

Biography of Captain William Thompson

Captain William Thompson (1786-1860)

William Thompson was born on June 17th, 1786 in New Brunswick, the eldest son of Cornelius and Rebecca (nee Emmons) Thompson. Cornelius had served with the New Jersey Volunteers, a Loyalist Regiment, during the American Revolution. The family would grow over the years to include Augustus (born 1788), Frederick (born 1790), Amelia (born 1792), Mary (born 1793), Cornelius Oliver (born 1797), and Sarah (born 1800).

The Thompson family immigrated to Upper Canada from New Brunswick in 1808, originally settling in Niagara, in Grantham Township. In 1810 Cornelius Thompson received an additional 400 acres in southwest Toronto Township (historic Mississauga). It was here, in the Clarkson area of Toronto Township (historic Mississauga), that Cornelius' son William would come to settle. William married Jane Garden sometime before 1813 and the couple had 9 children.

William and his three brothers (Augustus, Frederick and Oliver Cornelius) all volunteered to serve with the militia during the War of 1812. William received his commission as Captain in the 2nd Regiment of York Militia in 1811, which was signed by Major General Isaac Brock. William's three brothers all served in the Lincoln Militia. William may have been present at the Battle of Queenston Heights on October 13th, 1812, although not engaged in the actual battle. William took part in the funeral procession for Major-General Isaac Brock and Lieutenant Colonel John Macdonnell (Captain Thompson and Lieutenant Frederick Starr Jarvis of the 2nd York acted as pallbearers for Macdonnell).

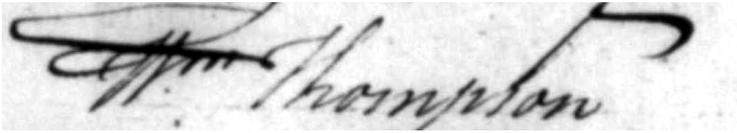
In 1813 William joined the Car Brigade with the Royal Artillery Drivers, and also served for a time in the Commissariat Department (in the accounts department) overseeing transport of supplies between Burlington Heights and Niagara. As a member of the 2nd Regiment of York Militia, William captained a company at the Battle of Lundy's Lane on July 25th, 1814. On July 27th, 1814, William, together with his brother Augustus (Augustine), was captured by American troops led by the infamous traitor Joseph Willcocks near St. David's, and was taken prisoner. He was held at Cheshire, Massachusetts for the remainder of the war, and was not released until March of 1815. William Hamilton Merritt, who was held prisoner with William, described him as "a man of most exemplary morals, a mild, good temper, and possessed of more fortitude than generally falls to the lot of mankind."

During the war, the Thompson family suffered "very severe losses" to land and family: William's youngest brother, Cornelius Oliver, died in 1813 of illness at the age of 16 while on duty in Niagara, and William's father, Cornelius, died in 1814. Additionally, another brother Frederick was severely wounded during the war, and died prematurely in 1822. Following his release, Augustus purchased a commission and entered the British Army, and served abroad, including in Greece, where he likely died in the 1830s.

After the war, William settled permanently in Toronto Township, and became of the historic Mississauga's leading citizens. He developed a large estate, dubbed "Harwood". He also came to purchase several lots, likely as speculation, within Erindale Village. In 1816 he became a Justice of the Peace, and served as such until 1838. William also served for many years as an officer of the West York Militia. During the Rebellion of 1837 he was on active service as Colonel in command of his regiment in York County. In 1846, after the reorganization of the militia, he became Lieutenant-Colonel of the 1st Battalion of York militia. William also entered politics. In 1824 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly. Staunchly conservative, William was a prominent member of the Church of England, a founder of St. Peter's Anglican Church (Erindale), and a personal friend of Bishop John Strachan, Sir John Beverley Robinson and other members of the so-called elite "family compact."

William's support of the government elite would cause him to lose the support of his constituents. He withdrew from the election of 1828, which resulted in the election of reform supporter William Lyon Mackenzie. In 1844 William became a member of Toronto Township's first council, and served as the first elected Reeve (Mayor) of Toronto Township in 1851. Colonel William Thompson died in 1860 and was buried at St. Jude's Anglican Cemetery in Oakville.

There is no known portrait of William Thompson.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Wm Thompson". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent flourish at the end of the word "Thompson".

Captain William Thompson's signature, from December 24th, 1812