

Remembering Historic Mississauga and the War of 1812



Commemorative medal designed
after the General Service Medal for
War of 1812 service

Historic Mississauga and the War of 1812

2012 marks the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. Although peace was concluded in late 1814, conflict continued into early 1815, and events and celebrations commemorating the bicentennial of the war, including tributes, dedications, anniversaries, re-enactments and publications will stretch over several years. In commemoration of the bicentennial, many dedicated cultural heritage organizations, museums, historic sites and volunteer groups are focusing energies on significant events and research projects connected to the conflict.

Heritage Mississauga has undertaken a research project aimed at documenting the residents of historic Mississauga who volunteered to serve with the militia during the War of 1812.

While the City of Mississauga (formerly Toronto Township) has some connections to the War of 1812 in the form of past residents who served as militiamen during the war, largely along the Niagara frontier, no battles or events of note took place within the modern boundaries of the City of Mississauga. To the east, in York (now the City of Toronto), Fort York was a military bastion during the war, and was captured and destroyed by American forces in 1813. Fort York was rebuilt in 1814 and stands today as a National Historic Site in Canada. To the south and west conflict neared our borders as invading American forces were repelled at engagements ranging from Stoney Creek to Burlington Bay.

Volunteer militiamen from Toronto Township (now the City of Mississauga) were involved in various capacities during the War, with some serving in support-oriented duties with the Embodied Militia, while others seeing action in 1812 as volunteer members of the First and Second Flank Companies of the 2nd Regiment of the York

Militia (with some others serving with the Lincoln Militia and other regiments). In 1813 and 1814, as the militia was reorganized, some of “our” militiamen served with the Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada, and others with the Royal Artillery Drivers (Car Brigade), Rifle Company, and with the Commissariat (Wagon Department).

Through this dedicated service, many of “our” militiamen were present and participated in some of the major engagements during the course of the war, including battles at Chippawa, Burlington Heights, Fort Detroit, Fort Erie, Fort George, Fort York, Lundy’s Lane, Queenston Heights, St. David’s, Stoney Creek, and others. Most often, their service was less glamorous but no less important to the war effort, namely in the transport of goods and supplies, garrison duty, and road maintenance, although some were involved in the hostilities, some were wounded, some captured, some deserted, and some never returned home.

Heritage Mississauga is in the process of documenting and exploring our City’s historic connections to the War of 1812, principally through the identification of individual militiamen. Our primary aim is to identify the service records and burial locations of War of 1812 militia veterans who either lived in or owned land in what is today the City of Mississauga during the War of 1812; militia veterans who lived elsewhere in 1812 but are buried within what is now the City of Mississauga; and militia veterans who relocated to what is now Mississauga immediately after the war, between 1815 and 1825.

Research is ongoing. Future research will delve into the connections of the Native Mississaugas from the Credit River and their involvement in the war. Please visit our website for more information, and for listings of 1812-events around Ontario.

Preparing for War

Upper Canada (now Ontario), lacked capital and military resources leading up to the outbreak of war. Experienced British soldiers were in short supply, and garrisons were undermanned and thinly stretched along vulnerable borders. The Militia Act of 1808 laid the foundation for defence of the young

colony through the arming and training of its civilian population for the purpose of defence should the need arise. The Militia Act had several clauses which laid the basis for militia recruitment and involvement leading up to the war:

Males between the ages of 16 and 60 capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled and trained in a county-based regimental system, and fines were established for persons who did not enrol or comply. This body of individuals was referred to as the “Embodied Militia”.

No man over the age of fifty was to be called out unless the entire militia was called out in the time of war.

Commanding officers of the regiments were to call their men out on June 4th of every year for inspection and training, and individual companies within the regiments were to be called out by their local Captains for training as required, two to four times per year.

No militiaman could be called out for active service for a period exceeding six months.

Compensation was established for commandeered wagons, horses, carriages and other implements in the time of war.

Individuals enrolled for duty could provide an able-bodied substitute providing the entire regiment was not called out.

Each regiment was to be formed of eight to ten companies, and each company to be formed of twenty to fifty rank-and-file.

Each militiaman was to provide his own clothing, musket or rifle, and minimum six rounds of ammunition.

Compensation for service was established (land grants based on rank, and payment for service), as was compensation for militiamen (or their families) if a militiaman was wounded, incapacity of killed while on duty.

As one might imagine, with such limited training and military supplies, the actual ability of the militia to defend the colony during war was questionable, as were the loyalties of many men. Beginning in February and March of 1812 Major General Isaac Brock introduced several amendments to the 1808 Militia Act, including:

Where the Embodied Militia regiments consisted of between five to ten companies, two

companies would be considered Flank Companies, consisting of 50 to 100 rank-and-file.

The Flank Companies were to be selected from volunteers between the ages of 18 and 50, excluding men with dependents under 10 years of age or who were the sole support for their families.

Flank Company captains were to call out their company for training six times per month until deemed fully trained.

A further amendment in July of 1812 clarified the organizational structure of the militia. These acts provided the basis for the militia structure in 1812, during the first several months of conflict. As the war progressed into 1813 and 1814, the structure and organization of the militia underwent several other changes, but throughout the war, volunteer militiamen from historic Mississauga continued to offer their services in a variety of capacities.



Depiction of an 1812 Embodied Militiaman, by Rene Chartrand, courtesy of Parks Canada

A Call to Arms

Historic Mississauga (Toronto Township) was part of York County in the Home District in 1812. The 2nd Regiment of the York Militia drew its men from what is now southern Mississauga (Toronto Township), Oakville (Trafalgar Township), Burlington (Nelson Township), Hamilton (Barton Township), Dundas, Ancaster and Flamborough, and other outlying areas.

In terms of Historic Mississauga, the population at the time was roughly 350 people living within the limits of Toronto Township in 1812, and of them approximately 75 men who would have qualified for militia service. We have, to date, identified some 51 individuals who lived in or owned land within historic Mississauga who served in some capacity with the militia during the war.

The majority of these militiamen served in the Embodied Militia, and while

some did see combat at times, most were involved with the transport of goods and supplies, guard duty, and road maintenance.

The 2nd Regiment of the York Militia, or the 2nd York, established 2 Flank Companies. The 1st Flank Company was led by Captain John Chisholm and the 2nd Flank Company was led by Captain William Applegarth. Over 140 men volunteered to serve with the Flank Companies at various times in 1812.

For much of the war the 2nd York was under the overall command of Colonel Richard Beasley.

In the Flank Companies, 15 individuals from historic Mississauga were enrolled in the 1st Flank Company, and 4 individuals in the 2nd Flank Company. Many of these men were present at the early battles of the War of 1812, including the capture of Fort Detroit and the Battle of Queenston Heights.

Within the Embodied Militia of the 2nd York, at least two local companies were formed independent of the Flank Companies, and from records these Embodied Militia Companies seemed to each draw from their immediate areas and were recruited and organized by Captain Thomas Merigold, Captain William Thompson, Ensign Philip Cody, and Lieutenant Frederick Starr Jarvis, likely amongst others.

Calling Out the Militia

When calling out the militia, notice would be posted at public locations such as general stores, churches, and inns, as well as being passed by word of mouth, usually several weeks in advance of the expected date of assembly.

Locally, in Toronto Township, companies would assemble at “Joshua Lollow’s house”. Although not known for certain, it is likely that this refers to Joshua Pollard, himself a militia volunteer, who opened an inn and ale house in Toronto Township in 1811, making his abode a logical mustering location for local companies.

For much of the war, when required, individual militia companies would assemble with the embodied 2nd York Regiment at Colonel Richard Beasley’s property at Burlington Heights (now the site of Dundurn Castle in Hamilton) to for inspection, training or to report for duty assignments.

Finding "Our" War of 1812 Militia Veterans

The process of identifying militia veterans with connections to historic Mississauga was, at first, a bit like finding the proverbial needle in the haystack, and we did not know what to expect – how many people were we looking for and what kind of records survived? As it turned out, after almost two years of documentation, we have learned a great deal about not only "our" veterans, but also about the militia in general, although we admit that our knowledge is also in its infancy. To learn more about the militia during the War of 1812 we highly recommend "Redcoated Ploughboys" by Richard Feltoe and "Soldiers of the King" by William Gray.

In terms of making connections to historic Mississauga, there were obvious places to start, such as the Loyalist families from Merigold's Point. However, most helpful was the cross-referencing of property records from 1812 with the muster lists and payrolls of the 2nd York Militia during the War (thank you to Fred Blair of OGS for all his research and documentation).

This process allowed us to assemble an initial list of militia volunteers. Cross referencing with family histories (where available), census records, local history publications, cemetery records through the Halton-Peel Branch of OGS, and multiple other local history resources helped to fill in some gaps and provide other names.

This research and documentation project is ongoing and our understanding of historic Mississauga's connections to this significant moment in Canada's history is also evolving, and we look forward to sharing this story, their story, our story, with you.

In the years following the war, many militiamen scattered, some to land grants elsewhere, several relocating to the United States, and others who simply vanished from the local records. We are still trying to "find" and document the final resting places for many of our militiamen.

If you would like to be part of this research project, or find out more information on the militiamen from historic Mississauga, or would like to help us to find some of our veterans, please contact Heritage Mississauga or visit: www.heritagemississauga.com



Portrait of Amos Willcox,
1877 Historical Atlas of Peel County

A Veteran of 1812: Amos Willcox (1793-1886)

Born in 1793 in New York, Amos Willcox (also spelt "Wilcox") was the son of a United Empire Loyalist, Isaac Wilcox. Isaac served in a loyal British regiment during the American Revolution, and together with his family emigrated to Canada in 1796. They first settled near Chippawa, in Niagara, before moving to the Fifty Mile Creek (near modern Stoney Creek), eventually settling on the Humber River near York (Toronto). Amos, the eldest son, lived with his family in Canada until 1808, when his father and family left Canada and resettled in Indiana in the United States. At age 15 Amos remained behind and worked in a variety of employments in York.

Amos took an active part in the War of 1812, volunteering with the 1st Flank Company of the 2nd Regiment of the York Militia, and actively participated in four engagements during the war: the capture of Fort Detroit, the Battle of Queenston Heights, the Battle of Stoney Creek, and at Black Rock. Amos received a General Service Medal for participating in the capture of Fort Detroit.

After the war, in 1819 at the age 26, Amos purchased his own farm in Toronto Township (Mississauga), at what is today the southwest corner of Eglinton Avenue and Hurontario Street. Amos again volunteered his services to the Crown during the Rebellion of 1837. He served as a soldier and was stationed first at Port Credit, and then as the Captain of the Britannia Militia. He was sent to Navy Island in an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve William Lyon Mackenzie.

Throughout his life he declined offers of an official military commission and chose to pursue farming. His farm was considered one of the most successful farms in Peel County. In 1820, Amos married Annie Papps, and the couple had ten children, including: Amos Jr., John William, Isaac, Charles, Urias, Thomas and Lucinda. Amos' second house, built in 1850, survives today as Scruffy's Irish Pub (formerly the

Barbizon Restaurant) at 30 Eglinton Avenue West in Mississauga.

Amos was a staunch conservative and was fiercely loyal to the British Crown. Amos, who died in 1886, his wife Ann, and seven of their children are buried in historic Dixie Union Cemetery.



Gravestone of Amos Willcox,
Dixie Union Cemetery

Excerpts from the correspondence of Major General Isaac Brock

www.canadahistory.ca

In this letter to Colonel Baynes dated February 12th, 1812, Major General Isaac Brock reflects on his speech to the legislature. Brock outlines proposed measures to prepare for war with the United States and begins to plot a strategy for the Detroit frontier.

The assurance which I gave, in my speech at the opening of the legislature, of England co-operating in the defence of this province, has infused the utmost confidence; and I have reason at this moment to look for the acquiescence of the two houses to every measure I may think necessary to recommend for the peace and defence of the country. A spirit has manifested itself, little expected by those who conceived themselves the best qualified to judge of the disposition of the members of the house of assembly. The most powerful opponents to Governor

Gore's administration take the lead on the present occasion. I, of course, do not think it expedient to damp the ardour displayed by these once doubtful characters. Some opposed Mr. Gore evidently from personal motives, but never forfeited the right of being numbered among the most loyal. Few, very few I believe, were actuated by base or unworthy considerations, however mistaken they may have been on various occasions. Their character will very soon be put to a severe test...

If I succeed in all this, I shall claim some praise; but I am not without my fears. I shall send you the militia act the moment it passes into a law. The more I consider the new provisions, the more I am satisfied (giving of course

every proper allowance to the disposition of the people) they are peculiarly calculated to meet the local situation of the country. I have not a musket more than will suffice to arm the active part of the militia from Kingston westward. I have therefore to request that the number of arms may be sent, according to the enclosed requisition, to the places therein specified, on the communication between Glengary and Kingston. Every man capable of carrying a musket, along the whole of that line, ought to be prepared to act. The members of the assembly from that part of the country are particularly anxious that some works may be thrown up as a rallying point and place of security for stores, &c, in the vicinity of Johnstown. I shall request Colonel M'Donnell to examine, on his return, the ground which those gentlemen recommend as best suited for that purpose.

Being immediately opposite Ozwegatchie, some precaution of the sort is indispensable, were it only to preserve a free communication between the two provinces ... the militia will have of course to be employed on the works.

I must still press the necessity of an active, enterprising, and intelligent commander being stationed on that important line of communication.

I wish Colonel Ellice were here to undertake the arduous task, as it is wholly impossible that I can do so. Every assistance in my civil capacity I shall always be ready to give, and to that point my exertions must be necessarily limited. Niagara and Amherstburg will sufficiently occupy my attention. I deliver my sentiments freely, believing they will not be the less acceptable.

I discussed every point connected with Amherstburg so completely with Captain Gray, that I do not find any thing very essential was omitted. Colonel M'Donnell will be able probably to give us further insight as to the actual state of affairs there. He was to make every enquiry and, as far as he was permitted, to judge himself of the relative strength of Detroit ... should it please his excellency to place the 41st and 49th at my disposal, I propose sending the former regiment to Amherstburg, as we cannot be too strong in that quarter. I have already explained myself on that point, and Captain Gray is furnished with further arguments in support of the measure. I have delayed to the last the mention of a project which I consider of the utmost consequence in the event of

hostilities. I set out with declaring my full conviction, that unless Detroit and Michilimackinack be both in our possession immediately at the commencement of hostilities, not only the district of Amherstburg, but most probably the whole country as far as Kingston, must be evacuated.

How necessary, therefore, to provide effectually the means of their capture. From Amherstburg it will be impossible to send a force to reduce Michilimackinack ... if therefore a war be likely to occur, at the time the canoes start from Montreal, I should recommend 40 or 50 of the 49th light company, and a small detachment of artillery, embarking at the same time for St. Joseph's. Should hostilities commence, the north-west would not object to join their strength in the reduction of Michilimackinack; and should peace succeed the present wrangling, the 49th detachment could be easily removed to Amherstburg.

Upcoming War of 1812 Lectures in Mississauga in Spring 2012

Mississauga South Historical Society

Date: Tuesday, March 20th
Time: 7:30pm

Speaker: Richard Feltoe
Title: "Redcoated Ploughboys: A History of the Incorporated Militia, 1813-1815"
Where: Lorne Park Library

Heritage Speakers Series

Date: Thursday, May 10th
Time: 7:00pm

Speaker: Ron Dale, War of 1812 Bicentennial Project Manager, Parks Canada
Title: "The War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier"
Where: Noel Ryan Auditorium, Mississauga Central Library

Heritage Speakers Series

Date: Tuesday, June 5th
Time: 7:00pm

Speaker: Richard Gerrard, Historian, Bicentennial of the War of 1812, City of Toronto
Title: "In Their Own Words: Contemporary Accounts of the Battle of York", 1813.
Where: Noel Ryan Auditorium, Mississauga Central Library

If you are interesting in learning more about historic Mississauga and the War of 1812, please contact Heritage Mississauga. For more information on War of 1812 Bicentennial events, lectures and other information relating to the City of Mississauga, please visit:

www.heritagemississauga.com

