

Mississauga Remembers

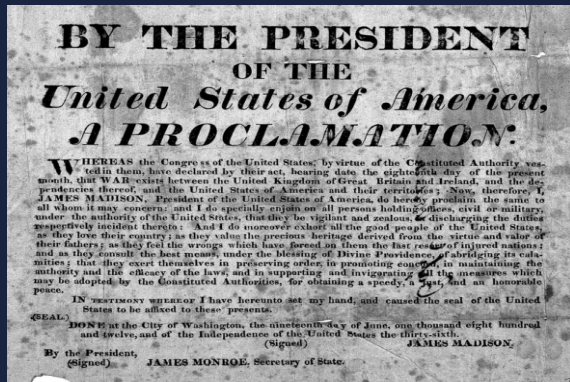
The War of 1812



War is Declared

Storm clouds of impending war had been gathering for years. The fledgling United States of America and Great Britain had come close to war leading up to 1812, notably in 1807 after the Chesapeake Affair, although war had been averted before 1812. During this time Britain was also at war with Napoleonic France. Prior to the outbreak of war between Great Britain and the United States, American discontent had continued to build. Leading the way on the list of complaints was the British policy of impressment, the blockading of trading ports, and the belief that the British were supporting Indigenous unrest in the Northwest. On June 1, 1812 American President James Madison sent a message to Congress outlining American grievances against Britain.

Although not unanimous, both the House of Representatives and the American Senate voted in favour of declaring war in what was the closest vote for war in American history. On June 18, President Madison signed the resolution into law. War was officially declared. A proclamation of war was published on June 19, 1812.



Early Days

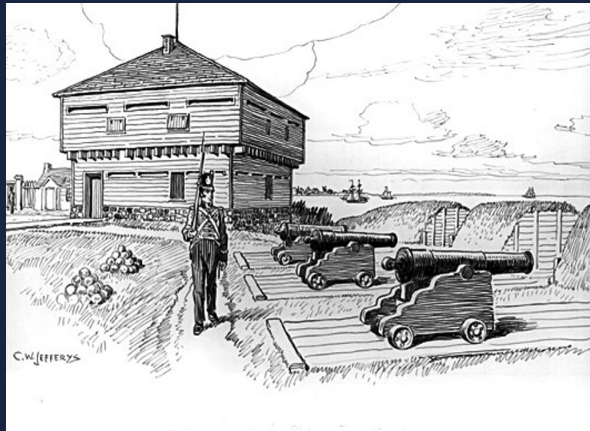
Although war was declared, open conflict was still weeks away. The American declaration of war against Britain and her colonies set into motion a series of events that would shape the future of North America. Information often travelled slowly, and news of the declaration of war reached Governor General Sir George Prevost in Quebec on June 25. In Upper Canada (now Ontario) news of the declaration of war was delivered to Major-General Isaac Brock at Fort George in Niagara on June 26. It took several more weeks before the news reached London, England, and several more months before Britain officially responded.

News Travels

The rumblings of potential war had been known in the years and months preceding June of 1812. Many early settlers in historic Mississauga had military family roots, and several were veterans of the American Revolution. Nonetheless for many the thought of war would have been disconcerting and a rupture of the normal routines of life and land. However, to some, war provided excitement, adventure and opportunity. Many young men volunteered to serve with the militia by early June, before war had been formally declared.

While we do not know for certain, word of the coming war would likely have passed by word of mouth, with people gathering at early inns and taverns. Newspapers of the day such as the York Gazette also carried the news.

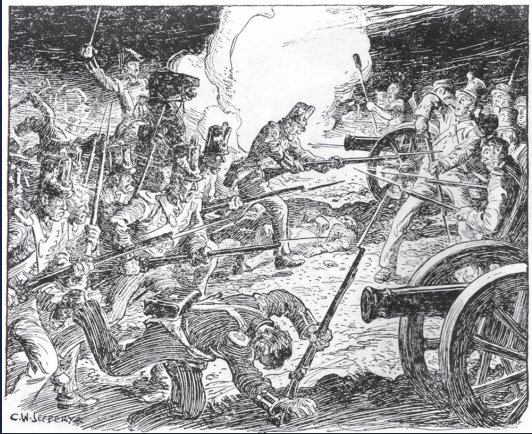
One can imagine the Silverthorn brothers gathered at Philip Cody's tavern on Dundas Street, perhaps listening to stories of past wars from their father John and neighbour Allen Robinet. Perhaps the Gables, Marlatts, Merigolds, Mongers and Thompsons were gathered at Joshua Pollard's inn on the Middle Road discussing the news and newspapers of the day. For Frederick Starr Jarvis and Lewis Bradley, news may have come even sooner: Jarvis' father, Stephen, was the Acting Adjutant General of the Militia in York, while Bradley served as an Adjutant in the 2nd York. Local militia captains Thomas Merigold Sr. and William Thompson also had family connections in York and Niagara respectively, perhaps aiding the news to spread throughout historic Mississauga and beyond. When the storm clouds broke, and conflict began, many residents of historic Mississauga actively took up arms in defence of Canada.



Above: Blockhouse and Old Battery, Old Fort York by C.W. Jefferys
Left: Proclamation of War, June 19, 1812

The Militia

The Militia Act of 1808 laid the foundation for civilian involvement during the War of 1812. Volunteer militiamen from historic Mississauga (then known as Toronto Township) were involved in a variety of capacities during the War, with some serving in support-oriented duties with the Embodied Militia, while others saw military action as members of the First and Second Flank Companies of the 2nd Regiment of the York Militia (2nd York).



Some militia volunteers participated in the transport of supplies, garrison duty, and road maintenance, amongst other duties, while others served in the Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada, the Royal Artillery Drivers (Car Brigade), and the Commissariat and the Wagon Department. When they served, militia volunteers often left their families and homes for weeks or months at a time.



Through this dedicated service, militiamen from this community were present and participated in several battles during the war, including engagements at Fort Detroit, Queenston Heights, Fort George, Fort York, St. David's, Stoney Creek, Chippawa, Lundy's Lane, Fort Erie, others. Some were wounded, some captured, some deserted, and some never returned.

Top: Battle of Stoney Creek by C.W. Jefferys

Bottom: 1812 Militiaman Private uniform by Rene Chartrand, Parks Canada

Right: Battle of Lundy's Lane by C.W. Jefferys

Indigenous Mississaugas

Indigenous peoples found themselves involved in the conflict, on both sides. Indigenous warriors allied to the British Crown played an important role in the British war effort and were vital in several British victories, including at Detroit and Queenston Heights. Indigenous warriors from the Mississaugas of the Credit River also found themselves supporting the British war effort. Among them were Ajetans (James Ajetance), Wageezhegome (John Cameron), Manoonooding (James Chechok), Pemiskishigon (George Henry), Negahnub (Lawrence Herkimer), Minowargewon (William Herkimer), Nawahjegezhegwaby (Joseph Sawyer), Pahoombwawindung (Thomas Smith), Tobecoo (John Tobeco) and Kish-ki-wabik (White John), likely amongst others.

Local Connections

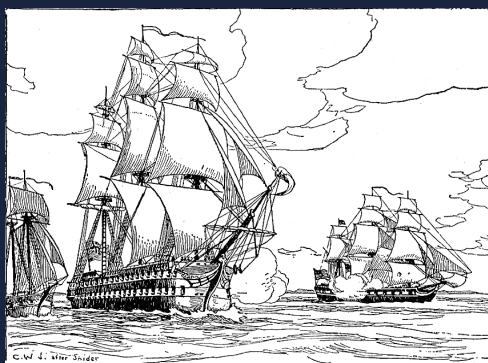


More than 50 individuals from historic Mississauga served with the militia during the war. Among them was Lewis Bradley, after whom the Bradley Museum is named, who served as an Adjutant with the 2nd York. Others include his father-in-law, Captain Thomas Merigold Sr., as well as his sons Thomas Jr., Daniel and

Amos. Many of their neighbours also served, including members of the Gable, Greeniaus, Hemphill, Hendershott, Jarvis, Marlatt, Monger, Oliphant and Pollard families, amongst others. Captain William Thompson also lived nearby and was present at several battles during the conflict. Warren Clarkson, after whom Clarkson was named, also served in the militia during the war. Others included Aaron, Joseph and Thomas Silverthorn, Amos Willcox and Philip Cody. 37 militia veterans who served during the war are known to be buried within the City of Mississauga today.

On the Land & Water

The War of 1812 lasted for more than two years, with engagements spread out across a wide area, both on land and on water. For most of the war, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie were contested bodies of water, with British and American squadrons battling for control of the lakes.



One notable naval engagement became known as the “Burlington Races” and took place on September 28, 1813. Much of the action would have been visible from the Lake Ontario shoreline here in historic Mississauga. The American squadron, lead by Commodore Isaac Chauncey, sought to engage the Royal

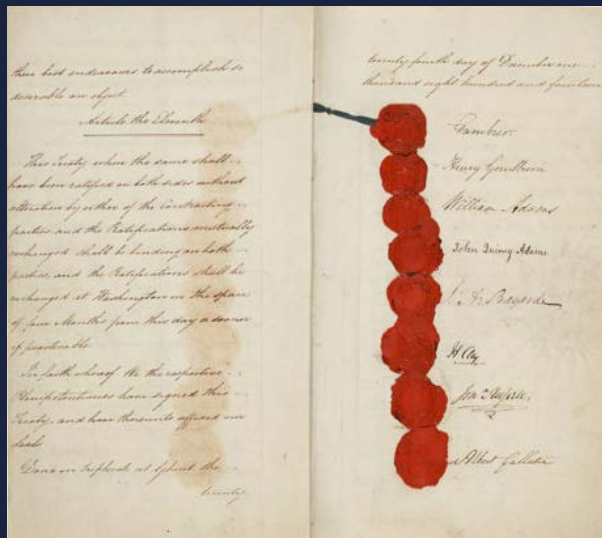
Navy squadron, which was commanded by Commodore James Yeo. The Americans had 10 ships to the British squadron’s six. The Americans also had a significant firepower advantage. The British ships were faster and more maneuverable. Leaving the harbour at York (Toronto), the British squadron made a run for open water, closely pursued. This became a pivotal battle for control of Lake Ontario, and perhaps the war itself.

At daylight, the British squadron was west of Toronto, close to modern Port Credit. The squadrons stalked each other. At noon, they engaged. Both flagships, the USS *General Pike* and the HMS *Wolfe*, were badly damaged. The British then sailed towards Burlington, with the American squadron limping in pursuit. “All or none”, Chauncey is said to have remarked. He was determined to end the contest for control of the lake.

When the British squadron reached Burlington Bay, they tacked to face the oncoming American ships and dropped anchor. Their backs to land, and precious British batteries, their guns were aimed at the oncoming American fleet. Faced with odds suddenly turned in his prey’s favour, Chauncey had missed his chance. The battle was over, and the damaged American squadron retreated. The Royal Navy squadron survived to fight another day, and control of the lake, and the war itself, remained contested.

The Treaty of Ghent, which formally ended the war, was signed in Europe on December 24, 1814, between Great Britain and the United States. The treaty returned borders to their pre-war status, and Indigenous concerns on both sides of the border were largely ignored. This would have lasting effects on Indigenous peoples and their relationship with governments in both Canada and the United States. The peace treaty also led to the Rush-Bagot Treaty of 1818 which demilitarized the Great Lakes and the international border. However, news of the peace treaty travelled slowly across the ocean, and several battles took place in early 1815 before knowledge of the peace treaty reached North America. In the aftermath of the war, several towns and cities along the contested border were in ashes, and the civilian populations faced tremendous losses and great hardship.

The many published interpretations and reinterpretations of the War of 1812 reinforce the concept that the war was, at times, a strange and confusing affair. The two principal nations arguably did not want the war in the first place, or at the very least actively sought to escape from the conflict several times during the war. The causes of the war were muddled, and many were no longer even factors by the time the war commenced. Affairs were often confused and mismanaged, with battles being fought even after the peace treaty had been negotiated. The War of 1812, while helping to cement two emerging National identities and ideologies in Canada and the United States of America, also fractured societies and families.



Above: Treaty of Ghent, 1814

Left: Ships of War on the Great Lakes by C.W. Jefferys



For more information, contact Heritage Mississauga:



1921 Dundas St. W.

Mississauga, ON L5K 1R2

www.heritagemississauga.com