, brave York Volunteers." As the battle continued, disciplined British reinforcements gradually overwhelmed the increasingly disorganized American forces.

Brock's decisive leadership was crucial in the first months of the war, and his loss was keenly felt. He is regarded as one of Canada's greatest military heroes. A monument in Queenston honors his memory. RT

Fort Schlosser and Fort Gray

Two small forts supported the American supply line from Buffalo to Fort Niagara. Both locations were fortified during the French and Indian War (1754–1763).

The British built Fort Schlosser (named for its first commander, a Captain Schlosser) in 1760 to guard the southern entrance (on top of the escarpment) to the portage around Niagara Falls. This fort replaced Fort Petite Niagara, burned in 1759 by the French as they retreated to Fort Niagara, soon to be besieged and captured by the British. From 1796 the U.S. used Fort Schlosser as a supply depot. The smaller Fort Gray secured the northern, lower end of the portage in Lewiston, NY. Fort Niagara guards the mouth of the Niagara River where it empties into Lake Ontario.

Early on the morning of July 5, 1813, a small detachment of the British 49th Regiment along with about 35 Canadian militia attacked Fort Schlosser. Led by Lieut.-Col. Thomas Clark of the 2nd Regiment, Lincoln Militia (Canadian), the attack was a complete surprise and the American garrison offered little resistance. Several boats were captured, as well as a cannon, small arms and supplies. As they withdrew, the British were confronted by local American militia, but suffered no casualties.

The other fort, built by the British in 1764 to protect the northern end of the Niagara Falls portage, stood at the top of the Niagara Escarpment, above Lewiston and opposite a high point of ground on the Canadian side of the river. An artillery fort named Fort Grey was constructed on this site in 1812, its guns bearing on British positions in Queenston, across the river. It was attacked and destroyed by the British in December 1813. The actual site was probably at Barton Hill — North 3rd and Center Streets, just north of the present-day Lewiston-Queenston Bridge. RT

Tourists visited the remains of key sites of the Queenston Heights battle in the 1860s. For them, the "French" chimney was a reminder of old Fort Schlosser.

precipitous cliff-side trail, he led a party of 60 on an ascent to a spot above and behind the gun battery doing most of the damage, driving the gun crew and General Brock, who had just arrived at the fighting from Fort George, down the slope into Queenston.

Two unsuccessful counterattacks to reclaim the battery ensued. In the first, General Brock, a conspicuous target at the head of the charge, was mortally wounded. The second resulted in the death of Brock's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel John MacDonell. With Brock's death and the British failure to retake the gun emplacement, the Americans, now under the command of Lieutenant Winfield Scott, held the field. It was at this point, with victory within grasp, that the operation completely unraveled.

The next part of the American plan had called for militia and arms to be ferried across from Lewiston to augment forces on the west bank. Neither militia nor arms made it. The sight of returning wounded and sounds of intimidating war whoops of Indians harassing Americans on the far side of the river chilled any enthusiasm the militia might have had for combat. Invoking their presumed right not to have to fight on foreign soil, the militia units at Lewiston, including those that had been most vocal in clamoring for action, balked at crossing into Canadian territory. As for arms, it was discovered that the boats intended for transporting their 6-pound cannon were inadequate to the

John Norton, later given the title of a Mohawk war chief, *Teyoninhokorawen*, c. 1763–c. 1830, oil portrait by Thomas Phillips (1770–1845). Son of a Cherokee father and a Scottish mother, Norton served in the British Army, came to Canada, and while working as a trader became involved with the Six Nations of the Grand River in Upper Canada. During the War of 1812, he was an active leader of Iroquois contingents loyal to Great Britain, and was present at several significant battles of the war.

The Death of General Brock at the Battle of Queenston Heights, *painting by John David Kelly (1862–1958). Brock was an active and imposing figure during the battle, and he attracted the fire of American sharpshooters. Wounded in the hand, he soon received a second, fatal wound and was carried from the field.*

purpose. One 6-pounder with limited ammunition did somehow manage to find its way across, but by then the tide of battle had turned.

While Van Rensselaer was unsuccessfully exhorting his troops to get into the fight, Indians led by John Norton, a Scottish-Cherokee Mohawk war chief, harassed Winfield Scott's troops, making it impossible for them to dig in and thereby giving time for 900 British regulars from Fort George under the command of Major General Roger Sheaffe to make their way south to the battlefield. Sheaffe executed a flanking maneuver, attacking from the west and driving the now-outnumbered and unsupported Americans to the riverbank. Some leaped from the heights to their death; many others sought what shelter they could find in the jumble of rocks along the riverbank. Most just huddled at the landing site, exposed and pinned against the river, awaiting rescue from the opposite shore. With American boatmen refusing to venture out onto the river in the face of concentrated British fire, however, that deliverance never materialized. Given the hopelessness of his position, Scott was forced to surrender in full view of his impotent comrades across the way.

Although the British suffered the loss of their hero, Isaac Brock, the American invasion had been thwarted, 1,000 troops had been captured, and the disarray of the American military had been exposed for all to see. Van Rensselaer resigned his commission three days later, to be replaced by the unpopular and bombastic Alexander Smyth — whose own men took potshots at him in camp. Smyth quickly proved an inept planner and poor organizer, and after fighting a duel with militia Major General Peter Porter, called off all operations in the Niagara theater for the winter. Smyth soon suffered his own humiliating exit from the army in March 1813 — his name was stricken from the army's rolls. President James Madison later remarked that Smyth's "talent for military command was... equally mistaken by himself and by his friends."

The only large-scale land engagement of 1812, the Battle of Queenston Heights thus produced nothing but turmoil for the American army and gave little cause for optimism going into 1813.

The *Hamilton* and *Scourge*

Figurehead of Scourge *representing the goddess Diana, taken by ASI Group Ltd., May 13, 2008. (Courtesy City of Hamilton).*

Hamilton and *Scourge* were merchant ships taken into the U.S. Navy just prior to the War of 1812. Both were schooners — very common on Lake Ontario at the time — ideal merchant ships, handy and maneuverable. *Hamilton* and *Scourge* were originally named *Diana* and *Lord Nelson* — *Diana* was American, built in 1809 at Oswego, New York, and *Lord Nelson* was a British ship launched on May 1, 1811. *Lord Nelson* was confiscated (illegally, as it turned out) from her owner according to the 1807 Embargo Act on June 5, 1812, shortly before the outbreak of war. *Diana* was purchased.

The ships were taken to Sackets Harbor and converted to warships, becoming part of Commodore Isaac Chauncey's Lake Ontario squadron. The 76-ton *Hamilton* was armed with eight 18-pound carronades and one 12-pound long gun on a pivot mount. The 45-ton *Scourge* was armed with four 6-pound cannons and four 4-pound cannons. The ships had their bulwarks (topsides) raised, and with the tons of added weight they proved to be both top-heavy and poor sailers.

A young American sailor, Ned Myers, wrote: "This craft (*Scourge*) was unfit for her duty, but time pressed, and no better offered. The bulwarks had been raised on her, and she mounted [8 guns] in regular broadside… accommodations were bad enough, and she was so tender that we could do little or nothing with her in a blow. It was often prognosticated that she would prove our coffin....We must have had about forty-five souls on board, all told."

Both vessels foundered and sank off Fourteen Mile Creek (near Hamilton, Ontario) in Lake Ontario during a sudden and violent squall just after midnight on August 8, 1813. Some 80 men were lost from both ships — 16 survived, including Ned Myers, who later told his story to novelist James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote a biography of Myers.

The wrecks were discovered in 1973, using side-scan sonar aboard a Canadian government research vessel. The ships lie in darkness approximately 290 feet (88 meters) below the surface. A number of research dives by both manned and unmanned submersibles were made after the ships were found. In 1976, the wreck site was designated a National Historic Site of Canada, and as an international war-grave site it has special protection for its historical and cultural significance. RT

The Story of Two Forts

During the War of 1812, two forts faced each other on opposite banks of the Niagara River where it empties into Lake Ontario. Fort Niagara occupied by American forces on the east bank and Fort George by the British on the west were close enough to engage in artillery duels, their stories inseparable, one from the other.

Fort Niagara dates back to the 17th century when construction began by the French. Captured by the British in 1759 during the French and Indian War, it remained under their control until the 1783 Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolution, when it was ceded to the United States. Unwilling to actually vacate such a strategically valuable facility, the British stubbornly retained physical possession until, under the terms of the 1796 Jay Treaty, they finally agreed to move out. To compensate for the loss of Fort Niagara, the British simply moved across the river and constructed Fort George in British/Canadian territory, setting the stage for a dramatic confrontation in the War of 1812.

During the first several months of the war, General Isaac Brock made Fort George the base for his operations in the Northwest. It had been from here that in August he launched his successful mission against Detroit. And it was from here that, hearing the thunder of artillery to the south, he made his ill-fated ride in the early morning hours of October 13 to the battlefield at Queenston Heights, and from here that troops under Major General Roger Hale Sheaffe embarked the same day to wrest control of the battlefield from the Americans. That same contest precipitated an artillery duel during the day that revealed the weakness and inexperience of the American gunners at a badly beaten Fort Niagara. Incoming ordnance from Fort George so demoralized the American gun crews that they abandoned the fort, with some returning late in the day only after being cajoled by insistent officers.

A month later, on November 21, the Americans gave a much better account of themselves in a day-long duel that settled nothing, but did beget a new member of the pantheon of American heroines in Betsy Doyle, wife of an American POW who volunteered for duty during the exchange. From 7:30 AM until dusk, she tirelessly carried red-hot 12- and 18-pound cannon balls from a lower level hot-shot furnace to the roof of the French Castle (the oldest part of Fort Niagara, built by the French in 1727) helping to load them and then cheering successful strikes. Indomitable and seemingly unfazed throughout the inferno of battle, she earned the unbounded admiration of witnesses.

With the British securely in control on the west bank, and the American army in disarray on the east, the recently-promoted Colonel Winfield Scott was given responsibility for restoring order. After reorganizing the command structure and instituting a training program designed to restore morale and pride in the American troops, he planned to implement part of the Queenston Heights offensive that

Fort Niagara (left) and Fort George (right) as they appeared during the War of 1812. Both forts, about a half-mile apart, were strategic posts, each an important base of operations during the military campaigns in the Niagara region. Each fort was captured by the opposing side in 1813. Fort Niagara's garrison flag is prominent in each picture (see page 35).

The imposing fortifications at Old Fort Niagara as seen today, with Civil War-era cannon mounted on the parapet. The "French Castle" seen in the distance is one of the oldest existing buildings in interior North America, dating to c. 1727.

had been discarded at the time — a combined army-navy assault on Fort George. American forces would land on the shore west of Fort George and then attack it from the rear where it was most vulnerable. Overall command of the operation was given to Major General Morgan Lewis.

The attack, which, according to military historian John Elting, "was undoubtedly the best-planned and best-fought engagement of the entire war," began auspiciously.

Artillery from Fort Niagara began to pound Fort George on May 25, 1813. The bombardment, which included incendiary shells setting parts of Fort George on fire, continued through the 26th. The landing, supported by a naval barrage knocking out shore batteries, followed in the early morning hours of the 27th, the coordination of naval bombardment and amphibious infantry assault proving too much for the British. Scott himself led the first wave of attackers; the second and third waves consisting of infantry accompanied by artillery were commanded by Brigadiers General John Boyd and William Winder respectively. Initial stubborn resistance was swiftly overcome, high casualties among the defenders making their position untenable.

Outnumbered and outmaneuvered, the Fort George garrison under the command of Brigadier General John Vincent pulled out, but not before spiking the fort's guns and blowing up the powder magazine. Heading south toward Queenston Heights, Vincent eluded American troops who were too late in arriving to close the proverbial barn door.

Heroines of the Niagara

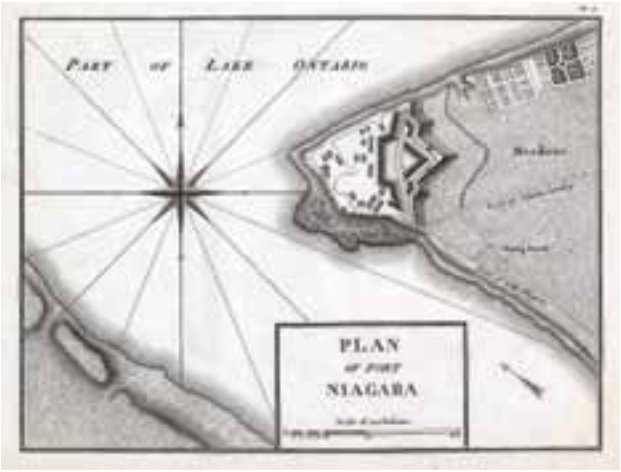
Two extraordinary women made their mark during the War of 1812 — Canadian Laura Secord and American Betsy "Fanny" Doyle.

Born in Massachusetts, Laura's father received a land grant in Upper Canada. In 1797, she married wealthy James Secord and settled in the Queenston area. James, serving as an aide to General Brock at the Battle of Queenston Heights, was wounded and captured, and Laura stayed with him while he recovered. In May 1813, American forces captured Fort George and began advancing west into the Niagara peninsula. Laura learned about a planned American attack on the British outpost at Beaver Dams — likely from American officers billeted at her home. On the morning of June 23, she secretly made her way on foot some 20 miles to warn Lieutenant James FitzGibbon of the impending attack. This information helped the British and their Mohawk Indian allies win the Battle of Beaver Dams the next day, capturing over 500 American troops. Over time, her story and legend grew, and today Laura Secord is considered one of Canada's national heroes.

In 1810, Elizabeth Doyle and her family joined her husband Andrew Doyle, a U.S. artilleryman stationed at Fort Niagara. At the Battle of Queenston Heights, Andrew was taken prisoner by the British. Canadian-born Andrew was still considered a subject by the British government, even though he was a naturalized American citizen. He was later sent to England to stand trial for treason but was never tried. He returned to the United States in 1815.

During a November 1812 artillery duel with Fort George, Betsy was praised by Fort Niagara's commanding officer for carrying red-hot cannonballs to American artillerymen serving the fort's cannon, comparing her to Joan of Arc! After Fort Niagara fell to the British in December 1813, Betsy and her four children survived a grueling 300-mile, four-month journey from Youngstown to the large American military camp in Greenbush, near Albany. She and Andrew were never reunited. For many years Betsy Doyle's story was thought doubtful, but recent research by Niagara County Historian Kate Emerson has confirmed both her existence and her extraordinary service. RT

A mid-19th century engraving of Betsy Doyle handling red-hot shot. Iron roundshot were heated in special ovens and then loaded with wet wads to shield the cannon's powder charge. The shot stayed red-hot for hours, starting fires very difficult to extinguish — very damaging to ships or other wooden structures.



A Plan of Fort Niagara*, from a book published by George Henri Victor Collot in 1796 — the year the fort was finally relinquished by the British after the signing in 1794 of a "Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation, Between His Britannic Majesty and The United States of America," known as the "Jay Treaty." The treaty was approved by the U.S. Congress in June 1796. Courtesy David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com*

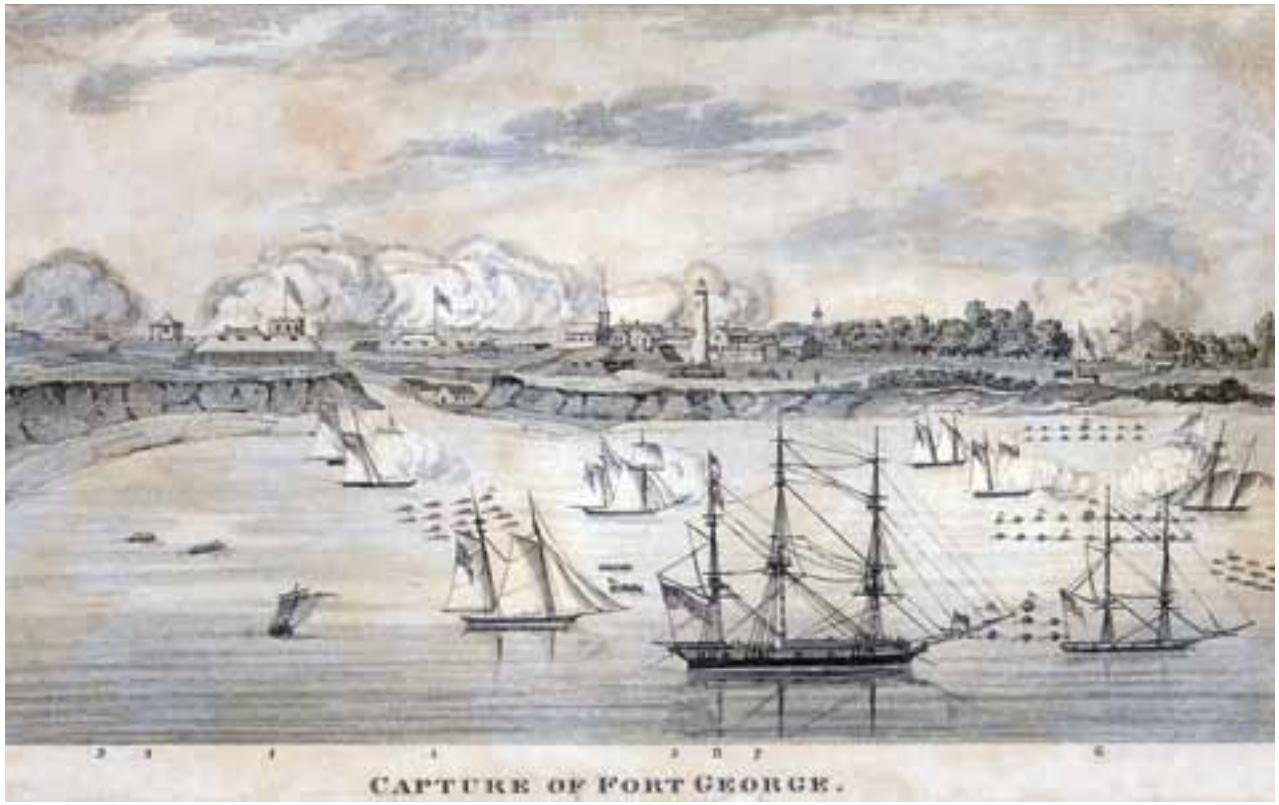
Finding that the British forces had slipped away but that they were still easily within reach, Scott gathered forces to mount a pursuit. He had ample fresh troops available and at his disposal. Unfortunately, the timidity of General Lewis, who ordered a frustrated Scott to abandon the pursuit, allowed them to escape. British troops stationed at Fort Erie 30 miles to the south also withdrew to meet Vincent at Burlington, thereby abandoning the Niagara frontier to the Americans.

The American invasion stalled over the next several months. The Americans occupying Fort George launched several half-hearted forays in an attempt to extend their influence further west on the Niagara peninsula, but were stopped short, suffering defeats at Stoney Creek and Beaver Dams. British forces, on the other hand, operating out of Burlington at the west end of the lake, focused on an effective policy of containment.

The Battle of Stoney Creek on June 15 saw a small British force under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Harvey launch a nighttime attack against an American army almost five times its size. In the darkness and amidst the confused and chaotic mêlée that ensued, American Generals John Chandler and William Winder were taken captive. Not realizing that they were facing a much smaller force that had already suffered greater casualties, the leaderless army the next morning broke camp and headed back to Fort George.

Later that month, on June 24, an American force of 600 men left Fort George to launch a surprise attack on a British outpost at Beaver Dams. Laura Secord, wife of a captured Canadian officer, secretly brought to the British word of the impending attack, confirming reports about the approaching Americans from Indian allies. When the unsuspecting Americans arrived, they fell victim to a successful ambush, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Boerstler surrendering almost his entire force. Those few who escaped made their way back to Fort George, where the Americans hunkered down for the next several months, having lost any enthusiasm for further combat.

Having had no success in expanding the perimeter of their influence, and with their numbers dwindling and their position becoming more exposed, the Americans pulled out of Fort George in December, burning Newark during their withdrawal. That precipitated the attack in reprisal on Fort Niagara, which then remained in British hands for the remainder of the war.



Covered by naval gunfire, American forces row ashore to capture Fort George in this print published in 1817. Fort Niagara is to the left of the mouth of the Niagara River, Fort George and the village of Newark (with lighthouse) is to the right. The USS Madison *is the large ship in the foreground. This action was notable for the excellent cooperation between U.S. naval and land forces.*

The Fort Niagara Garrison Flag

The Fort Niagara Flag

Before dawn on December 19, 1813, British troops fought their way into Fort Niagara to capture the post from the United States. The War of 1812 was in its second year and fighting had already raged across the Niagara River several times.

The most important trophy taken by the British that cold night was Fort Niagara's garrison flag; an immense version of the "Stars and Stripes." Fort Niagara's battle colors had already flown proudly above its walls during earlier fierce actions in 1812 and 1813. Six months after the flag fell into British hands, it was sent to England to be laid "at the feet of the Prince Regent," the future King George IV. It was later given to General Sir Gordon Drummond, whose troops had captured it.

The flag remained in the Drummond family home, Megginch Castle in Scotland, lovingly cared for by the descendants of Sir Gordon. It was acquired by the Old Fort Niagara Association in 1994 and returned to the United States for conservation and display.

Fort Niagara's flag is a "garrison color" intended for use on special occasions and during battle. Its large size made it easily visible to an enemy. Although the present dimensions of the flag are 24 feet (high) by 28 feet (long), the banner might once have been as long as 36 feet. It is one of the oldest surviving United States flags, and a fine example of the 15-star, 15-stripe flag authorized by Congress in 1795. Text courtesy Old Fort Niagara.

The "Star-Spangled Banner"

The most famous War of 1812 garrison flag is the one that flew over Fort McHenry guarding Baltimore harbor during the British bombardment of September 13–14, 1814. It had been on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History from 1964 until 1998 when it was moved to a lab for a major conservation effort that was completed in 2005.

Like the Fort Niagara flag, the Fort McHenry flag is a 15-star, 15-stripe flag that originally measured 30 feet high by 42 feet long. The current size is now 30 by 34 feet.

While the flag was in the possession of the Armistead family (the fort's commander, Major George Armistead, kept the flag as a souvenir of the battle), pieces of the flag were given away over the years as gifts. These pieces were preserved as treasured mementoes of the event. Some of these flag fragments have since been given to the Smithsonian. The flag was loaned to the Smithsonian in 1907 and donated in 1912 as a gift to the nation.

Although the dramatic overnight bombardment of Fort McHenry was an important battle of the war and the inspiration for Francis Scott Key's poem "The Star Spangled Banner," it was a one-time event, lasting about 25 hours.

The Fort Niagara flag was witness to nearly 18 months of conflict, at the center of the primary theater of operations throughout the War of 1812. At the time, a captured enemy flag was an important symbol of victory, and as such, the flag remained in the hands of its captors for almost 180 years. Today, thanks to the generosity of more than 2,000 corporate and individual donors, the Fort Niagara garrison flag has come home — now on permanent display in a special, environmentally controlled area of the Fort Niagara Visitor Center. RT

The Fort Niagara flag seen after conservation but before installation in its permanent display area. The flag was damaged when a portion of Megginch Castle burned in 1969. Photo courtesy Old Fort Niagara.

British Raids on Charlotte

Charlotte today is a quiet residential area in Rochester, NY. Picturing it at one time as the hub of military hostilities is a stretch of the imagination. Beginning in the fall of 1812, however, as an independent lakeside village at the mouth of the Genesee River just north of what was then the village of Rochesterville, population 700, Charlotte attracted the particular attention of British warships looking for easy pickings. Over the next year-and-a-half, the residents of Charlotte endured four separate encounters with the British, each progressively more contentious.

In October 1812, two boatloads carrying a total of 70 British sailors from *Royal George* sitting offshore came into the harbor at Charlotte and towed away two vessels — a revenue cutter and a schooner, *Lady Murray*. Not discovering until they were out of the harbor that they had overlooked the schooner's sails and rigging stored ashore, the sailors returned for them the next day. Along with the missing sails and rigging, a local shopkeeper agreed to provide the soldiers with two gallons of whiskey if they would leave the rest of the barrel untouched, an offer amicably accepted. No fuss; no muss; no hint of resistance.

In June 1813, Commodore James Yeo's ships arrived once again, this time in search of provisions. One hundred fifty men came ashore and made off with hundreds of barrels of flour and pork and more than a thousand bushels of grain. Once again, the townspeople offered no resistance. This time, however, with hostilities everywhere along the border having ratcheted up since the earlier visit in October, the British were wary. To prevent word of their activities getting out to the surrounding countryside, they rounded up the locals and confined them to one or two buildings. Despite these efforts at secrecy, 80 militia from nearby Penfield showed up the next morning, but by then the British had already departed.

By the third visit in September 1813, the patience of the people of Charlotte was wearing thin. Having offered no resistance on previous visits from the British fleet, the townspeople had decided that enough was enough, and the next time they would stand their ground. When Commodore Yeo's ships appeared offshore on September 11, a call went out to able-bodied men who gathered on the shore to repel any attempt at landing. When Commodore Chauncey's American fleet fortuitously appeared and forced Yeo's ships to flee to the west, a test of the mettle of the men of Charlotte was averted. That was probably a good thing. Although willing to fight, they were hardly prepared.

Over the next few months, as area residents stiffened in their resolve to stand up to the British, they made preparations to actively defend against the expected future incursion. Two cannon — a 4-pounder and an 18-pounder — were brought to Charlotte. A committee of public safety was formed, shoreline patrols were established, and efforts were made to organize the local militia into a trained company of dragoons. At the beginning of May, word reached Charlotte that Commodore Yeo's fleet was in the area. Cannon were moved into position; a breastwork was set up between Charlotte and Rochesterville; a bridge the British might utilize was booby-trapped; and every man, woman, and child was put on alert.

When Commodore Yeo's fleet appeared on May 14, 1814, the trap was laid and the defenders ready. By the time a boat approached from the fleet under a flag of truce offering essentially the same terms that had been accepted previously — the British would respect the property rights of individuals provided

A detail from A Map of the State of New York, *published by Simeon De Witt, 1804, showing the south shore of Lake Ontario. Although many of today's towns and counties had already been organized, settlement was sparse a scant eight years before the war. West of the Genesee River the rest of New York State was organized as Genesee County. Roads and villages were few.*

the public stores were handed over — a dozen riflemen were in place on the beach. The boat was not permitted to land, and was sent packing carrying a curt refusal to capitulate.

Surprised at the unexpected temerity of the Americans, the British sent a gunboat out from the ships. When it was fired upon prematurely from shore, it returned to the fleet. With that demonstration of the American willingness to fight and the subsequent arrival of more American militia reinforcements, Commodore Yeo reconsidered and decided that the rewards did not merit the trouble. The next day the British fleet upped anchor and left. Charlotte had stood up against the British fleet and forced it to back down. The Genesee was secure.

1813 was an active year on Lake Ontario, as the opposing fleets maneuvered to force a decisive naval battle, while supporting various land operations — the American captures of York and Fort George, and the British attack on Sackets Harbor. After a series of cautious maneuvers off the Niagara River in August 1813, both squadrons withdrew to their home bases for resupply. September 11 found both squadrons about 10 miles off the Genesee River, engaged in what turned out to be an indecisive skirmish. For several hours, Chauncey's American ships fired at long range at the becalmed British ships. The British worked to get their vessels out of range by towing them with the ship's boats and also by using sweeps (long oars) operated through the gunports—a common tactic in such a situation. In the late afternoon a breeze allowed Yeo's ships to withdraw back towards Kingston. In this painting by Peter Rindlisbacher, the British warships are being towed out of range while shots from the American ships miss their mark.

New York State Militia in the War of 1812

As one of the states most heavily engaged in the War of 1812, New York was called upon to provide numerous contingents of militia to defend the frontiers of the state.

The New York State Militia was a very impressive organization on paper — around 160 infantry regiments were grouped into 40 brigades, with 9 cavalry regiments grouped into 3 brigades as well as numerous artillery and other specialized units.

The men called to actually serve were either volunteers or drafts from around the state — "detached" men originally organized into two divisions — the First under Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer and the Second under Major General Benjamin Mooers.

Reenactors portray hastily-assembled militia, wearing a variety of civilian and military clothing.

The First Division saw action in the western part of the state, and the Second Division operated in the Plattsburgh area along the Canadian border. One serious problem when using militia in an offensive capacity was their legal right not to serve beyond the borders of their state. So much for the invasion of Canada!

The Militia Act of 1809 regulated clothing and equipment, which was similar to that of the regulars; New Yorkers on active service were often well-clothed and equipped. In many cases, however, hastily assembled local militia had few or no uniforms at all. Later in the war it was determined that state troops called into active service would be clothed, equipped, and paid at federal expense.

The uneven performance of militia during the American Revolution did not seem to diminish confidence regarding such troops when war broke out in 1812. Predictably, the ill-trained and ill-led New York State Militia had a very mixed record. With the exception of Porter's militia brigade (New York and Pennsylvania volunteers) which served alongside Scott's regular brigade in 1814, New York Militia serving in the Niagara region generally proved a disappointment. On the other hand, when it came to defending the state from invasion, the militia at times did quite a bit better, notably at Sackets Harbor and Plattsburgh.

Elsewhere the record was also varied. There were two notable successes for militia — the militia defenders of Baltimore overawed the invading British, and those in New Orleans with General Jackson helped decisively defeat a veteran British army. After the war it was determined that a stronger regular army was better for national defense. In 1823, Adjutant General William Sumner wrote:

"The disasters of the militia may be ascribed chiefly to two causes, of which the failure to train the men is a principle one; but, the omission to train the officers is a so much greater [one]… more to their want of knowledge or the best mode of applying the force under their authority… It may almost be stated, as an axiom, that the larger the body of undisciplined men is, the less is its chance of success..." RT

The Battle of Pultneyville

A dense morning fog blanketed the harbor and the main street of the lakeside village where General John Swift drilled 130 militiamen. Having arrived in Pultneyville the previous evening to reports of British ship activity in the area, Swift, on May 15, 1814, was taking advantage of the opportunity brought about by this call to arms to instill in his men some much needed training.

As the troops drilled, the fog lifted quickly, revealing the British fleet sitting menacingly just offshore. Taken by surprise, the 130 militiamen scattered, taking cover in nearby woods before regrouping to prepare for battle.

Throughout the war, American villages and towns along the south shore of Lake Ontario had suffered as desirable targets for British marauders looking for provisions to feed hungry soldiers. Too small to merit extensive defenses and vulnerable to attack from the lake, they tempted British warships looking for easy pickings. Landing parties would often disembark from British ships, demand food and supplies from unarmed and defenseless villages and towns, and return to their ships unchallenged. Without fortifications and with many of their men already off fighting elsewhere, villagers had few options. Militia units were formed from the remaining available men, but untrained, badly equipped and in small numbers, they stood little chance against well-armed British seamen and marines.

On this Sunday morning in May, once the initial shock had passed, negotiations ensued. A boat from the fleet came ashore demanding surrender. Despite the fact that General Swift's militia was hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned, General Swift refused. After further deliberations and consultations with frightened villagers, Swift relented and an offer was sent under a flag of truce to the British, who agreed to its terms. Anticipating a possible visit from the British, the villagers a few days earlier had moved hundreds of barrels of flour from a warehouse to a ravine outside of town, leaving only 100 barrels of moldy flour. Hoping to put one over on the British, the villagers offered them the contents of the warehouse, promising no resistance if the British agreed to limit their incursion to the warehouse property, to take only the flour, and to respect private property.

Once ashore, however, the British seamen soon violated the terms of the agreement by attempting to take supplies in other buildings throughout town. This prompted musket fire from the militia in nearby woods, which in turn produced an exchange of fire as the British, after grabbing a few prisoners, retired to their boats to return to the fleet. The only reported

While the assembled militia stands ready, a delegation rows out to the British ships for negotiations to spare the town from destruction. As British troops land and gather supplies (and plunder) from the town, shots are fired and the British retreat to their ships. A brief bombardment of the town commences, but ends before too much damage is done.

Portrait of General John Swift. *Swift was born in Kent, Connecticut on June 17, 1761. A Brigadier General of New York Volunteers, on July 12, 1814, Swift led an attack against Fort George. Capturing an outlying position, he was killed by one of the defenders who had been taken prisoner but not yet disarmed. He is buried in the General John Swift Memorial Cemetery in Palmyra, New York.*

fatality was a British soldier who was killed as he tried to break open a chest in the Whipple Tavern.

A bombardment from the fleet ensued, ultimately leaving little damage but for cannonball holes in several buildings. Abruptly, the firing stopped, and the ships weighed anchor and sailed away, vanishing just as fast as they had appeared. Besides the cannonballs and the holes, the only remaining evidence of the British visit was a length of rope left at the shoreline near the warehouse by a British soldier who, in his hurry to get away, had cut rather than untied a rope securing a boat to the shore. The rope was collected by a local family who utilized it for many years on the windlass for their well.

Warships on the Lakes

At the outbreak of war, the U.S. Navy had only 16 warships compared to the British Royal Navy, which had over 600 warships of all kinds, a huge disparity of force on the high seas that was impossible to overcome. On the Great Lakes the naval forces were more equal — Sackets Harbor, Black Rock (Buffalo), and Erie became centers for American naval shipbuilding, Kingston and Amherstburg for the British.

At Black Rock, two 20-gun brigs and three gunboats were built for Lake Erie. In 1809, the brig *Oneida* was built and launched in Oswego. At Sackets Harbor, shipbuilders constructed a number of bateaux (small cargo-carrying boats), gunboats, brigs, corvettes and frigates. Two ships of the line, *New Orleans* and *Chippewa* were under construction when the war ended, but never completed. The corvette *Madison* was launched at Sackets Harbor in November 1812 and two more in April 1813 — the small schooner *Lady of the Lake*, and the biggest ship on Lake Ontario at the time, the large corvette *General Pike*. A number of merchant schooners were armed by the U.S. Navy — *Scourge* and *Hamilton* were two such vessels.

An array of warships is depicted in this drawing by Peter W. Spicer, who served on the USS Sylph *during this action on Lake Ontario, September 11, 1813.*

Lake warships were similar to those used at sea, but the availability of fresh water and nearness of home ports required much less in the way of on-board supplies and crew accommodation. Typical lake vessels used by both the Americans and British included:

Schooner: The schooner varied considerably, having in common a fore-and-aft rig sail and usually two masts. Schooners, common on the lakes, were small, fast and handy merchant or fishing vessels. A topsail schooner carries a square topsail and sometimes a topgallant sail on its foremast.

Brig: A brig is a two-masted square-rigged ship. The aft mast—the main mast—also carries a gaff sail. Brigs were maneuverable and big enough to carry 20 or more guns in broadside. Perry's *Niagara* and *Lawrence* were both brigs.

Frigate and corvette: A frigate was a three-masted, square-rigged vessel with 24 to as many as 50 guns on one deck. Frigates were smaller and faster than ships of the line and served as scouts or escorts protecting merchant convoys. The U.S. Navy had some excellent and powerful frigates like USS *Constitution* in the Atlantic Ocean and USS *Superior* on Lake Ontario. Corvettes were smaller versions of frigates, square rigged and carrying fewer, lighter guns.

Ship of the line: The ship of the line was the principal "battleship" of European navies from the mid-17th to the mid-19th century. The type evolved from the primary battle tactic in naval warfare known as the "line of battle," in which two opposing columns of ships maneuvered to fire their guns broadside against each other. Although such battles were not typical on the lakes, by the end of the war both sides were constructing ships of this size. These three-masted ships were upwards of 200 feet long and had crews of 600–800 men, carrying 60 to as many as 120 cannons and other guns on three decks. The British *St. Lawrence* was the only ship of this size to be in service (on Lake Ontario in late 1814) during the war.

Gunboat: A gunboat is a boat fitted with one or two large cannon, one usually in the bow. Inexpensive and easy to man, gunboats were used extensively during the war, both on the lakes and along the seacoast. RT

The Battle of Sodus Point

British ships prowling the southern coastline of Lake Ontario forced villages along the shore to be on constant alert. With many local able-bodied men already having been called to duty at Lewiston, few men of fighting age were available. Small, relatively untrained civilian populations stripped of their most able militiamen were left to fend for themselves against professional British marauding forces — what must have been a truly frightening prospect.

On June 15, 1813, reports of approaching British ships began to arrive at Sodus, a dozen miles east of Pultneyville. The remaining militia was called out. Over the next several days, military stores were removed to a more secure location outside of town. By Saturday morning on the 19th of June, with no British ships in sight, the militia was sent home, only a small guard being left to protect the supplies. That very afternoon, the British fleet appeared offshore. With the alert just having been cancelled and the militia having been sent home, a new general call-to-arms went out. Riders were dispatched to recall as many men as possible, and an assortment of about 60 militia and completely untrained craftsmen, farmers and shopkeepers gathered, selecting Elias Hull of nearby Lyons as their captain.

Plans were made to respond to a British landing. As nightfall approached, the assembled defenders decided that, at the appropriate time, they would form a skirmish line and enter the woods near the point where the British were expected to land. Realizing the folly of battling a superior British professional force, they decided to fire one volley and then abandon their position, each man responsible for his own safety.

Rain and darkness reduced visibility to near zero. The appearance of lanterns shortly after midnight, however, revealed a British force of probably around 100 men (though estimates range as high as 400 men) having landed and moving toward the village. As the two forces came within range of each other, a shot was fired from the defenders, which drew a return volley from the British. Not being able to see their targets, the British attackers fired, for the most part too high or too low, managing to strike only a few defenders, including two mortally wounded. The Sodus Point defenders, having seen the powder flashes of the British line, responded with a more effective volley that killed at least two and wounded several more, stopping the British in their tracks.

Confusion reigned. With neither side able to establish a cohesive attack in the darkness and rain, both pulled back, gathering casualties and prisoners. The defenders disappeared into their familiar woods, making their way to safety in the darkness. The British returned to their ships.

With the arrival of daylight the next morning, the British returned, this time unchallenged. After gathering what stores they could, they destroyed the village, burning virtually every public building but one — a tavern that later became the Mansion House. It was in this tavern that the British had transported Asher Warner, a mortally wounded American who would die later in the afternoon. The British officers who carried him there insisted the building sheltering him be protected. They personally doused two or three fires set by soldiers intent on razing everything in sight.

The villagers had retreated to the edge of the woods to protect the stores previously carried out of town, within full view of the British

On the rainy night of June 19, 1813, American farmers and militia fire into the ranks of the British as they ascend the hill coming onto Sodus Point, painting by James Zeger.

The burning of Sodus, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.

soldiers swarming over the village. Not knowing how many more defenders lurked in the woods, the British, rather than engage an enemy force of unknown strength, opted for discretion. After performing their depredations on the village, they returned to their ships and sailed away, leaving a devastated village and several casualties, including the aforementioned Asher Warner, who died clutching a pitcher of water given him by his British protectors, and whose body was retrieved later that evening by his 12-year-old son Daniel. After finding his way several miles through dark woods and arriving back home to find the cabin deserted — his mother and younger brother having fled to the home of relatives — Daniel, at midnight, enlisted the aid of a friend another mile away to come and help him remove the body of his father from the lumber wagon into the house.

As evidenced by the Warners' struggles and those of others inhabiting lakeside villages, not all stories of death and destruction come from the large set-piece battles so familiar to readers of early 19th-century military history. Tragedy often came in small packages.

A defender of Sodus Point

One of those responding was Timothy Axtell, who upon hearing the alarm, ran to a neighbor's house to borrow a gun. The man not being home, and the man's wife refusing to lend the gun, Axtell appropriated it over her objections. The gun's owner later sued Axtell in court and received six-and-one-quarter cents in damages.

Weapons of War in 1812

The weapons used by soldiers during the War of 1812 differed very little from those of their grandfathers and fathers during the French and Indian War (1754–1763) and the American Revolution (1775–1783). Infantrymen still carried muzzle-loading smoothbore muskets with bayonets. The British used a slightly updated version of their well-known .75 caliber Short Land musket or "Brown Bess" — called the "India Pattern."

United States regulars were equipped with the U.S. Model 1795 musket, patterned on the French Charleville Model 1763/66, thousands of which were imported to America during the American Revolution. Manufactured in government armories at Springfield, Massachusetts, and Harper's Ferry, Virginia, this .69 caliber musket was sturdy and reliable. Improved models were developed during the war, and versions continued in use through the Mexican War (1846–1848) and even into the early years of the American Civil War (1861–1865).

Reenactors portray a British Royal Artillery crew serving a 3-pound fieldpiece. The carriages of these lightweight mobile guns often had side boxes mounted over the axles carrying a ready supply of ammunition.

Harper's Ferry also manufactured the .54 caliber U.S. Model 1803 rifle and the .54 caliber Model 1805 pistol. Rugged and accurate, the rifle was carried by the 1st U.S. Rifle Regiment and could be used to devastating effect.

Each army had its own drill — a series of maneuvers and steps to enable the controlled movement of massed troops and operation of weapons. A well-trained soldier could load and fire his musket two to three times per minute. The muskets were similar in capability, reasonably effective at 100 yards, firing a destructive one-ounce lead ball through clouds of white smoke. Ammunition consisted of a paper tube cartridge containing gunpowder and a ball. American troops often used "buck and ball"— a musket ball and three buckshot, considered very unsporting by the British! Soldiers carried anywhere from 24 to as many as 60 rounds. Muskets mounted a bayonet — a fearsome and effective weapon in the hands of determined troops. Other small arms included swords for officers and cavalrymen, pole arms, pistols, axes and tomahawks.

As in earlier conflicts, there were several types of cannon used during the war. The most common were field guns, mounted on wheeled wooden carriages, firing iron cannon balls from 3 to 12 pounds in weight and deadly grapeshot or canister rounds. Howitzers — short, wide-mouthed cannon firing exploding shells — were also used in the field. For siege work, heavy cannon firing 24-pound balls were used to batter down fortifications, and mortars lobbed exploding shells in a high arc into the interior of a fort or town. These specialized guns were almost never used in battle since they were difficult to transport and required large supplies of ammunition. RT

The Battle of Oswego

Lying at the mouth of the Oswego River where it spills into Lake Ontario, the village of Oswego and the adjacent once-formidable bastion, Fort Oswego, held great strategic significance to the American war effort. During the late colonial period, the Revolution, the early years of the Republic, and into the War of 1812, Oswego functioned as the natural distribution hub for the military supply route to Lake Ontario that extended from New York City via the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers to Oneida Lake, and thence downstream to Oswego. From there, war materials were shipped via a short hop across the southeast corner of the lake to the Americans' primary naval base during the War of 1812 at Sackets Harbor. By 1812, Fort Ontario itself had fallen into a state of disrepair, but Oswego had not lost its usefulness as a link in the supply chain.

With both Commodores — British Sir James Yeo, and American Isaac Chauncey — determined not to engage the enemy without having an overwhelming advantage, the two rivals concentrated on trying to outbuild the other. By the spring of 1814, the edge in this arms race had shifted to Commodore Yeo's British fleet. Intent on maintaining the upper hand, slight as it was, Yeo and his army counterpart Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond decided to attack a poorly defended Oswego to intercept a shipment of cannon and other shipbuilding stores in transit for Sackets Harbor, a shipment which, if successful in reaching its destination, would allow the Americans to launch the most powerful ship yet on the lake and regain the advantage in firepower. Unfortunately for the British — and unbeknownst to them — the bulk of the shipment rested 12 miles upriver at Fredericksburgh.

On May 6, after a preliminary naval bombardment chased the defenders back into Fort Ontario, the British landed 750 men — a primary assault force of 550 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Victor Fischer to mount an attack from the east and 200 led by Captain William Mulcaster to attack from the west.

The landing did not go smoothly. The attackers exited their boats in unexpectedly deep water, soaking their ammunition and rendering it useless. Unable to fire their weapons, they fixed bayonets and advanced up the slope in the face of a steady and deadly musket fire, redcoats falling by the dozens. Commodore Yeo and General Drummond disembarked and joined in the assault, Yeo himself narrowly escaping injury from a musket ball passing through his hat. With fewer than half as many men as their attackers, the Americans defending the fort were soon overwhelmed, and Lieutenant Colonel George Mitchell ordered a retreat. The Americans vanished into the woods, but not before firing at Royal Marine Lieutenant John Hewett who was clambering up the flagpole to rip down the U.S. flag flying from its peak. Despite being hit several times, Hewett succeeded in his mission, flinging down the flag and bringing the fighting to an abrupt close.

Attack of Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario North America, May 6th 1814, drawn by James Hewett R.M., Published May 1, 1815 and engraved by R. Havell & Son. Prince Regent *(later renamed* Kingston*) is at the far left foreground and* Princess Charlotte *(later renamed* Burlington*) is in the middle foreground. Both ships are at anchor.*

Above: The storming of Fort Oswego *from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *Below:* The capture of Fort Oswego, on Lake Ontario. North America by Genl. Drummond and Sir J. Yeo May 6th 1814 / Drawn on the spot by Capt. Steele. R. M. *Wounded British officers are taken off by boat as their troops storm up the bluff, overwhelming the American defenders.*

The British clearly were justified in claiming victory, but they had failed to deliver the intended knockout blow. Yes, they had captured seven cannon, 300 shot, and 2,400 barrels of foodstuff, but they missed 21 more cannon that were waiting 12 miles away at Oswego Falls to be carried around the cataract and then downstream to the port. With Yeo's fleet now blocking the water route from Oswego to Sackets Harbor, Commodore Chauncey organized land transport, 200 teams carting heavy ordnance and supplies over rudimentary roads to the shipyard at Sackets Harbor. By the end of July, the new ships had been launched and fitted out, and Chauncey's squadron once more had taken command of the lake.

Commodore Isaac Chauncey

Though often overshadowed by the more famous Oliver Hazard Perry, Isaac Chauncey (1779–1840) was the key American naval commander on Lake Ontario throughout the war. Born in Connecticut, he entered the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant in 1799. Chauncey saw service in the Mediterranean against the Barbary pirates, and commanded the brig *Hornet* in 1805–1806. Promoted to captain in 1806, he was put in charge of the New York Navy Yard until appointed in September 1812 to command U.S. naval forces on lakes Erie and Ontario.

Chauncey, now a commodore (the U.S. Navy had no admirals at the time), was given full authority to purchase vessels and naval stores, appoint officers, and recruit sailors and workers. He established his headquarters at Sackets Harbor in October 1812.

Overall, Commodore Chauncey succeeded in maintaining a strong American naval presence on the lakes and worked continually to strengthen his squadron. He is praised for his cooperation with U.S. land forces, most notably the amphibious operations that captured York (Toronto) and Fort George. Chauncey has been criticized for being at times over-cautious, and failing to bring on a decisive battle to destroy British naval power on Lake Ontario. However, he strove to maintain at least a balance of naval power while assisting American land operations, as well as thwarting British attempts to both support their own land forces and interfere with American movements.

Chauncey served in several oceangoing and shore commands after the war. He also served on the Navy Board in Washington, first as a commissioner and then president, until his death in 1840. RT

The Battle of Big Sandy and the Great Cable Carry

May 1814. Offensive naval operations on Lake Ontario had settled into a pattern of relatively benign avoidance. Neither British Commodore Sir James Yeo nor his American counterpart Commodore Isaac Chauncey dared risk a confrontation without having a massive advantage in firepower, and both, cautious to an extreme, were determined to construct the biggest, most powerful ship on the lake before committing to battle.

In an effort to prevent the Americans from acquiring needed materials, the British had blockaded Sackets Harbor, the focal point of American shipbuilding on the lake. Construction work on *Superior*, a 58-gun two-decker, had stalled, and with American vessels unable to penetrate the blockade to deliver naval stores, the materials needed to complete the work — mostly guns and rigging — were piling up on the docks at Oswego Falls, 12 miles upriver from the lake.

In an effort to circumvent the blockade, Captain Melancthon Woolsey set out from Oswego on May 28 commanding a flotilla of 19 bateaux laden with war materials including cannon — twenty-one 32-pounders, ten 24-pounders, and three 42-pound carronades — planning on keeping close to shore at night and ducking into inlets and creeks to hide during the day. Traveling with the bateaux to provide protection were Major Daniel Appling and 150 of his riflemen.

One of the bateaux, carrying two cannon and a cable (heavy rope), disappeared during the first dark, rainy night, apparently having gone over to the British. On the 29th, their secrecy having been compromised and with the British in hot pursuit, the Americans retired two miles up Sandy Creek, where they rendezvoused with militia and a number of friendly Oneida Indians. Passage up the creek was facilitated by the generosity of the riflemen, who, during the 12-hour trip in darkness and rain, willingly spelled exhausted seamen at the oars. Expecting the British to attack, Woolsey set a trap for the pursuers, deploying the seamen, Oneida, and riflemen along both banks of the creek, and sending a runner back to Sackets Harbor to request support. By 9 AM on May 30th a troop of 300 dragoons bringing three cannon had arrived from Sackets Harbor bolstering the group already lying in wait.

Making their way up the creek in three gunboats, three cutters and a gig, with marines deployed on the creek banks in advance of the vessels, the unsuspecting British fell into the trap. Recalling the previous year's debacle at Cranberry Creek (see pages 52–53), Commodore Yeo had warned Captain Stephen Popham of the dangers of pursuing American boats up narrow streams. Nonetheless, unaware of the presence of American riflemen, dragoons, and Oneida Indians hiding along the creek bank, Popham fell for the bait and advanced on the targeted bateaux clustered invitingly behind a stand of bulrushes in a marshy area. The concealed Americans opened fire. Within the space of 20 minutes, caught in a crossfire from both banks and unable to maneuver their own boats, the British troops succumbed to mass confusion and capitulated in what became known as the Battle of Big Sandy. About 70 British soldiers were killed or wounded while the Americans suffered only two casualties, one of whom died several days later. The British vessels were all captured and every one of the British soldiers was either killed or taken prisoner.

Despite their victory, the Americans still had to figure out how to get the naval stores to Sackets Harbor. With the British now on alert on the lake, it had become impossible to continue as planned. Militia reinforcements arrived, and all the materials except

Patrolling British ships saw the American bateaux and chased them into Sandy Creek, firing as they entered. The British landed troops, planning to capture the American supplies. American forces, hidden in a grove of trees, opened a deadly fire on the advancing British, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing the entire force. Since the British had naval control over Lake Ontario at this time, maintaining the overland supply route was critical for the Americans at Sackets Harbor.

for one massive anchor cable destined for *Superior* were loaded into wagons and ox-carts and shipped out across 20 miles of rudimentary roads for Sackets Harbor. The one remaining cable was simply too large for a normal wagon. Six-hundred feet long and 22 inches in circumference, it weighed nearly 5 tons. Unable to find a suitable conveyance, soldiers of Colonel Allen Clark's 55th New York Militia Regiment volunteered to carry it on foot. Eighty-four men distributed themselves front and back of a single wagon, spread out the entire 600-foot length of the mammoth cable, and set out for Sackets Harbor with it draped across their shoulders. Other volunteers joined in along the route. Various reports suggest that anywhere between the original 84 and 200 willing men took part. Alternating travel and rest a mile at a time and padding their bruised, chafed and raw shoulders with straw, the men took about 30 hours to cover the 20 miles, arriving at Sackets Harbor to a raucous welcome, martial music, a barrel of whiskey, and a bonus of $2.

The loss of 180 fighting men and several boats at the Battle of Big Sandy was significant for Commodore Yeo and his squadron. With the cable's arrival in Sackets Harbor and the successful outfitting of *Superior*, the British were forced to lift their blockade and sail away. Launched in May 1814 and outfitted in June, *Superior* was the most powerful warship on the lake at the time. The ship never saw active combat but did perform useful service for the remainder of the year, participating in Commodore Chauncey's blockade of Kingston, Ontario, and transporting hundreds of troops across the lake.

Cannons and Carronades

Ever since the late Middle Ages (c.1450–1500), when gunpowder, cannons, and firearms were coming into general use in Europe, cannons have been placed on warships. The warship soon evolved into a floating platform for cannon ranged along both sides of a ship, an arrangement called a "broadside." By the time of the great Spanish Armada in 1588, battles between warships were mainly artillery duels. Larger and improved warships continued to be built, with several decks for cannon, so by the mid-17th century, large European warships had very powerful armament.

Cannons Most naval cannons were made of iron (some were brass or bronze) and all came in many sizes. The usual way to refer to a cannon's size was by the weight of the iron cannonball that it fired. The heaviest cannons in general use on a large ship of the line fired a 32-pound ball, so it was called a 32-pounder. Ships of the line carried a mixture of cannon sizes from heavy 32s on the lower gun decks to 24s and 18s on the upper decks. A heavy frigate like the USS *Constitution* carried 24-pounders—powerful, long-range, and hard-hitting guns. Smaller frigates were armed with guns as light as 9-pounders—cannons smaller than 6-pounders were not very useful on ocean-going warships. Lighter cannons were carried on merchant ships and on some of the smaller Great Lakes warships.

Left: Naval cannons on truck carriages; right: a carronade on a pivoting slide carriage.

An iron "12-pounder" cannon barrel could weigh from one to as much as three tons. In multi-deck ships, the heaviest cannon were placed on the lowest gun deck to improve stability. By the 1790s, cannon patterns and sizes were standardized in the Royal Navy, a practice adopted by most other navies at the time.

Carronades This type of cannon was developed in Great Britain by the Carron Company in the 1770s. It was a shorter and lighter type of gun that fired a much heavier cannonball than a regular cannon of similar size. These short-range guns were generally 24- or 32-pounders, but could be as big as 68-pounders — a very heavy ball indeed! Though carronades lacked range, their heavy cannonballs made them fearsome weapons. Known as "smashers," carronades became popular for warships of all types, and they were much used on smaller ships to increase their firepower. Ships might be armed almost exclusively with carronades, like Commodore Perry's brigs *Niagara* and *Lawrence.* At close range, ships armed with carronades could deliver very destructive broadsides.

Gun Carriages and Tackle Cannons and some carronades were mounted on truck carriages—named for the four small wheels called trucks. Some guns were on slide carriages, and some (especially on gunboats) on pivoting carriages. The sides of the carriage, called brackets, were stepped to allow the heavy cannon barrel to be aimed up or down with a lever called a handspike. A system of heavy ropes and pulleys, called tackle, absorbed the dangerous recoil of the gun after it was fired. Once reloaded, the tackle allowed the muzzle of the cannon barrel to be run out of the gun port again for firing.

Ammunition All cannon used a charge of gunpowder, the heavier the shot, the bigger the charge. Cannonballs were used to smash into the hull (causing deadly splinters), to dismount guns, and punch holes below the waterline. Grapeshot (small iron balls) and canister (lead musket balls) inflicted casualties on crewmen. Special bar and chain shot flew whizzing through the air to tear sails and cut rigging. RT

The First & Second Battles of Sackets Harbor

Despite its relatively remote location and its proximity to the British naval base at Kingston, Ontario, Sackets Harbor provided the Americans with its best deep-water harbor on Lake Ontario, and by necessity, became the Americans' major naval facility on the lake. Given its strategic importance to the U.S., it is not surprising that throughout the war the British considered Sackets Harbor a primary target.

As early as July 1812, the British Lake Ontario squadron came hunting the brig *Oneida* which was stationed in Sackets Harbor and was the only U.S. naval warship on the lake. Despite inadequate preparation and a squadron that was composed of inexperienced and untested Canadian Provincial Marine, the British possessed three times the firepower of *Oneida* and assumed its capture would be a mere formality. It wasn't.

On Sunday morning, July 19, Lieutenant Melancthon Woolsey, commanding *Oneida*, anchored his ship near the mouth of the harbor, its larboard (port side) guns facing the five approaching British ships. Removing the starboard guns, he had them carried ashore to be mounted with other guns in the fortification, later named Fort Tompkins, which overlooked the lake. The centerpiece of the Americans' battery was a 32-pounder, a long gun known as the "Old Sow" that had originally been intended for *Oneida*. Proving to be too unwieldy, she had been dismounted in 1810 only to be resurrected and pressed into service as part of the battery at Sackets Harbor with the onset of the War of 1812.

In the ensuing artillery exchange, the British, standing out beyond the reach of the 9-pounders in the battery, were unsuccessful in leveling the village, most of their shot striking the bluff below the town. The Old Sow, without any ammunition designed for her size, could only return fire inaccurately with 24-pound balls bulked out in pieces of carpet. After two hours, a 32-pound ball from a British gun came flying over the bluff, plowing a deep furrow in the earth. According to several unsubstantiated reports, a soldier, retrieving it, ran to the officer in charge of the Old Sow and cried, "I've been playing ball with the redcoats, and have caught 'em out. See if the British can catch back again."

The Old Sow, finally given the chance to show what she could do with an appropriate ball, did not disappoint. As *Royal George*, the 20-gun flagship of the attacking squadron, swung around to deliver what was planned to be a devastating broadside, the Old Sow scored a direct hit, striking the stern of *Royal George* and raking her completely, driving a cascade of splinters as high as the mast tops, killing 14 and wounding 18. Severely chastened, *Royal George* and her entourage fled the scene to the cheers of the village's defenders and the strains of "Yankee Doodle" played by a band on shore. Having failed to inflict any significant damage

A sketch map of the town and defenses at Sackets Harbor in March 1813 by General Alexander Macomb. Macomb was commissioned a first lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in 1802, and spent the years before the war constructing and supervising fortifications in the Carolinas, Georgia, and the Northwest. Mapmaking was a required skill for engineer officers.

on the Americans, the British were described by one wit as having "broke[n] nothing but the Sabbath."

Ten months later, in late May 1813, the British received reports that the American fleet under Commodore Chauncey had departed Sackets Harbor to support an amphibious assault on Fort George toward the western end of the lake, leaving the town and its naval yard exposed to attack. Quickly gathering all their available units, which included a landing force of about 900 men, Commodore Yeo and Governor-in-Chief Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost set sail for Sackets Harbor, arriving offshore on the morning of the 28th. Bad weather caused a day's postponement in the attack, giving the Americans time to organize their defenses. Lieutenant Wolcott Chauncey, brother of the commodore, had been left with the responsibility of defending the naval assets, with his top priority a new

Sunset at Sackets Harbor, 1813*, painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. Navy Point and Fort Tompkins protect the small harbor area, where a number of ships lie at anchor, including Commodore Chauncey's flagship, the 24-gun corvette* Madison*. As her crew stows anchors and sets sails, the armed schooner* Hamilton *(center) glides out into Black River Bay, headed out onto Lake Ontario.*

The USS *Superior*

USS *Superior*, built at Sackets Harbor under the direction of Henry Eckford, was laid down in February and launched on May 1, 1814. Once launched, she was the largest U.S. warship afloat during the War of 1812. Though called a frigate, in reality this 175-foot long, 58-gun two-decker qualified as a small ship of the line, the "battleship" of the period. With a crew of some 500 men and officers and carrying very heavy guns — thirty 32-pounder long guns, twenty-six 42-pounder carronades and two 24-pounder long guns — she was a formidable adversary.

Commanded during her lake service by Lt. John Elton, *Superior* joined Commodore Isaac Chauncey's Lake Ontario squadron in late July 1814, blockading Kingston harbor in hopes of initiating a decisive naval battle against Sir James Yeo's British squadron.

In late September, *Superior* was part of the squadron that transported some 3,000 troops commanded by General George Izard to the Genesee region, forces needed to reinforce the army in the Niagara region.

Superior never seriously engaged enemy ships during her brief wartime service, and at the end of the war she was laid up at Sackets Harbor. By 1824, she had been sold for scrap. RT

Kingston — the Royal Navy's Home Port

Recognized early on as a strategic location, the French built Fort Cataraqui in 1673 (later called Fort Frontenac) on a sheltered bay on the north shore of Lake Ontario, near the St. Lawrence River's entrance. After the American Revolution, "Kings Town" became a focus of Loyalist settlement. Fort Frontenac was rebuilt and garrisoned in 1783, and by the early 1800s, Kingston (renamed in 1788) was the home of the small Provincial Marine, established in 1784.

During the War of 1812, the Provincial Marine was incorporated into the Royal Navy (1813), and Kingston became the principal hub of British military and naval activity on Lake Ontario. In 1814, Kingston was made an official Royal Navy station (continuing as such until 1853). Like the rival American naval base at Sackets Harbor, Kingston was repeatedly threatened by enemy land and naval forces, but unlike Sackets Harbor, was never directly attacked. A number of warships were constructed at Kingston during the war, including the largest sailing warship to ever see service on the lakes, the powerful HMS *St. Lawrence.*

After the war, Kingston remained an important Canadian military locale and was the home of Canada's first military college, the Royal Military College of Canada, established in 1876. RT

The British St. Lawrence *and other ships laid up for the winter in Kingston harbor, painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.*

Operations at Sackets Harbor May 1813*, from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *Fort Tompkins and Navy Point were key features protecting the harbor.*

28-gun vessel, *General Pike*, still under construction on the stocks. Colonel Electus Backus had 750 regulars at his disposal, and Brigadier General Jacob Brown could field another 700 New York State Militia under his command.

When the British launched their attack on the morning of the 29th, the Americans were ready. Brown had the militia prepared to receive the British as they came ashore. Backus and his regulars lined a drainage ditch running perpendicular to the lake and in front of the town and barracks. Chauncey had 200 men at the navy yard. As in most battles, however, where even carefully constructed plans collapse under the weight of human frailty, error, and inexperience, the Second Battle of Sackets Harbor had more than its share of unexpected twists and turns.

To General Brown's consternation, his militia fired one ineffective round and, being intimidated by the sight of the advancing line of redcoats with their bayonets flashing, threw down their guns and fled. Preventing a rout, he was able finally to rally a hundred of his men, who did help slow the British advance.

But actions by the respective naval commanders contributed most significantly to the breakdowns and confusion at Sackets Harbor.

As the battle raged to the west of the village, Lieutenant Wolcott Chauncey abandoned his post at the navy yard to return to his ship, leaving the defense of the naval stores and new ship to an inexperienced young lieutenant who, thinking the British were on the verge of overrunning the American defenses, ordered everything torched. Half a million dollars in naval supplies, including sails and rigging for *General Pike*, went up in smoke. Fortunately, a hastily organized fire brigade and the green wood of the new ship saved it from the conflagration.

Commodore Yeo, perhaps, made the biggest error of all when, unable to resist the lure of the land assault, he left his ships and came ashore with the troops. Lacking the assured direction of his leadership, his ships with their heavy artillery remained too far from shore to provide proper support for the landing. Only one vessel, *Beresford*, propelled by sweeps, made an attempt to venture within range. Without adequate support, the Brit-

ish assault force, fought off by the ferocious firing of Backus's regulars, withdrew.

Although the British failed to overcome the American defenses at Sackets Harbor, they did succeed in throwing a scare into Commodore Isaac Chauncey. Already having demonstrated reluctance about leaving Sackets Harbor exposed to possible attack from nearby Kingston, Chauncey proved for the remainder of the war to be relatively unwilling to provide support for U.S. ground forces anywhere along the Canadian border.

In the short term, Chauncey's precipitous return to Sackets Harbor after learning of the attack deprived the Niagara Peninsula campaign of the support of firepower and supplies it needed to succeed and ceded control of Lake Ontario to Yeo's squadron, who, for the next several months, roamed unchallenged. In the long term, left to fend for themselves, American ground troops in northern and western New York failed to achieve the freedom of movement that adequate logistical and tactical support of the navy would have provided.

The USS Oneida off Sackets Harbor, *painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. The brig* Oneida*, built at Oswego and launched in 1809, was armed with 16 24-lb. carronades (here shown with a pivot gun in the bow). She was an active part of Chauncey's squadron on Lake Ontario, participating in many of the actions on the lake. Sold in May 1815, she was repurchased by the U.S. Navy not long after and laid up at Sackets Harbor. Sold again in 1825, she worked as a timber ship until sinking in French Creek near Clayton, NY, sometime in the 1830s. One of her cannon is in Clayton's Memorial Park and an anchor is owned by the French Creek Marina.*

Bigger and Bigger...

The naval building race on Lake Ontario ended with the construction of three massive ships—far larger than any yet built on the Great Lakes—the British *St. Lawrence* and the American *New Orleans* and *Chippewa*.

In February 1814, in response to news that three warships were being built at Sackets Harbor, the British shipyard in Kingston commenced construction of *St. Lawrence*. The failure of peace talks hastened her building, and she was launched on September 10, 1814 — 191 feet long on the gun deck, 2,304 tons burthen and armed with a total of 104 guns, including 32-pounder long guns and 68-pounder carronades. One of the most powerful of all the Royal Navy's ships then afloat anywhere in the world, *St. Lawrence* gave Commodore Yeo undisputed command of Lake Ontario for the remainder of 1814. This mastery of the lake was ultimately of little worth — the Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814, and by the end of the year Lake Ontario was icing over.

Since news of the treaty did not reach New York until February 11, 1815, Henry Eckford and Noah Brown had begun work at Sackets Harbor on the even larger *New Orleans* and *Chippewa*. Such large ships required deep water for launching, so a new dockyard was set up at Navy Point. Intended to carry some 120 guns, *New Orleans* would have been the largest ship in the U.S. Navy had she been completed, but construction was halted in March 1815. *New Orleans* remained on the building stocks for many years afterward, roofed over to protect the hull. She was finally scrapped in 1883, sold to J. Wilkinson of Syracuse, New York. Work on *Chippewa* was started, but never progressed very far, and she was sold in November 1833. By the 1830s, almost all the Lake Ontario warships, British and American alike, had been sunk, sold off, or scrapped. RT

The remains of New Orleans *in 1883, the year she was scrapped.*

The Battle of French Creek

"I have the Honor to acquaint you that His Majestys Sloops *Melville*, and *Moira*, accompanied by 4 Gun Boats, formed a junction with the *Sir Sidney Smith*, and *Beresford* Schooners, yesterday morning, and I instantly made an arrangement with the Commanders of those Vessels for an immediate attack on the Enemy's Position at French Creek, as soon as we could see through the Snow."

— Captain William Mulcaster,
to British Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo

Winter came early to the St. Lawrence Valley in the fall of 1813. Late October storms dumped a foot or more of snow on Kingston, Sackets Harbor, other nearby communities, and the islands guarding the Lake Ontario entrance to the St. Lawrence River. For General James Wilkinson, already behind schedule in his efforts to put together an invasion force, the snow was a spur to action.

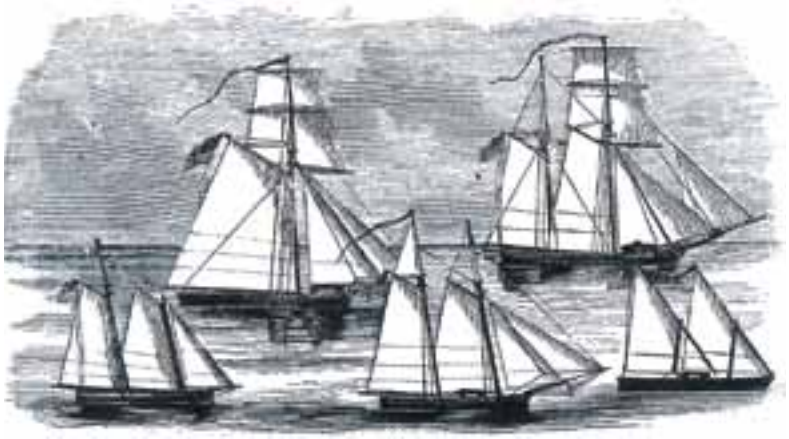
Having gathered an army of more than 6,000 at Sackets Harbor, he had pushed forward to Grenadier Island, from which he could maintain his options for an attack on nearby Kingston and its navy yard or proceed down the St. Lawrence, meet up with another 4,000 men moving up through the Richelieu River corridor under the command of General Wade Hampton, to make a coordinated attack on Montreal. Until the onset of bad weather, Wilkinson, Secretary of War John Armstrong, and Commodore Chauncey had not been able to agree on the target. With weather-inflicted delays giving the British time to shore up their defenses at Kingston and treacherous lake conditions making an amphibious landing with thousands of troops unattractive, Wilkinson sent three brigades as an advance guard to the mouth of French Creek, a half-mile west of present-day Clayton, to establish the next staging area for a move down the St. Lawrence to Montreal. Due to the bad weather, only the brigade under the command of Major General Jacob Brown made it as the other two were forced to turn back. At the same time, Commodore Chauncey was directed to establish a blockade of Kingston to prevent pursuit and disruption by the British navy.

Reports of the troop movement reached Kingston and several ships under the command of Captain Mulcaster slipped past Chauncey's ineffective blockade. On November 1, 1813, they made their way through a heavy snowstorm to harass Brown's force at the mouth of French Creek.

An infantry unit posted on a headland overlooking the creek entrance peppered the nearing ships with musket fire

General Wade Hampton of South Carolina (1752–1837), another Revolutionary War veteran given command during the war. Unpopular and quarrelsome, he and Wilkinson were sworn enemies, ruining any chance of coordination between their forces. Unjustly blamed by Wilkinson for the failure of their joint 1813 campaign to capture Montreal, he resigned his commission in April, 1814.

The entrance to French Creek, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.



Various U.S. schooners and gunboats, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *The St. Lawrence River was the major waterway connecting the Great Lakes to the sea, though large ships could sail no further west than Montreal because of shallow water and rapids. Smaller ships could go some distance downstream from Lake Ontario, but often had difficulties navigating the treacherous river. Although gunboats did carry a sail rig, they had the additional advantage of being rowed, making them much more maneuverable on the river.*

until driven away by grapeshot and canister from the ships' guns. Rounding the headland into the creek, the British ships came upon the American camp. For the next hour, the British ships exchanged artillery fire with a U.S. shore battery of two 18-pounders posted on a high bank west of the creek. With the approach of darkness, the British pulled back. According to Captain Mulcaster's report: "[A]s the day was closing fast, and the Enemys Troops could no longer be discerned from the thickness of the Trees, so as to fire at them with precision, and the Squadron having received several shots in their Hulls, and a few between Wind and Water, I thought it right to haul off for the night." The next morning, the British ships resumed their attack, only to be driven away by red-hot shot from the American guns — the mortal enemy of wooden ships.

In the few days after the departure of the English fleet, Wilkinson's entire army gathered at French Creek before continuing downriver on November 5 to pursue the offensive against Montreal. Despite its auspicious start, with Brown successfully fending off the British naval attack, the operation would soon meet with disaster. Harassed by British units on their tail and led by an increasingly ineffectual General Wilkinson, the campaign would come to an ignominious conclusion a week later at the Battle of Crysler's Farm.

James Wilkinson

Born in Maryland in 1757, James Wilkinson is one of the more notorious figures of the early United States. Intelligent and ambitious, he joined the Continental Army, serving with Benedict Arnold at Quebec in 1775 and later with General Horatio Gates. Elevated to brigadier general, Wilkinson's army career was marred by continual intrigue — he was implicated in the "Conway Cabal," a plot against George Washington. Financial irregularities later forced his resignation as Clothier General of the army. In 1784, he settled in the Kentucky Territory where he began a secret, long-term, and likely treasonous relationship as a spy with the authorities in then-Spanish Louisiana.

James Wilkinson, 1797, by Charles Willson Peale

In October 1791, he obtained a Lt. Colonel's commission in the U.S. Army. Upon General Anthony Wayne's death in 1796, Wilkinson became the senior officer in the U.S. Army until 1798, and again from 1800 until early 1812. While in this position (and for a time the governor of Louisiana Territory) he continued his secret dealings with the Spanish. He also became deeply involved in the "Burr Conspiracy" — a suspected treasonous plot led by former Vice President Aaron Burr to establish an independent nation in North America at the expense of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Burr and many of his associates were arrested, but at the trial a lack of evidence allowed the conspirators to go free. Wilkinson's reputation was damaged, and though he remained in office, his conduct continued to be the subject of scandal and investigation. Much of the poor condition of the U.S. Army at the outbreak of war was due to his relative negligence.

When war came in 1812, he was in command at New Orleans, quarreling constantly with his subordinates. In March 1813, he received permission to seize Mobile (now in Alabama) from Spain which had opportunistically captured the area from Britain during the American Revolution.

His Revolutionary War friend, Secretary of War John Armstrong, offered Wilkinson command in the north. Wilkinson arrived at Sackets Harbor in late August 1813, boasting that he would capture Upper Canada in one campaign. His inadequate preparations and feeble efforts led to the disastrous invasion that ended at the Battle of Crysler's Farm on November 11. His demoralized troops suffered terribly over the ensuing winter, raising concern about yet another conspiracy. After another unsuccessful advance into Canada in March 1814, Wilkinson was relieved of command — yet a court of inquiry cleared him of all charges! He never held command again, retiring to his plantation south of New Orleans. He died in Mexico City in 1828, petitioning for a land grant in Texas.

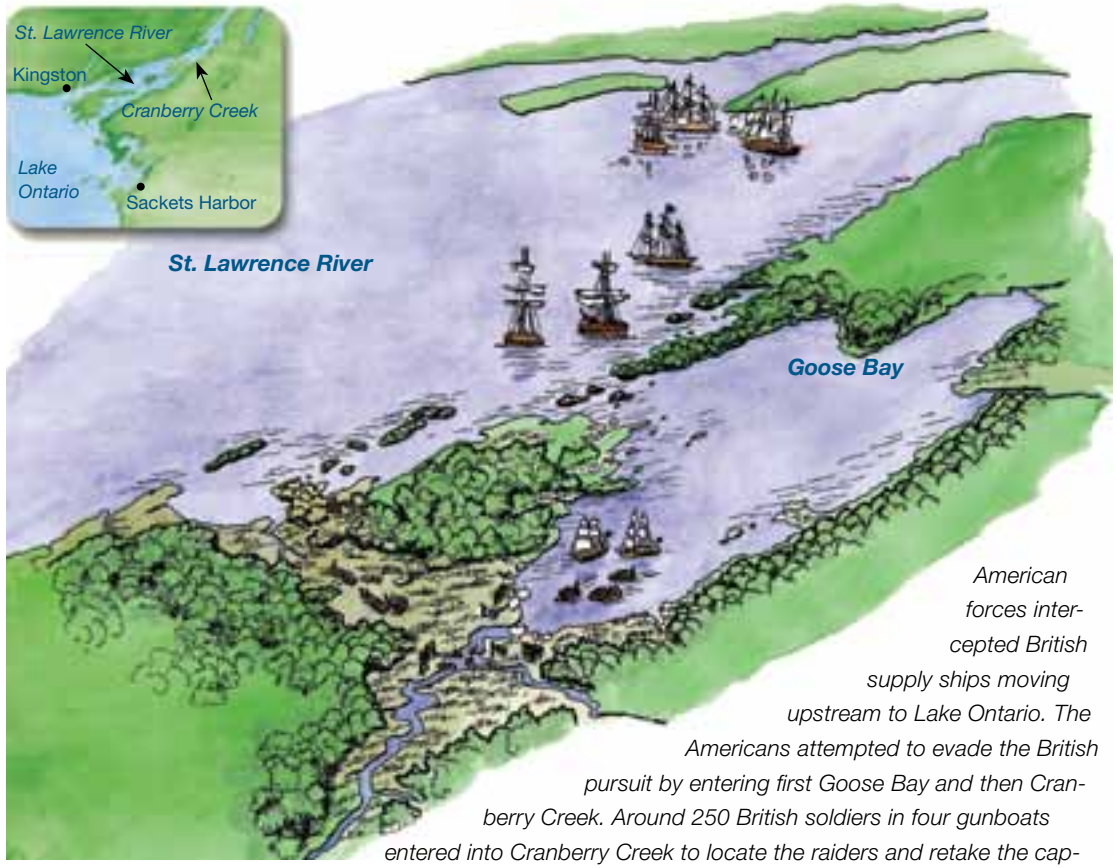
Wilkinson's checkered career has been almost universally condemned — by historians as well as by his contemporaries. Winfield Scott called him an "unprincipled imbecile." American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) considered Wilkinson "the most consummate artist in treason that the nation ever possessed." In 1816, Wilkinson published a book in his defense — *Memoirs of My Own Times*, which did little to redeem his reputation. RT

The Battle of Cranberry Creek

Getting provisions to the thousands of sailors and soldiers along the frontier border between Canada and the United States was for both sides a difficult proposition under the best of circumstances, and circumstances during the war were quite often far from good. Muddy, rutted rudimentary roads seemed to swallow up men, horses, and material. River systems, as they had been for the previous 200 years, were far more attractive despite their own hazards and challenges. The Hudson-Oswego water route via the Mohawk Valley presented obstacles for the Americans, but at least it was relatively free from enemy harassment. The same could not be said for the British route up the St. Lawrence, intersected by narrow creeks and confused by an archipelago of more than a thousand islands, an inviting labyrinth to marauding enemy forces.

In mid-July 1813, 15 bateaux laden with supplies for the fort located on Point Henry guarding Kingston, escorted by a British gunboat, *Spitfire*, made their way upriver through the Thousand Islands. Lying in wait near the present-day town of Alexandria Bay for just such a convoy were two U.S. sloop-rigged gunboats — *Neptune* and *Fox* — manned by 45 volunteer sailors and soldiers under the joint command of Captain Jehiel Dimock of the First U.S. Rifle Regiment and Sailing Master Samuel Dixon. Accounts of the subsequent confrontation vary widely, but the basic facts seem to include the following.

Surprising the bateaux convoy at 4 AM, the Americans captured the bateaux, their cargo of hundreds of barrels of pork and bread, and 69 prisoners without having to fire a shot. A few crew members having escaped, and realizing that British reinforcements would soon descend on them, Dimock and Dixon sent the prisoners back to Sackets Harbor with an escort and then headed for the shelter of Goose Bay and Cranberry Creek with the captured food stores. A few days later, four British gunboats bearing a large contingent of infantry appeared and, believing they had their quarry trapped in the creek, did not hesitate to follow. It seemed too good an opportunity to pass up.



American forces intercepted British supply ships moving upstream to Lake Ontario. The Americans attempted to evade the British pursuit by entering first Goose Bay and then Cranberry Creek. Around 250 British soldiers in four gunboats entered into Cranberry Creek to locate the raiders and retake the captured supplies. A company of 50 U.S. Riflemen led by Major Benjamin Forsyth opened a destructive fire on the British, forcing them to retreat. In the meantime, the Americans moved the captured supplies to safety across marshy ground, while their gunboats evaded the blockading British vessels.

Despite being greatly outnumbered, the American raiders made efficient use of several key advantages. As the British made their way up the creek, their lack of maneuverability in its narrowing confines compromised the effectiveness of their guns, allowing the American riflemen to subject the exposed enemy to deadly fire from shore. Moreover, in preparing to meet their pursuers, the Americans had felled trees across the stream and, from the captured barrels of pork, had assembled an impromptu breastwork overlooking the tangled timber. From these protective walls, the Americans were able to direct fire into gunboats stymied by the improvised watery impasse. British infantry made their way ashore and were able to drive the Americans back into the protection of the pork-barrel fort long enough for their comrades to extricate their boats and head them back downstream.

Fleeing the death trap into which they had fallen, they made their way back to *Earl of Moira*, blockading the mouth of the creek. Having been soundly thrashed, and realizing the futility of chasing down the American raiders in the creek given their available forces, the British abandoned the chase.

Later, *Neptune* and *Fox* succeeded in slipping past *Earl of Moira*, stationed at the entrance to the St. Lawrence, an escape not without its own moments of high drama. *Earl of Moira*, recognizing too late the presence of the American sloops, exchanged fire with them as they disappeared into a fortuitous fog that enabled them to make their way home safely to Sackets Harbor.

For the Americans, eluding the British warship and returning safely home brought a satisfying end to a daring and successful raid. For the British, falling prey to American forces entrenched along a narrow waterway was a lesson not learned well enough. A similar scenario would play out with even more dire consequences for the British the following May at the Battle of Sandy Creek (see pages 44–45).

Earl of Moira Hotly Engaged*, painting by Peter Rindlisbacher. HMS* Earl of Moira*, shown here in action during a running engagement called "The Burlington Races" in late September 1813.* Earl of Moira *was a 100-ton, 14-gun schooner, launched at Kingston in May 1805. In 1813, she was rebuilt as a 16-gun brig, as depicted here. Set afire by red-hot shot during the action at French Creek, she was briefly scuttled to extinguish the fire, and later salvaged and returned to service.*

The Rocket's Red Glare

If you've ever seen a fireworks display, you have some idea of what rocket weapons were like during the War of 1812. Rockets used as weapons were encountered by the British in India in the 1780s and 1790s in a series of wars against powerful regional rulers. While not accurate nor greatly destructive, showers of these rockets were very disruptive and certainly dangerous—enough to impress Colonel Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington. After the defeat of the Indian leader Tipu Sultan of Mysore at the climactic Battle of Seringapatam in May 1799, a large store of rockets and launchers was captured. In one account… "the British at Seringapatam had suffered more from the rockets than from the shells or any other weapon used by the enemy." In one account an eye-witness said, "a single rocket had killed three men and badly wounded others."

A Royal Navy ship's boat prepares to fire a rocket from an adjustable launching frame.

As a result, the Royal Arsenal laboratories in Woolwich began a program to develop rocket weapons under the direction of Colonel William Congreve. The rockets were made up of an iron or tin case or tube containing black powder as a propellant and an explosive warhead. A rocket had a long guide pole attached to the side of the tube. A simple, portable frame and launcher-trough was designed, which could be adjusted for different ranges, in some cases up to two miles. Although rockets were inaccurate and unpredictable — premature explosions were not uncommon — they were soon adopted by the army and navy.

Rockets were made in many sizes, with warheads from 3 to as much as 32 pounds — with a 15-foot guide pole, the 24-pounder was the most common size in use. They were fired by pulling a long cord attached to a flintlock mechanism.

Some 2,000 rockets bombarded the French invasion boats at Boulogne in 1805, and rockets were used against the Danish fleet at Copenhagen in 1807, inflicting considerable damage. The Royal Horse Artillery established a rocket battery which saw action at the great Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, but for the most part rockets were fired from "bomb" (mortar) ships or specially equipped boats.

The British used rockets at the Battle of Bladensburg outside Washington in August, panicking the inexperienced American militia who fled the battlefield. Admiral Cockburn's fleet of ships raiding up and down Chesapeake Bay in 1814 used rockets to both drive off defenders and as incendiaries to set fire to buildings and stores. While used in battles along the Canadian border, such as Plattsburgh, their most famous use during the war was in the bombardment of Fort McHenry in Baltimore in September 1814 — 32-pound rockets arching through the air, fired through special ports from the bomb ship HMS *Erebus* (later famous as a ship used in polar exploration, most notably one of the two ships that carried the doomed Franklin Expedition to the Canadian Arctic in 1845). RT

The Battle of Ogdensburg

Having led two earlier raids across the St. Lawrence River into Canadian territory, Major Benjamin Forsyth of the U.S. Rifle Regiment should not have been surprised on February 22, 1813, at reports that a substantial British force was advancing across the frozen St. Lawrence from Prescott, Upper Canada. Forsyth and a small force of 50 riflemen had taken up residence on the site of old Fort Presentation, opposite the village of Ogdensburg, NY, on the west bank of the Oswegatchie River where it feeds into the St. Lawrence. Although he had been expecting a retaliatory strike, he had been lulled into complacency by inoffensive daily drilling the British had staged on the ice for the past several weeks.

It was the smaller of the two British columns, 100 men under Captain Jenkins moving on the fort, that dispelled any doubts this was merely a drill. Once the magnitude of the threat did become apparent, cannon fire from the fort knocked out Jenkins's only artillery as the column neared the shoreline. Deep snowdrifts on the riverbank further hampered Jenkins's troops, and Jenkins himself was felled when grapeshot smashed his left arm. Rising and urging his men on through the snow, Jenkins was knocked down again when fire from the fort shattered his right arm. Dispirited, the attackers turned and fled for the Canadian shore, carrying Jenkins, but leaving other dead and wounded in their wake.

A depiction of the eastern wall of Fort Oswegatchie from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *The picture shows a British flag — perhaps an acknowledgment of the brief capture and occupation of the fort by Mcdonnell's men, or simply an error by the artist.*

A map of Ogdensburg from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *The site of the old French* Fort de la Présentation *is seen in the upper left, and the partially completed Fort Oswegatchie is located in the upper right.*

Reenactors brave the cold, portraying an American Light Artillery cannon crew at the annual winter battle reenactment. American cannon carriages were typically painted a bright blue — those of the British Royal Artillery were grey.

The action at the fort, however, had provided enough of a distraction to allow a larger column of 500 men under Lieutenant Colonel "Red George" Macdonell to enter the village and overwhelm the spirited but limited resistance offered by its few scattered defenders. With the village secured, Macdonell moved on the fort, his force of 500 augmented by the addition of Jenkins's troops, reformed and sent back from Prescott into action by their chaplain, Alexander Macdonell. The worthy cleric, it is said, used his heavy crucifix to good advantage in convincing reluctant stragglers to move along.

In the early morning of February 22, 1813, Colonel Macdonell's column begins its march across the frozen St. Lawrence River — Ogdensburg sleeps peacefully on the far shore. In his dispatch after the battle, Macdonell wrote that his column consisted of "… about 120 of the King's (8th) Regiment & 30 of the Newfoundland, with about 230 of the Militia." British soldiers were issued wool greatcoats as part of their uniform. Their American counterparts typically had overcoats available only for men on guard duty — a serious handicap for troops operating in the harsh winter conditions along the St. Lawrence River valley.

Fort de la Présentation, 1749–1796

In a region controlled by France until 1760, a Sulpician priest, Abbé François Picquet, constructed Fort de la Présentation in 1749 as a mission to Native Americans. He was intent on converting the nearby Iroquois to Catholicism as well as aiding French efforts to keep the encroaching British at bay. More a commercial outpost than a military installation, Fort de la Présentation was ideally situated to relay supplies to French forts in the interior. Located on a small peninsula about 60 miles downstream from Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Oswegatchie River where it empties into the St. Lawrence, the small garrison at Fort de la Présentation utilized its relatively easy access to Lake Ontario and Fort Niagara to funnel supplies through Niagara and the Falls portage to Lake Erie and the Ohio Country. Building materials, food, livestock, and locally produced items such as snowshoes, moccasins, and clothing all made their way into frontier posts from the fort.

The fort was roughly 150 feet square, with a blockhouse in each corner, the whole connected with a wooden stockade to shelter its inhabitants.

Quite successful in his proselytizing, by the mid-1750s Father Picquet had drawn about 3,000 Onondagas, Oneidas, Senecas, and Cayugas into the surrounding area. Indians drawn from what became known as the Oswegatchie population took part in raids on English settlements in the Mohawk Valley, the Champlain Valley, and on Lake Ontario, often accompanied by Father Picquet. As the land under control of the French shrank in 1758 and 1759 — the forts at Louisbourg, Frontenac, Duquesne, Carillon and Niagara fell in succession in those years — the remaining French forces pulled back from the Champlain Valley to concentrate in the St. Lawrence Valley, and it soon became clear that Fort de la Présentation, now on the western periphery of French defenses, was unable to withstand a sustained assault. In 1759, it was abandoned over Father Picquet's objections in favor of construction of a new fort, Fort Lévis, on Île Royale (now Chimney Island) a little further downstream.

During the Battle of the Thousand Islands in 1760, an important naval engagement took place off the peninsular location of Fort de la Présentation — a bloody battle lasting more than three hours. Fort Lévis was captured a few days later. After the fall of New France in 1763, the British occupied Fort de la Présentation, renaming it Fort Oswegatchie. Under the Jay Treaty implemented in 1796, Fort Oswegatchie was transferred to the Americans and given an anglicized version of its original name, Fort Presentation. SB

Fort de la Présentation, c. 1756. Bateaux are loading at dockside and a native longhouse and cornfield are seen in the lower right. Illustration by Robert McNamara, The Art of Wilderness/Seaway Trail, Inc.

United States Rifle Regiments

Although the usefulness of rifle-armed soldiers had been demonstrated in the American Revolution, it wasn't until 1808 that such a regular unit was raised — The First Regiment of United States Riflemen. They were armed with the .54 caliber Harper's Ferry Model 1803 rifle and wore distinctive uniforms — a simple green linen hunting frock with yellow fringe in summer, and a green wool coatee with black facings and yellow lace for winter and full dress. In 1814, due to the difficulty of obtaining the green wool, the winter uniform was changed to gray. A black felt shako with yellow cords was the standard headgear.

On campaign riflemen were expected to operate independently of the main force, serving as advance, flank, or rear guards, scouts, and in general harass or disrupt enemy movements. Their rifles gave them superior range and accuracy when compared to the regulars' smoothbore muskets. While riflemen could be used in the line of battle, the regiment most often operated as detached independent companies. The riflemen soon proved their worth, and in early 1814, three more regiments were authorized.

A company of the First Regiment was stationed in Ogdensburg, commanded by Major (later Lt. Colonel) Benjamin Forsyth, who built a reputation as an active and enterprising officer. He was involved in many operations and raids during 1812 and 1813, and was killed in June 1814 while on patrol north of Lake Champlain near Odelltown, Quebec. Deservedly or not, Forsyth's men gained notoriety with the British and Canadians as marauders and looters — unfortunately a problem common to both sides, but especially among the often poorly disciplined Americans. RT

Soldiers of the First Regiment of Riflemen, 1813. Hunting frocks were also popular during the American Revolution.

Outnumbered almost 16-to-1 by the British attackers, Forsyth realized the futility of further confrontation and abandoned the fort, withdrawing through the woods all the way back to Sackets Harbor. With the disappearance of resistance, the British sacked the town, making prisoners of any who exhibited defiance. The women of Prescott followed, making their way across the St. Lawrence and stripping the village of what remained, carrying clothing, bedding, and cooking implements back across the ice to their homes in Prescott.

The question has repeatedly been asked, why, if Ogdensburg represented such a good spot from which to disrupt British delivery of war supplies, was not more done to re-establish a more significant American military presence there during the remainder of the war. Why give up so easily and cede the river route to the British? After all, this was American territory. Why did the Americans not do more to move back in with sufficient forces, fortify

Sword (detail) belonging to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Forsyth of the First Regiment of U. S. Riflemen, courtesy Fort Wellington, Ontario.

Forsyth's sword is a fine example of an American officer's sword of the period (in this case a curved saber). The eagle-headed hilt and guard are gilded brass, the grip is ivory, and the blade is blued with gilded military and patriotic motifs. A federal eagle and shield is on the chappe, below the cross guard. The eagle device was popular in the military as a symbol of the United States and hearkens back to the eagles of the ancient Roman republic and empire. Napoleon's French Empire (1804–1815) also used the eagle as a symbol of imperial glory and military might.

and utilize Ogdensburg to intercept British transport on the St. Lawrence, and choke off the supply line to British troops in Upper Canada?

Historian Alan Taylor makes a convincing case that the American decision was the result of an agreement between David Parish, wealthy merchant and landowner, and the Madison administration. Parish, a German entrepreneur living in Philadelphia, had invested heavily in upstate New York properties. Evidence suggests that, in return for providing much-needed money to fund the war effort, Parish received a promise from Washington that Ogdensburg could maintain a low profile; that is, no further troops would be stationed in the village, thereby protecting its profitable and clandestine trade with the British and the property of its largely Federalist population. Such an arrangement, while clearly detrimental to the overall war effort, certainly worked to the advantage of the people of Ogdensburg, who prospered from the resumption of illicit trade with the British.

Soldiers of the 1st Regt. of Foot Guards, in Marching Order, *from Charles Hamilton Smith's* Costume of the Army of the British Empire, *published in 1815 at the close of the Napoleonic Wars. The Foot Guards did not serve in America during the war, but except for certain details of uniform, on campaign they were dressed and equipped like soldiers in the regiments of foot — here in winter clothing typical for British troops serving in Canada. Protective covers of painted canvas over the felt shakos were commonly worn on active service. Smith (1776–1859) was prolific — writing, illustrating and publishing works on natural history, military history, and antiquarian costume among other subjects.*

A New York Militia Coat and Button

This uniform coat is thought to have been worn by Shubel Clark of Canton during the War of 1812. He was drafted June 8, 1812, and served as a private in a company of detached militia at Ogdensburg. The record of Shubel Clark's military service did not indicate whether he was in the artillery or infantry — the red facings on the coat could mean either during this period. The fabric is of a fine quality, probably from England, long a source of quality woolen broadcloth. The edges of the coat are left "raw," not finished — the wool is so tightly woven that even after 200 years it has frayed very little. The buttons are brass. The front (left) and back (right) of the coat are pictured below.

Oddly enough, the false button holes that extend from under the buttons are covered with twisted threads of gold, typically found on officers' uniforms. A private soldier's uniform would likely have worsted wool tape sewn on to make false button holes.

Shubel Clark was a prosperous farmer, was married and had several children. He died February 28, 1866, at the age of 83 years.

The coat, in very good condition, was given to the Potsdam Public Museum in 1959 and was rediscovered during a recent inventory of their collections.

New York Militia uniform coats and roundabout jackets were generally made with a standard New York "Excelsior" pewter button, washed in copper — an original button is shown here at actual size, about seven-eighths of an inch. RT

Coat photographs courtesy Potsdam Public Museum

The St. Lawrence River Campaign

During the late summer and early fall of 1813, American plans for offensive action along the Canadian border shifted to the east from Lake Ontario. As plans for a major operation on the St. Lawrence River coalesced, a dispute arose as to the primary objective. From early July through late October, Major General James Wilkinson and Secretary of War John Armstrong, among others, argued the relative risks and merits of capturing Kingston, the base of British naval operations on Lake Ontario, or Montreal, thereby extending the war into Lower Canada. After months of vacillating, by the end of October, almost by default, Wilkinson's army found itself making its way toward Montreal. The original plan had called for two columns, one making its way down the St. Lawrence Valley from Sackets Harbor under the command of Wilkinson and the other advancing north from Plattsburgh under Major General Wade Hampton, to converge near the mouth of the Chateauguay River just southwest of Montreal. From there they would combine forces and descend on the British stronghold.

A plan unlikely to succeed from its inception — a start too late in the season, Montreal too well-fortified and well-protected, and the two American armies inadequately supplied — the incompatible and intractable egos of those in charge ensured its collapse. The deficiencies of the entire command structure of the American army were glaringly exposed by its inability to find any commanders better qualified than Wilkinson and Hampton to direct the campaign. Given the fact that they despised one another, any possibility that they could work together was further quashed by mixed directives coming from Secretary Armstrong.

While Wilkinson and his army were bumbling down the St. Lawrence Valley, led by a general increasingly incapacitated by dysentery and laudanum and being soundly thrashed by a vastly inferior force at Crysler's Farm, Hampton was engaged in a similar struggle on the Chateauguay River.

Wilkinson's flotilla on the St. Lawrence River, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.

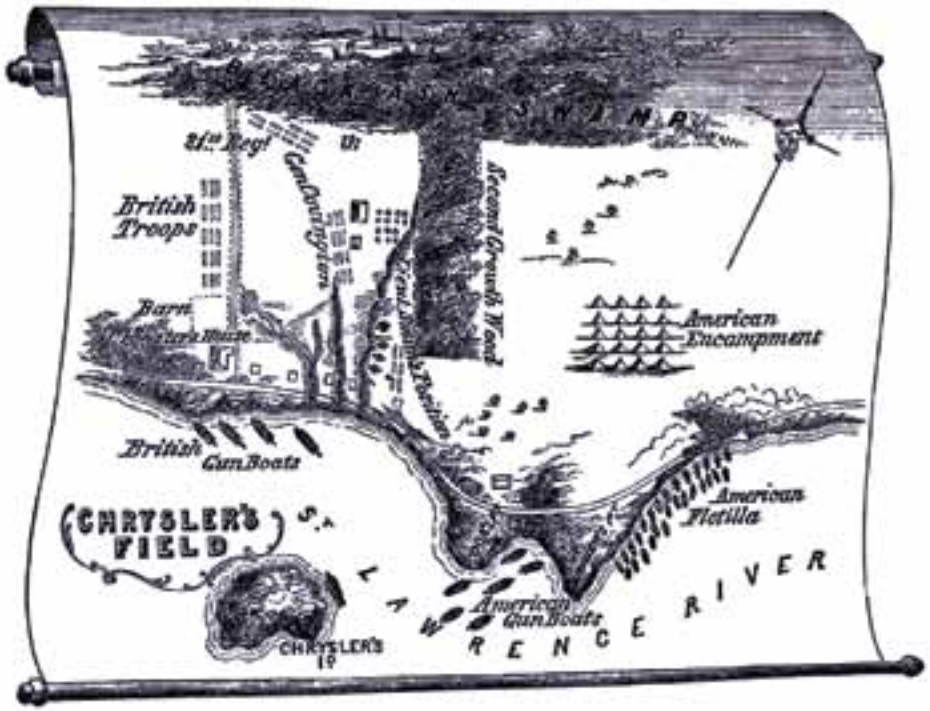
Encountering resistance from 1,500 troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles de Salaberry while moving the American force from Four Corners (now Chateaugay village, NY), Hampton sent, under the command of Colonel Robert Purdy, 1,000 of his 4,000 men across the river in an effort to outflank the enemy. Shortly after dispatching Purdy and his forces across the river, Hampton received revised instructions from Armstrong informing him that Armstrong was returning to Washington leaving Wilkinson in charge, and that Hampton was to prepare winter quarters for 10,000 men. Assuming, incorrectly, that those instructions indicated that the entire assault on Montreal was being abandoned, and effectively rendering his confrontation of de Salaberry

After some three weeks moving down the St. Lawrence River, American infantry, no doubt cold and weary, disembark from their boats on the Canadian shore near Crysler's Farm. It took several days for all the American troops to land and organize for the November 11, 1813, battle. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.

meaningless, Hampton was nevertheless forced to continue, as he already had committed Purdy's units to the battle.

In the meantime, Purdy's men, inundated by heavy rains in swamps on the south bank of the Chateauguay, had lost their way. Trying to salvage the attack, Purdy gathered what troops he could and attempted to recross the river to get behind de Salaberry's troops, only to be greeted by intense fire. Unable to make any headway, Purdy pulled back to rejoin the main force now to discover that it, too, had called off its attack and withdrawn after being deceived by British buglers sounding "the charge" from scattered sites within the forest into thinking it was facing a superior force. When Hampton finally managed to corral all his scattered forces, he ordered a return first to Four Corners and then on to Plattsburgh, effectively abandoning Wilkinson and bringing the campaign against Montreal to an ignominious halt.

Wilkinson, no more successful, had discovered a scapegoat in Hampton, and used Hampton's withdrawal to justify taking his army into winter quarters at French Mills, NY, later known as Fort Covington. For the next two months — December and January in the bitter cold of the Canadian border — 4,000 men suffered from a lack of adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. The nearest supply depot lay more than 200 miles of undeveloped roads away — most little more than rude cart paths — in Plattsburgh. While many officers left French Mills on



Crysler's Field *from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812. *The battlefield was constrained by a swamp area to the north and the St. Lawrence River to the south.*

Climax of the Action at Crysler's Farm*, a mural by Adam Sherriff-Scott, is on display at the Crysler's Farm Visitor Centre. Soldiers from the 49th and 89th British regiments, plus troops from several Canadian fencible units, totaling around 900 men, defeated some 8,000 Americans. The British line on the hill at upper right delivers a series of devastating volleys against the opposing American troops. A general retreat of the demoralized American forces is underway, as men, horses, and artillery stream away from the battle line. By late afternoon, the American army was in full retreat.*

Trading with the Enemy

Smuggling is simply defined as "moving goods illegally into or out of a country." An ancient practice, smuggling was commonplace in the American colonies. In the years after the French and Indian War, various duties were imposed on colonial trade by the British government to raise revenues, duties that were cheerfully evaded by enterprising smugglers.

Before the War of 1812, cross-border commerce between Canada and northern states like New York and Vermont was an important part of the regional economy. When the international situation began to seriously interfere with American commerce on the oceans, and trade sanctions in the U.S. such as the Embargo Act were enforced, smuggling thrived.

When the war started, it was in Great Britain's interest to promote illegal trade with the United States as a means of supporting the defense of Canada. A British Order-in-Council of October 1812 allowed limited trade with the U.S., a country Britain was now at war with! Some U.S. merchants even swore allegiance to the Crown to facilitate doing business, and Britain's ability to pay in gold drew American goods away from their own government and markets, where finances were weaker and payment uncertain.

In northern New York and Vermont, trade continued almost as though no war existed. The British were all too happy to feed their troops with American foodstuffs, including beef on the hoof, to the detriment of U.S. troops in the region. In 1814, Governor General Sir George Prevost estimated that two-thirds of his troops lived on American beef, while American quartermasters could not obtain fresh meat! Although Britain maintained a blockade of almost the entire U.S. east and gulf coasts, smuggling flourished from the Chesapeake Bay to New Orleans. Blockading British warships were routinely supplied by American smugglers.

The War of 1812 was very unpopular in parts of the U.S., making it quite difficult for customs officials to enforce anti-smuggling measures. Even when caught, sympathetic courts declined to prosecute smugglers, and in more than a few cases local and regional government officials and civic leaders were themselves active in illegal trade with Britain.

Smuggling was an open and widely acknowledged problem, a problem that further compromised the nation's ability to successfully prosecute the war. Many Americans simply refused to let a war interfere with doing business, even with the enemy—an attitude that seems at the very least unpatriotic, if not actually treasonous. In a war fought in part over issues of "free trade," more than a few Americans took this idea quite literally! RT

In this 19th-century print, Charles de Salaberry leads his men from the front at the Battle of Chateaguay. His own regiment, the Canadian Voltigeurs, as well as the other fencibles and embodied militia making up his force were raised in Lower Canada, populated mainly by French-Canadians.

leave and General Wilkinson himself recuperated comfortably in the home of Alexander Hamilton's former law partner in nearby Malone, illness spread throughout the camp. Unsanitary conditions only compounded the negative effects of harsh weather, as fecal matter often contaminated water used to prepare food. Pneumonia, typhoid fever, diarrhea, and dysentery felled soldiers by the score. One unit even reported 12 men afflicted with "paralysis of all the extremities." Soldiers died by the hundreds. Funeral dirges sounded so frequently that, in the interest of maintaining what little morale remained, Wilkinson ordered they no longer be played. Finally, in February, Secretary of War Armstrong ordered that 2,000 soldiers be transferred to Sackets Harbor and the remainder to Plattsburgh. The evacuation of the camp saw soldiers in frustration torching everything they could, including the fleet of boats now frozen in the Salmon River which had transported them down the St. Lawrence. The sad end of the miserable campaign against Montreal thus literally went up in flames.

Wilkinson would make one more ineffective attempt in March 1814 to recoup some of his losses, taking 4,000 men from Plattsburgh north in an unsuccessful attack against a British garrison of 500 at Lacolle Mills. Incompetent to the last, he miscalculated, seriously underestimating the need for adequate artillery. After floundering through deep snowdrifts and having to retrace his steps after taking a wrong road, his guns failed to reduce the mill's stone walls. Rather than utilize his overwhelming advantage in numbers to overrun the

mill, he suffered a failure of nerves and ordered a humiliating retreat.

That embarrassment punctuated the ineffectiveness of the American army in the North Country, the campaign bringing an end to the careers of its architects. Blamed by Wilkinson for the failure of the campaign, Hampton resigned his commission and returned to his plantation in South Carolina where, upon his death in 1835, he reputedly owned 3,000 slaves and was the wealthiest planter in the nation. Wilkinson himself was relieved of his command after the debacle at Lacolle Mills. Although acquitted in a subsequent court martial of conduct unbecoming an officer, he was never given another command.

Even Armstrong failed to survive the stigma of such an inglorious campaign. Dissatisfaction with the army's lack of success on the St. Lawrence brought calls that his authority be curtailed, calls that President Madison answered by instituting a requirement that all of Armstrong's future decisions be subject to further administrative review. Thus began a downward spiral for Armstrong that culminated in his resignation in August after being blamed for the burning of Washington. Future president James Monroe was named his replacement.

Ironically, then, the utter failure of the American army to achieve any success in its plan to capture Montreal ultimately did have a positive effect on the command structure of the military if only by clearing away some of the deadwood at the top, making room for the advancement of some of the more capable young officers like Jacob Brown and Winfield Scott.

Gunboats were useful on the St. Lawrence, and skirmishes between the opposing sides were frequent. The gunboat in the foreground resembles the wreck presently on display at Prescott, Ontario. Gunboats were versatile and maneuverable, but it must have been miserable for the crews in their cramped and exposed quarters. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.

General Jacob Brown

Jacob Brown (1775–1828) was one of the more outstanding American military leaders to emerge from the War of 1812. Born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, in 1798 he moved to upstate New York. He and his enterprising family established mills, a store, and improved roads and navigation in the Black River region. A leading citizen, in 1809 Brown was colonel of the 108th Regiment of New York Militia, and when the war began he was already a brigadier general of New York Militia. After his successful defense of Sackets Harbor in May 1813, he was commissioned a brigadier general in the regular army. Brown commanded U.S. forces in the 1814 Niagara campaign, capturing Fort Erie and winning the Battle of Chippawa. He was seriously wounded at Lundy's Lane but retained overall command in Niagara until transferred with his division to Sackets Harbor in October 1814.

As the only U.S. major general, in 1821 President James Monroe made him commanding officer of the U.S. Army, and he instituted many worthy reforms. His 22-room home in Brownville, NY, built of native limestone between 1811 and 1815, stands today and houses a museum and several village offices and facilities. It is open to visitors all year. RT

The Brown Mansion, *from Lossing's* Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.

The Battle of Plattsburgh

From the St. Lawrence River, armies traveled south along Quebec's Richelieu River to New York's Lake Champlain and the Hudson River. In 1777, British General John Burgoyne met his own personal Waterloo at Saratoga. His planned invasion of the Hudson Valley was thwarted, and the victorious Americans went on to win their independence. In 1814, Governor-General of Canada Sir George Prevost met a similar fate at Plattsburgh. His planned invasion of New York was thwarted, denying Britain the advantage they had sought at the bargaining table at the peace talks in Ghent. After two-and-a-half years, bitter fighting on the northern frontier had produced nothing but a stalemate and it would remain that way for the rest of the war.

Prevost had assembled the largest force — 10,000 men strong — ever to invade the continental United States. The goal was British occupation of American territory. The plan was for the Lake Champlain armada under the command of Captain George Downie to neutralize the American squadron on the lake, thereby opening supply lines for a push by the army south to Plattsburgh. Standing in the way were 3,500 well-entrenched soldiers, albeit only militia and poorly trained regulars, in Brigadier General Alexander Macomb's army, and the American squadron on Lake Champlain under the command of Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough.

Although Prevost was determined to wait for the British naval attack to begin before committing his ground troops, he did not have the luxury of time on his side. Autumn was fast approaching. Campaigns on the northern frontier had a history of foundering on cold nights and early snowfalls. Provisions were in short supply. Messages from Prevost to Captain Downie urging haste became edgy and then increasingly assumed a peremptory tone. Pushed prematurely into action, Downie's HMS *Confiance*, the largest warship on Lake Champlain, was fresh from the shipyard, but unfinished, poorly equipped, and undermanned.

Even so, the two Lake Champlain fleets were relatively evenly matched, each side capable of producing combined broadsides of about a ton of metal. Pressed into service without having the benefit of a shakedown cruise — Downie had taken command only two days earlier — *Confiance* (37 guns), accompanied by *Linnet* (16), *Chubb* (11), *Finch* (11), and a dozen gunboats carrying 17 more guns, appeared off Cumberland Head outside of Plattsburgh Bay on the morning of September 11, 1814. Lieutenant Macdonough, aboard his flagship, USS *Saratoga* (26), accompanied by *Eagle* (20), *Ticonderoga* (17), *Preble* (7), and ten gunboats, carried fewer long guns but outweighed the British in carronades. He had established a position for his squadron inside the confines of the bay running northeast from Crab Island with his starboard batteries facing out, intent on avoiding a long-range duel on the open lake. His goal was to force Downie into an exchange where the short-range effectiveness of the American carronades could best be utilized. To increase his mobility, Macdonough had spring-loaded his anchor cables and set out kedge anchors, additional hardware that would enable him to turn his otherwise stationary ships quickly mid-battle should it become necessary.

At 9 AM, the British fleet sailed into the bay. A few desultory shots were exchanged before Macdonough personally aimed one of his long

At right: A map of Plattsburgh from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812, *showing the town, the principal American forts, Plattsburgh Bay (now known as Cumberland Bay) and the position of the ships of the opposing fleets during the naval battle.*

At top: Captain Thomas Macdonough *(1783–1825) painted by Gilbert Stuart; center:* General Alexander Macomb *(1782–1841), painted by Thomas Sully in 1829. Macomb was commanding general of the U.S. Army from 1828 to 1841.*

24-pounders at *Confiance*, the discharged cannonball raking the British flagship's deck, killing several sailors and taking out *Confiance's* wheel. A furious artillery barrage ensued, the next two hours witnessing devastating damage to both fleets.

Chubb, *Finch*, and *Preble* were the first vessels to be silenced, leaving the bulk of the fighting to be done by the larger ships.

The carnage was extensive. Blood, bodies, and the wreckage of guns and rigging made for treacherous footing. Fifteen minutes into the battle, Downie himself was crushed by a runaway cannon unleashed by a direct shot from *Saratoga*, his flattened watch marking the precise minute of his death. Although Macdonough, too, was struck, twice, once by a falling spar and again by the decapitated flying head of his gun captain, he emerged unscathed.

After almost two hours of continuous rolling thunder of blasting cannon, with both sides exhausted, and with his own starboard batteries depleted, Macdonough seized the initiative in the battle as he rotated his ship 180 degrees, capitalizing on his preparatory arrangement of hawsers, cables, and kedge anchors to bring his fresh portside guns to bear on *Confiance*. Failing in his efforts to accomplish a similar maneuver, and being hammered by unchallenged and unrelenting broadsides from *Saratoga*, Lieutenant James Robertson, Downie's successor, struck his colors. The rest of his remaining squadron inevitably followed suit.

Watching the devastation of the British fleet and its capitulation from shore, Prevost called off his army. Without the support of supply lines via the lake to feed his troops, capture of Plattsburgh would be a meaningless gesture at an unacceptably high cost. Too, the land assault itself, despite the overwhelming numerical advantage enjoyed by the British, had already shown signs of disarray.

The naval battle of Plattsburgh begins shortly after 9 AM. The American ships lie at anchor supported by gunboats as the HMS Confiance *comes under fire. Painting by Peter Rindlisbacher.*

The Kent-Delord House, Plattsburgh

In 1797, William Bailey (one of the first judges and assemblymen in the region) built a modest house on this site in Plattsburgh, a settlement founded in 1785. William's father, Colonel John Bailey, bought the house and later gave it to his daughter Elizabeth, who married James Kent, a local judge. In 1810, the Kents sold it to Henry and Betsey Delord, and in 1811, the Delords rebuilt the house essentially as it is seen today. It is thought to be the oldest existing house in Plattsburgh.

Born in France in 1764, Henry Delord came to the Plattsburgh area as an immigrant from the French West Indies in 1796.

During the War of 1812, Plattsburgh was a center of American military activity, and the northern Lake Champlain region in general was known for a great deal of cross-border smuggling. Henry Delord and his partner William Bailey were among the few merchants willing to extend credit to General Macomb's ill-paid troops, allowing them to purchase provisions. They were never repaid.

In September 1814, as a powerful British army advanced on Plattsburgh, many citizens, including the Delords, fled the town. By September 11, Plattsburgh had been occupied north of the Saranac River, and the British were preparing for their assault on the American defenses. Given its location by the mouth of the Saranac River with its expansive view of the bay and lake, the house was chosen as the British headquarters.

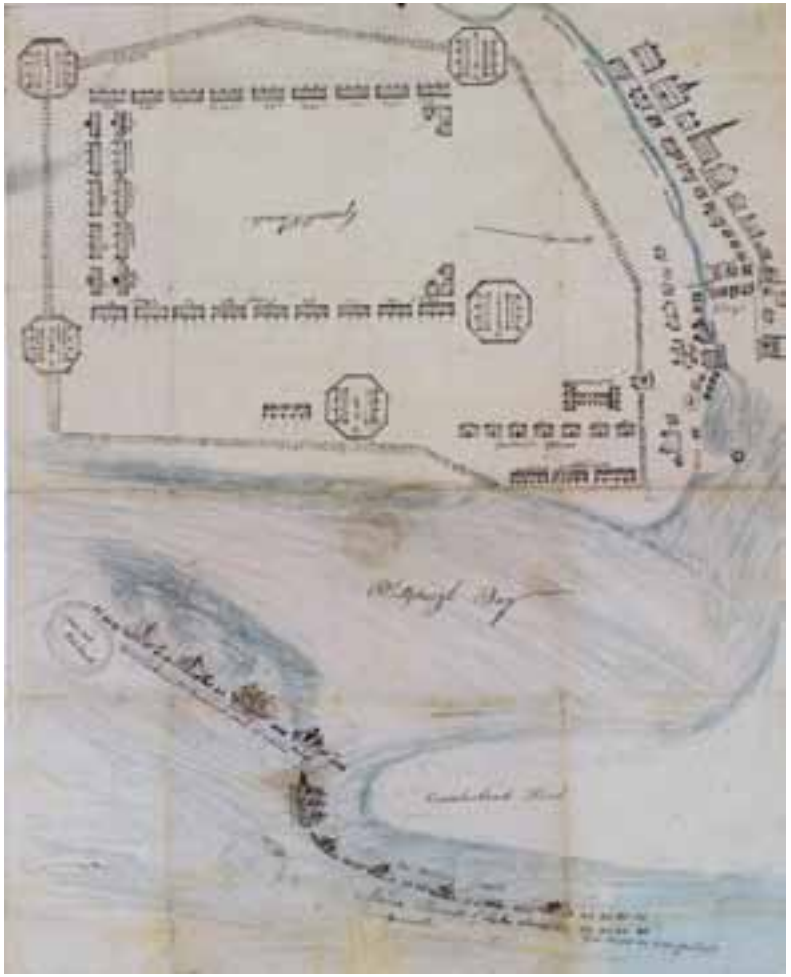
The house remained in the family until 1913 and has operated as the Kent-Delord House Museum since 1928. RT

Designed to coincide with Downie's engagement of Macdonough, delays stalled the attack for an hour. When Prevost's troops finally began to move, American artillery put up unexpectedly stiff resistance. Major General Frederick Robinson at the head of 2,500 men was at the same time losing another precious hour searching for the ford of the Saranac River west of Plattsburgh. His failure blunted a flanking maneuver intended to coordinate with the frontal assault coming from the north. Moreover, Prevost feared being cut off, having come into possession of an intercepted letter, one that later turned out to have been fabricated by Macomb, announcing the approach of 10,000 militia from Vermont and another 9,000 from St. Lawrence County to the west and New York's Washington County to the south.

General Macomb's troops on the south side of the Saranac River hold off the advancing British as the naval battle rages in the distance in this 19th-century print.

Prevost's order to pull back came just as Robinson positioned his men to launch their strike on Macomb's left wing and was received with consternation. The retreat was so precipitate that, by the time Macomb realized the British had withdrawn, Prevost's frustrated and dispirited legions were well on their way back to Canada.

Macdonough's victory on Lake Champlain and defeat of the British Army at Plattsburg by Genl. Macomb, Sept. 17th 1814 / painted by H. Reinagle; engraved by B. Tanner. *Hugh Reinagle was an English theatrical scene painter working in Albany during the war. The print was published in 1816. The ships and gunboats are precisely depicted, and in the distance at right, the trails of rockets can be seen arching over the land battle.*



Manuscript plan of the Battle of Plattsburgh, with pencil shading for bodies of water, 1814. This detailed plan shows the American fortifications on the south side of the Saranac River (upper left) and the village of Plattsburgh (upper right). The ships of Macdonough's fleet lie at anchor in a line as the British ships, led by HMS Confiance, *round Cumberland Head to engage in battle.*

Recriminations surrounded Prevost's conduct of the campaign, his most vocal critic being Commodore Yeo, who, himself, had failed to provide materials and men to the Lake Champlain fleet when requested. Prevost was eventually called back to London where he demanded a court martial to clear his name. That court martial never convened; Prevost died a week before it was to open. He deserved better. Despite the controversy of the final campaign, Prevost managed during his administration to preserve Canada's integrity, keeping it intact in the face of American aggression.

Prevost's withdrawal from Plattsburgh did, however, open the door for Macdonough's triumphant entrance into the pantheon of American military heroes. In battering Downie's fleet into submission and preventing it from providing artillery support for Prevost's invading army, which subsequently turned tail and fled back across the border, Macdonough had humbled the mighty British war machine and accelerated the momentum toward a peace agreement.

An early 19th-century portrait by Jean-Baptiste Roy-Audy of Sir George Prevost, 1st Baronet, (1767–1816).

Battle of Plattsburg*, a hand-colored engraving published shortly after the battle in 1814, provides a panoramic overview of the day's actions. The British are seen at left in the village of Plattsburgh, and the wooden bridge over the Saranac River leads to the Americans defending the south side of the river. The Saranac was not a formidable military obstacle, in places only 30 or 40 yards wide, and there were several shallow fords where the main British attacks were to take place. In the distance the naval battle is underway, seen against the mountains along the Vermont shore only a few miles away.*

A United States Regular Regiment

Organized on January 11, 1812, the 16th U.S. Infantry was one of the more distinguished U.S. regiments active during the war. Raised in Pennsylvania and commanded by Colonel Cromwell Pearce, the 16th was involved in many battles, including the captures of York and Fort George, Crysler's Farm, Lyon's Creek, and Cook's Mills, one of the last land engagements of the war fought on Canadian soil. As was all too common, the 16th was not always clothed in regulation uniform. The men depicted here wear a version of the 1812 uniform with red facings, but instead of blue, the coats were black, which quickly faded to a dull "rusty" greenish-grey. In many cases officers purchased their own uniforms of better quality — as worn by the officer at right. All are fully equipped for campaign — the soldiers carry the canvas knapsack patented by its designer, New Yorker John Lherbette, the flap typically painted a light blue with a red "US." The embossed plate, worn on the felt shako, is shown at lower left. RT

The Watervliet Arsenal and the Greenbush Cantonment

During the War of 1812, as the northern frontier along what was then the border of British Canada came into play, American military planners put lessons of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution to good use. Presented with the logistical difficulties of supplying troops in what was essentially a wilderness, they had come to realize that the area surrounding the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers not only provided vital access to the Niagara and St. Lawrence regions, giving them the flexibility to shift distribution of men and materials from one to the other depending on the demands of the moment, but also provided a ready-made route to New York City in the event of a British appearance in the harbor there.

Besides the downriver route to New York City, two other clearly-defined water routes existed. One lay westward along the Mohawk River valley, following the course of the river and a series of portages to the Oswego River and then to Oswego itself on the shore of Lake Ontario, from where supplies could be shipped via the lake northeast to Sackets Harbor, southwest to the Niagara region, and to all points in between. The second route lay from the Hudson River northward through Lake George to Lake Champlain and beyond, the prospect of a direct assault on Montreal always beckoning.

As the American government developed a war footing in the early months of the conflict, two installations and an assortment of military suppliers providing access to all three routes appeared near the Hudson-Mohawk confluence. On the west bank of the Hudson, just north of present-day Albany, a site for the manufacture of war materials was established, and on the east bank, the Greenbush Cantonment became a gathering point for troops preparing to be sent to the front lines.

The Watervliet Arsenal, the oldest continuously active armaments manufacturer in the United States, traces its relatively modest beginnings to the War of 1812. On July 14, 1813, James Gibbons sold 12 acres of land in the tiny hamlet of Gibbonsville on the west bank of the Hudson to the United States government. Construction began immediately on ten buildings — several of brick defining a large parade ground and the remaining outlying buildings of wood. Known today for its production of technically advanced artillery systems, in the War of 1812 the Watervliet Arsenal provided a variety of equipment to American troops: powder horns, bullet pouches, flints, sword and bayonet scabbards, cartridge boxes and shoulder belts. Its conversion to a factory producing cannon would not take place at Watervliet for another 75 years.

On the opposite bank of the Hudson, a mile-and-a-half east of the village of Greenbush, American troops awaiting deployment were quartered in an encampment known as the Greenbush Cantonment. Careful consideration was given to the selection of the location, a 400-acre tenant farm sold to the government by Stephen Van Rensselaer in 1812. Routes for troop movements north, south, and west were readily accessible, an attribute of the area that had been exploited by the military as early as the French and Indian War. The encampment was also close enough to Albany to facilitate the enjoy-

Remains of the Barracks at Greenbush, 1840. *"The United States cantonment, now in ruins, was erected here during the late war, on a commanding eminence 2 miles SSE. of Albany. It consisted of very extensive wooden barracks for soldiers, officers' quarters, &c., &c., calculated for the accommodation in winter quarters of 5,000 men." Description from John Warner Barber (1798–1885),* Historical Collections of the State of New York, *published in 1841.*

Camp Dupont, an encampment near Wilmington, Delaware, established in the spring of 1814. Camp Dupont was typical of military encampments of the time, with its rows of tents and large parade ground. Permanent facilities like the Greenbush Cantonment had numerous buildings serving as barracks, officers' quarters, magazines and supply depots. Winter encampments intended for a single season usually consisted of rows of huts built by the troops for better shelter than that afforded by canvas tents, with nearby houses taken over for officers' lodgings and headquarters.

ment of the pleasures of city life for officers but just far enough away to deny common soldiers the same privileges.

Eight barracks 250 feet long and two stories high and capable of providing quarters for a total of 4,000 soldiers were constructed on either side of an extensive parade ground. Officers were housed in buildings at each end of the parade ground. Among other structures were commissary buildings, an arsenal and armory, guard houses, stables, and a 100-bed hospital.

$400
Reward.

DESERTED

From the Rendezvous of the 41st Regiment U. S. Infantry, at the City of Hudson, the following Persons:

FIFTY DOLLARS a piece will be given for the above Deserters, if delivered at Greenbush or at Fort Gansevoort, City of New-York.

T. E. BEEKMAN,

Broadside description of deserters, July 1814. Desertion was a constant problem for both armies, and stern measures were often taken to suppress this act. In 1814 alone, the U.S. Army executed 146 deserters. The 41st U.S. Infantry Regiment, authorized in January 1813, was raised in New York.

Accompanying almost every chronicle of the Cantonment's history is a surgeon's eyewitness account of an execution. The target for the firing squad was a black heart pinned to the coat of an unfortunate soldier convicted for desertion. His stated intention had been to visit his wife and three children who lived 30 miles from the camp and then return to camp. Having been found guilty of the same infraction *three times previously*, he was shown no mercy. Escorted to the execution site in full view of the entire drawn-up encampment, he was ordered to kneel on his coffin. The weapons of the eight members of the firing squad had all been charged with powder, but only seven with ball, allowing each member of the squad to think that he may have been the one to discharge the ineffective musket.

Upon a signal, a fusillade cut down the soldier, who fell back with a cry. To ensure a quick death and to prevent needless suffering, the sergeant of the guard then administered a musket shot to the head at close range. The assembled troops were then marched single file past the corpse, the better to impress upon them the penalty for desertion.

With the end of the war in 1815, the Cantonment fell into disuse, eventually being sold by the government in 1831. Of the numerous buildings constructed during the war years, only one — an officers' barracks — remains today. Now a private home, that building is a living testament to the events of the War of 1812.

"Uncle Sam" Wilson

Along with our national anthem — "The Star Spangled Banner" — perhaps the other most enduring cultural icon of the War of 1812 is "Uncle Sam." Born in Arlington, Massachusetts, in 1766, Samuel Wilson moved to Troy, New York, in 1789, where he and his brother Ebenezer went into business. By 1812, Sam Wilson was a successful meat packer, obtaining contracts to provide beef to American forces, especially to troops in nearby Greenbush as well as those along the northern border with Canada.

Soaked in brine for preservation and packed in wooden barrels, pieces of beef and pork were used by both land and naval forces as a mainstay of diet. Most of the barrels used by Samuel Wilson were government property (as were muskets and other military equipment), and, as was customary, were marked with a "U.S." It became popular among the soldiers and teamsters to say that the initials on the barrels referred to "Uncle Sam" Wilson, who supplied the meat to the troops. Over time, items associated with the army and marked "U.S." were linked with his name, eventually becoming a popular personification of the United States. Sam Wilson died in 1854.

At top: the only known photograph of Samuel Wilson. Above, James Montgomery Flagg's iconic poster, based on a British poster featuring Field Marshal Lord Kitchener.

An earlier, less flattering personification of both American colonials and citizens of the United States known as "Brother Jonathan" was soon replaced by the more robust and patriotic "Uncle Sam," resplendent in his red, white and blue clothing.

In 1917, when the United States entered World War I, artist James Montgomery Flagg created the most famous image of Uncle Sam for an army recruiting poster.

Today recognized around the world, the Uncle Sam character remains as popular as ever. Two sites memorialize the real "Uncle Sam" — a statue in Sam Wilson's birthplace of Arlington, Massachusetts and a memorial in Troy's Riverside Park, near the site of his home. RT

War of 1812 Sites along the Great Lakes Seaway Trail

The following sites contain exhibits, artifacts, or other items related to the War of 1812 as well as Peace Gardens [🌹] that will help bring this historic event to life as you travel along the Great Lakes Seaway Trail and Lakes to Locks Passage.

Lake Erie Region

Dunkirk Historical Lighthouse
and Veterans Park Museum
1 Lighthouse Point Dr.
Dunkirk, NY 14048
716-366-5050
www.dunkirklighthouse.com

Erie Maritime Museum
150 East Front St.
Erie, PA 16507
814-452-2744
www.flagshipniagara.org

Buffalo/Niagara Falls Region

🌹 **Black Rock Peace Garden**
269 Dearborn St.
Buffalo, NY 14207

🌹 **Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village**
3755 Tonawanda Creek Rd.,
Amherst, NY 1422
716-689-1440
www.amherstmuseum.org

🌹 **Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens**
2655 South Park Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14218
716-827-1584
www.buffalogardens.com

Buffalo & Erie County Naval & Military Park
One Naval Park Cove
Buffalo, NY 14202
716-847-1773
www.buffalonavalpark.org

Buffalo History Museum
1 Museum Court
Buffalo, NY 14216
716-873-9644
www.buffalohistory.org

🌹 **Community Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden**
1425 Main St.
Niagara Falls, NY 14305

🌹 **Delaware Park Japanese Garden**
25 Nottingham Ct.
Buffalo, NY 14216

🌹 **Faulkner Park**
Main St.
Youngstown, NY 14174

🌹 **Forest Lawn Cemetery**
1411 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14209

🌹 **Front Park**
Port Ave. & 190
Buffalo, NY 14201

🌹 **Hull Family Home & Farmstead**
5976 Genesee St.
Lancaster, NY 14086

🌹 **Lewiston War of 1812 Peace Garden**
476 Center St.
Lewiston, NY 14092

🌹 **Niagara University**
Niagara University,
NY 14109
716-286-8270
www.niagara.edu

North Tonawanda History Museum
54 Webster St.
North Tonawanda, NY 14120
716-213-0554
www.nthistorymuseum.org

Old Fort Niagara
Fort Niagara State Park
Youngstown, NY 14174
716-745-7611
www.oldfortniagara.org

Rochester/Central Lake Ontario Region

🌹 **Brown's Berry Patch**
14264 Roosevelt Highway Rt. 18
Waterport, NY 14571
585-682-5569
www.brownsberrypatch.com

🌹 **Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse**
70 Lighthouse St.
Rochester, NY 14612
585-621-6179
www.geneseelighthouse.org

Genesee Country Village & Museum
1410 Flint Hill Road
Mumford, NY 14511
585-538-6822
www.gcv.org

🌹 **Mayer's Lake Ontario Winery**
1593 Hamlin Parma Townline Rd.
Hilton, NY 14468

Museum of Wayne County History
21 Butternut St.
Lyons, NY 14489
315-946-4943
www.waynehistory.org

Sodus Bay Lighthouse
7606 North Ontario St.
Sodus Point, NY 14555
315-483-4936
www.sodusbaylighthouse.org

🌹 **Sodus Point War of 1812 Mural & Peace Garden**
8364 & 8440 Bay St.
Sodus Point, NY 14555
www.historicsoduspoint.com

🌹 **US Made Mercantile**
146 Ridge Road West
Gaines, NY 14411

🌹 **Williamson-Pultneyville Historical Society**
4130 Mill St.
Pultneyville, NY 14538
315-589-9892
www.w-phs.org

Eastern Lake Ontario Region

Fort Ontario State Historic Site
1 East 4th Street
Oswego, NY 13126
315-343-4711
www.fortontario.com

H. Lee White Marine Museum
1 W. 1st St. Pier
Oswego, NY 13126
315-342-0480
www.hleewhitemaritimemuseum.com

Jefferson County Historical Society
228 Washington Street
Watertown, NY 13601
315-782-3491
www.jeffersoncountyhistory.org

🌹 **Oswego War of 1812 Peace Garden**
160 East First St.
Oswego, NY 13126

Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site
504 West Main St.
Sackets Harbor, NY 13685
315-646-3634
www.sacketsharborbattlefield.org

Sackets Harbor Visitors Center
301 West Main St.
Sackets Harbor, NY 13685
315-646-2321
www.sacketsharborny.com

🌹 **Seaway Trail Discovery Center**
401 W. Main St.
Sackets Harbor, NY 13685
315-646-1000
www.seawaytrail.com/discoverycenter

Thousand Islands/St. Lawrence River Region

Fort La Présentation Association
Lighthouse Point
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
315-394-1749
www.fort1749.org

🌹 **Ogdensburg War of 1812 Peace Garden**
Downtown Arterial Highway
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

War of 1812 Sites along the Lakes to Locks Passage

Clinton County Historical Museum
98 Ohio Avenue
Plattsburgh, New York 12903
518-561-0340
www.clintoncountyhistorical.org

Kent-Delord House Museum
17 Cumberland Avenue
Plattsburgh, NY 12901
518-561-1035
www.kentdelordhouse.org

War of 1812 Museum operated by the Battle of Plattsburgh Association
31 Washington Rd
Plattsburgh, NY 12903
518-566-1814
www.battleofplattsburgh.org

U.S.S. Ticonderoga at the Skenesborough Museum and Heritage Area Visitor Center
Skenesborough Drive
Whitehall, NY 12887
518-499-1155 or 499-0716
www.skenesborough.com

Watervliet Arsenal Museum
Broadway
Watervliet, NY 12189
www.wva.army.mil/museum.php

Rensselaer County Historical Society
57 Second Street,
Troy, NY 12180
518-244-6846
www.rchsonline.org

Reenactors portray various aspects of military and civilian life during the War of 1812.

A How-to Guide for Aspiring Reenactors

Interested in stepping back in time as a living history reenactor? Here are ways to make your dream come true and your interest a real experience.

- *Ask reenactors at French & Indian War, American Revolution, War of 1812 and other heritage events at historic sites about their clothing, weapons, tools, and equipment.*
- *Contact reenactors and historic site managers about how you can join a living history unit.*
- *Ask if units loan authentically-made uniforms and accoutrements for your first year, and if they provide guidance for both purchase of clothing and can provide patterns so you can make your own if you choose.*
- *Study the details of your chosen historic period to help you collect items true to that time by searching antiquarian book sales and eBay.*
- *Ask unit leaders if they are strictly authentic or offer historically-sound commemoration; for example, some units camp in a primitive style and eat only the food of that era; typically most groups are less strict in their after-hours camp life and activities.*
- *Many groups are very family-friendly, and the hobby can be a great hands-on experience for children and an activity that everyone can participate in.*
- *Be aware that joining a living history unit can be essential since participation at events is often by invitation only.*

When visiting Canada...

Many of the significant events of the War of 1812 took place in Canada, and most are close to the United States-Canada border. Sites nearby the Great Lakes Seaway Trail in the Niagara region include Fort Erie, Niagara Falls (Chippawa and Lundy's Lane) Queenston (Battle of Queenston Heights), Fort George and Niagara-on-the-Lake, all located in Ontario's Niagara Peninsula.

Sites near or along the St. Lawrence River include Kingston (home base of the Royal Navy on Lake Ontario), Prescott (Fort Wellington), and Upper Canada Village and the Crysler's Farm Battlefield Visitor's Centre in Morrisonville.

Other sites related to the war, as well as places like Hamilton (Stoney Creek Battlefield) and Toronto (Fort York) are further away, but still within a few hour's drive of the Seaway Trail.

U. S. visitors to Canada are required to present either an approved enhanced driver's license or a current U. S. Passport.

The Fort York National Historic Site, operated as a museum of the City of Toronto, houses Canada's largest collection of War of 1812 period buildings.

Timeline of the War of 1812

March 25, 1802 The Treaty of Amiens ends ten years of war in Europe between Revolutionary France and various European powers, including Great Britain.

April 30, 1803 Treaty signed with France for the Louisiana Purchase, transfer of ownership completed by December 20, 1803.

May 18, 1803 War resumes between Napoleonic France and Great Britain and her allies (War of the Third Coalition).

1803 British begin forcibly taking sailors from American ships and impressing them into the Royal Navy, violating American neutrality.

October 21, 1805 A British fleet led by Admiral Horatio Nelson defeats the combined French and Spanish fleets at the Battle of Trafalgar, greatly diminishing French naval power.

June 22, 1807 The American warship USS *Chesapeake* is fired upon by the British warship HMS *Leopard* off the Virginia coast, causing an uproar in the United States with angry calls for war against Great Britain.

December 22, 1807 President Thomas Jefferson imposes an embargo on all trade with Great Britain. Largely a failure, it is replaced in 1809 with the Non-Intercourse Act.

March 4, 1809 James Madison is inaugurated as the fourth President of the United States.

November 4, 1811 "War Congress" (12th Congress) convenes.

November 7, 1811 The Battle of Tippecanoe (Indiana), fought between Indians led by Tecumseh's brother, The Prophet, and William Henry Harrison's American army.

June 16, 1812 British Government repeals Orders in Council in an attempt to defuse U.S. anger over years of British (and French) interference with American overseas trade.

June 18, 1812 Congress declares war on Great Britain, unaware of Britain's new willingness to address long-standing American grievances.

June 22, 1812 Napoleon launches a massive invasion of Russia.

June–August 1812 Riots break out in Baltimore protesting the war.

July 12, 1812 General William Hull's American troops invade Canada — the first of several failed attempts made by the U.S. to invade Canada.

July 17, 1812 The British capture Fort Mackinac (Michigan).

July 19, 1812 The British raid Sackets Harbor (New York).

August 5, 1812 Battle of Brownstown (Michigan).

August 15, 1812 Fort Dearborn (Chicago, Illinois) massacre.

August 16, 1812 General William Hull surrenders Detroit to British General Isaac Brock (Michigan).

August 19, 1812 The USS *Constitution* defeats HMS *Guerrière.*

September 5–12, 1812 British siege of Fort Wayne (Indiana).

September 7, 1812 Napoleon wins the Battle of Borodino (Russia).

October 12, 1812 British raid on Charlotte (Rochester, New York).

October 13, 1812 Battle of Queenston Heights (Canada).

October 25, 1812 USS *United States* defeats HMS *Macedonian.*

November 9–10, 1812 Commodore Isaac Chauncey's American squadron attacks the British naval base at Kingston (Canada).

December 29, 1812 The USS *Constitution* defeats HMS *Java.*

January 18–23, 1813 Battle of Frenchtown and subsequent "Raisin River massacre" — American prisoners captured at Frenchtown are killed (Michigan).

February 7 and 22, 1813 American raid on Brockville (Canada) in an attempt to free prisoners, and British raid Ogdensburg (New York) later in the month in retaliation.

February 24, 1813 USS *Hornet* defeats HMS *Peacock.*

March 27, 1813 Oliver Hazard Perry arrives at Presque Isle (Erie, Pennsylvania) to supervise the construction of a fleet on Lake Erie.

January–May, 1813 British naval blockade of the United States imposed from Long Island to the Gulf of Mexico. By April 1814, the blockade is extended to include the New England coast.

April 27, 1813 U.S. troops capture and burn the town of York (Toronto, Canada).

April 27–May 9, 1813 First British siege of Fort Meigs (Ohio).

May 27, 1813 Capture of Fort George (Canada) by American forces.

May 28, 1813 British evacuate their posts in the Niagara region.

May 29, 1813 British attack on Sackets Harbor fails (New York).

June 1813 Several British raids along the south coast of Lake Ontario, including Charlotte (New York).

June 1, 1813 HMS *Shannon* defeats USS *Chesapeake.*

June 6, 1813 Battle of Stoney Creek (Canada).

June 24, 1813 Battle of Beaver Dams (Canada).

June 15–16, 1813 Battle of Sodus Point (New York).

June 26, 1813 British attack Hampton (Virginia).

July 11–12, 1813 British raid Black Rock (Buffalo, New York).

July 19–21, 1813 British raid at Cranberry Creek (Alexandria Bay, New York).

July 21–28, 1813 Second British siege of Fort Meigs (Ohio).

August 1–2, 1813 Battle of Fort Stephenson (Ohio).

August 4, 1813 Perry's warships get over the bar in Presque Isle Bay and fleet is assembled in Lake Erie (Erie, Pennsylvania).

August 7–8, 1813 American schooners *Hamilton* and *Scourge* founder and sink on Lake Ontario (near Hamilton, Canada).

September 1813 British raids continue along the south coast of Lake Ontario, including Charlotte (New York).

September 10, 1813 Commodore Perry defeats and captures the British fleet at the Battle of Lake Erie (near Put-In-Bay, Ohio).

September 27, 1813 General William Henry Harrison's American army crosses into Canada.

October 5, 1813 Battle of the Thames (Canada). Procter's British army is routed and captured, and Tecumseh is killed.

October 16–19, 1813 Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Leipzig (Saxony, Germany). Napoleon's forces retreat to France by the end of the year.

October 25–26, 1813 Battle of Chateauguay (Canada).

November 1, 1813 Battle of French Creek (New York).

November 4, 1813 Great Britain offers the United States direct peace negotiations.

November 11, 1813 The Battle of Crysler's Farm (Canada).

December 10, 1813 Americans abandon Fort George and burn the village of Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada).

December 18, 1813 Fort Niagara captured and occupied by the British (Youngstown, New York).

December 19–31, 1813 Lewiston, Fort Schlosser, Black Rock, and Buffalo destroyed by the British (New York).

January, 1814 Campaign against the Creek Indians in Alabama

March 27–28, 1814 General Andrew Jackson's troops defeat the Creek Indian "Red Sticks" at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend (Alabama).

March 31, 1814 Russian, Prussian, Austrian and other allied forces in France capture Paris, ending the war in Europe.

April 6, 1814 Napoleon abdicates the imperial throne of France and a few days later accepts exile to Elba, an island off the coast of Italy.

April 14, 1814 U.S. repeals Embargo Act and Non-importation laws.

May 1814 Both sides conduct raids affecting the Lake Champlain valley, the coasts of Lake Ontario, and the Thames Valley of Upper Canada.

May 5–6, 1814 British capture Fort Ontario (Oswego, New York).

May 14, 1814 Final British raid on Charlotte (New York).

May 15, 1814 Battle of Pultneyville (New York).

May 28–29, 1814 Battle of Big Sandy and the Cable Carry (New York).

July 3, 1814 Americans capture Fort Erie (Canada) across the Niagara River from Buffalo, beginning the 1814 invasion of Canada.

July 5, 1814 General Winfield Scott's brigade defeats British regulars at the Battle of Chippawa (Canada).

July 25, 1814 The Battle of Lundy's Lane. Battle is a draw, but American forces retreat back to Fort Erie (Niagara Falls, Canada).

August 8, 1814 Peace negotiations begin in Ghent (Belgium).

August 10, 1814 British raid on Stonington (Connecticut).

August 13–September 21, 1814 British besiege American forces holding Fort Erie (Canada).

August 15–16, 1814 British night assault on Fort Erie is repulsed with heavy losses.

August 24, 1814 American forces routed at the Battle of Bladensburg (Maryland), opening the way for the capture of Washington, DC.

August 24–25, 1814 The British burn Washington, DC in retaliation for the burning of York and other "scorched earth" depredations by American forces during the war. President James Madison flees the Capital.

August 28, 1814 Nantucket Island declares neutrality (Massachusetts).

September 1, 1814 A large British army of veteran troops based in Montreal moves south towards Plattsburgh, New York.

September 11, 1814 British naval forces are defeated at the Battle of Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain (New York). Land forces retreat back to Canada.

September 12–16, 1814 British repulsed at Mobile, Alabama.

September 12–14, 1814 Battle of North Point, in Maryland, delaying the British advance on Baltimore.

September 13–14, 1814 British ships bombard Fort McHenry, defending Baltimore harbor, in preparation for an attack on Baltimore. Francis Scott Key writes "The Star Spangled Banner." Entrenched militia defending Baltimore discourage British troops from attacking the city.

September 17, 1814 American troops sortie from Fort Erie and attack British siege lines, disrupting British operations.

October 19, 1814 Battle of Cook's Mills (Canada).

November 5, 1814 Americans abandon Fort Erie. The 1814 U.S. invasion of Canada in the Niagara region ends in failure.

December 14, 1814 British ships overwhelm American gunboats defending New Orleans on Lake Borgne (Louisiana).

December 15, 1814–January 5, 1815 Hartford Convention (Connecticut). New England delegates debate secession over Federal war and trade policies.

December 23, 1814–January 8, 1815 British and American forces clash around New Orleans. Andrew Jackson's army of regulars and militia decisively defeat the British at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8.

December 24, 1814 The Treaty of Ghent is signed. American and British diplomats agree on terms and a return to *status quo ante bellum* — there will be no changes in territory between the two countries.

February 17, 1815 The peace treaty is ratified and President Madison declares the war over.

March 5, 1815 Napoleon returns to France from exile on the island of Elba — beginning the "Hundred Days" and renewed warfare in Europe.

June 18, 1815 Battle of Waterloo (Belgium). Napoleon's army is defeated by British, Prussian and allied forces led by the Duke of Wellington and Prussian Marshal Blücher, effectively ending the Napoleonic Wars.

May 5, 1821 Napoleon dies in exile on the island of St. Helena.

Events highlighted in blue are covered in more detail in this book.

An American militiaman, from Lossing's Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812.

Resources for more information

Books

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Carl Benn, ***The Iroquois in the War of 1812*** (1998). A Canadian historian documents the story of the Iroquois caught in the crossfire of war.

Donald E. Graves, ed., ***Fighting for Canada: Seven Battles, 1758–1945***, volume 1 (2000). Volume 1 contains a chapter on the Battle of Queenston Heights by Robert Malcolmson; Graves is the pre-eminent Canadian historian of the War of 1812 and has written the definitive books on the Battle of Chippawa (1994), the Battle of Lundy's Lane (1997), the Battle of Crysler's Farm (1999) and edited and updated J. Mackay Hitsman's classic ***The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*** (1999).

Donald R. Hickey, ***The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*** (2012) — solid, comprehensive basic account — well-balanced in its treatment of the military, political, economic, and diplomatic aspects of the war.

Jon Latimer, *1812:* ***The War with America*** (2007) gives the British perspective on the war.

Alan Taylor, ***The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies*** (2011) — an intriguing and revelatory account of the impact of the war on the people of the St. Lawrence and Niagara regions.

GENERAL HISTORIES

Russell P. Bellico, ***Sail and Steam in the Mountains: A Maritime and Military History of Lake George and Lake Champlain*** (1992; rev. ed. 2001), the first broad, authoritative treatment of his themes in more than a century; and ***Chronicles of Lake Champlain / Journeys in War and Peace*** (1999), a collection of annotated primary sources.

Pierre Berton, ***The Invasion of Canada 1812–1813*** and ***Flames Across the Border 1813–1814*** (1981) two-volume narrative representing the Canadian perspective.

Walter R. Borneman, ***1812: The War That Forged a Nation*** (2004).

Eliot A. Cohen, ***Conquered into Liberty: Two Centuries of Battles along the Great Warpath that Made the American Way of War*** (2011). A brilliant strategic analyst sets the Battle of Plattsburgh into the larger, two-century story of struggle to control the Champlain corridor.

Gilbert Collins, ***Guidebook to the Historic Sites of the War of 1812*** (1998; rev. ed. 2006). A detailed local history guide, especially strong on sites on the Canadian side of the border.

Mark Collins Jenkins and David A. Taylor, ***The War of 1812 and the Rise of the U.S. Navy*** (2012).

Ronald J. Dale, ***The Invasion of Canada: The Battles of the War of 1812*** (2001). A veteran Parks Canada site manager tells a comprehensive story.

John R. Elting, ***Amateurs to Arms! A Military History of the War of 1812*** (1991).

Allan S. Everest, ***The War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley*** (1981; 2011).

Donald R. Hickey, ***Don't Give Up the Ship! Myths of the War of 1812*** (2007) — valuable companion volume to *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* — organized topically, i.e., best and worst generals, role of women, weapons of war, etc.

Hickey and Connie D. Clark, ***The Rocket's Red Glare: An Illustrated History of the War of 1812*** (2011).

A.J. Langguth, ***Union 1812: The Americans Who Fought the Second War of Independence*** (2006). An engaging popular history of the war.

Benson J. Lossing's 19th-century ***Pictorial Field–Book of the War of 1812*** — an old-fashioned narrative, full of period detail and illustrations, it remains a classic. On line at http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wcarr1/Lossing2/Contents.html.

Robert Malcomson, ***A Very Brilliant Affair: The Battle of Queenston Heights, 1812*** (2006) and ***Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812–1814*** (1999; 2003) — insightful and detailed analyses of carefully defined subplots of the war.

Theodore Roosevelt, ***The Naval War of 1812; or The History of the U.S. Navy during the Last War with Great Britain*** (1882). An epic story, dramatically told by a man just two years out of Harvard. The book established his reputation as a serious writer and historian. Roosevelt went on to become Assistant Secretary of the Navy (1897–1898), Governor of New York State (1899–1900), and President of the United States (1901–1909).

David Curtis Skaggs and Larry L. Nelson, eds., ***The Sixty Years' War for the Great Lakes, 1754–1814*** (2001). Worthwhile for its broad historical context and close attention to the impact of the War of 1812 on Native communities on both sides of the border.

J.C.A. Stagg, ***Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy and Warfare in the Early Republic, 1783–1830*** (1983). The geo-political "big picture."

Spencer Tucker, et al., ***The Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*** — can be accessed at google.com.

Websites

In addition to the following list of sources, almost every upstate New York county and community has its own collection of materials online. Wikipedia often serves as a useful starting point for many selected topics.

Great Lakes Seaway Trail
www.seawaytrail.com/warof1812

Lakes to Locks Passage
www.lakestolocks.org

General Overview
www.warof1812.ca
www.historycentral.com/1812
www.vectorsite.net/tw1812.html

American Naval Records Society
www.ibiblio.org/anrs/1812.html
(a treasure trove of primary source material)

Erie Maritime Museum
www.eriemaritimemuseum.org

Battles of the War of 1812
www.warof1812.ca/battles.htm

Daily Blog of the War
www.blogof1812.com

The War of 1812 in the North Country
http://northcountrynow.com/news/war-1812-north-country-200-years-later-061005

Bicentennial of the War of 1812
http://ourflagwasstillthere.org
(includes an interactive timeline)

The Canadian Perspective
http://canadachannel.ca/HCO/index.php/6._The_War_of_1812
(well-illustrated)

Sackets Harbor Battlefield State Historic Site
http://sacketsharborbattlefield.org

Old Fort Niagara
http://oldfortniagara.org

Fort Ontario State Historic Site
www.fortontario.com

Fort La Présentation Association
www.fort1749.org

War on Lake Ontario
www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/v4_1942/v4i4.pdf

Lake Champlain War of 1812
www.champlain1812.com

NY State War of 1812
www.nysm.nysed.gov/Warof1812

Lacolle Mill Blockhouse
www.ileauxnoix.com/eng tourisme/blockhaus.html

The Niagara Frontier Joint U.S.-Canadian Bicentennial Commission
http://www.visit1812.com