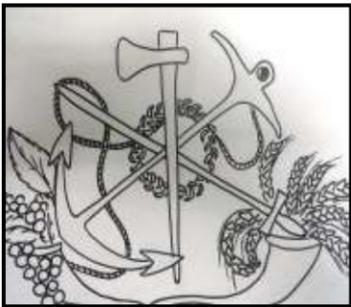


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The 1812 Heritage Gazette,
commemorates and shares the
historic connections between
Mississauga and the War of 1812.

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Remembering Historic Mississauga and the War of 1812



Upper Canada Coat of Arms
Artists' Rendition

The Gathering Storm

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 prior to 1812. Leading up to the outbreak of hostilities, American discontent, not unfounded, had continued to build. Heading up the list of complaints was the British policy of impressment, the blockading of trading ports, and what was perceived by American interests as British support for Native unrest in the Northwest, amongst other notable concerns.

On June 1st, 1812 American President James Madison sent a message to Congress outlining American grievances against Britain. After a four-day deliberation, the House of Representatives voted 79 to 49, after which the Senate voted 19 to 13, all in favour of declaring war. Far from resounding support for what many came to call “Mr. Madison’s War”, it was the closest vote for war in American history. On June 18th, 1812, President Madison signed the resolution into law, and war was officially declared.

The Declaration of War

“Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That war be and is hereby declared to exist between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the dependencies thereof, and the United States of America and their territories; and that the President of the United States is hereby authorized to use the whole land and naval force of the United States to carry the same into effect, and to issue to private armed vessels of the United States commissions or letters of marque and general reprisal, in such form as he shall think proper, and under

the seal of the United States, against the vessels, goods, and effects of the government of the said United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the subjects thereof.”

–from “An Act Declaring War between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the Dependencies Thereof and the United States of America and Their Territories, 18 June 1812”



Presidential Proclamation,
published June 19th, 1812

Proclamation, province of Upper Canada

By Isaac Brock, Esquire
President administering the
Government of Upper Canada,
and Major-General
commanding His Majesty’s
forces within our said
Province.

To all whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:

Whereas, on the seventeenth day of June last the Congress of the United States of America declared that war then existed between those States and their territories and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the dependencies thereof, and whereas in the pursuance of such declaration the subjects of the United States have actually committed hostilities against the possession of His Majesty, as President of His Majesty’s Executive Council in the affairs of the Province, I do hereby strictly enjoin and require all His Majesty’s liege subjects to be obedient to the lawful authorities, to forbear all communication with the enemy of persons residing within the territory of the United States, and to manifest their loyalty by a zealous co-operation with His Majesty’s armed force in defence of the Province and repulse the enemy. And I do further require and command all offices, civil, and military, to be vigilant in the discharge of their duty, especially to prevent all communication with the enemy, and to cause all persons suspected of traitorous intercourse to be apprehended and treated according to law.

Given under my hand and seal at arms at York, in the Province of Upper Canada, this sixth day of July, in the year of

our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twelve, and in the fifty-second of his Majesty’s reign.

By command of his Honour
William Jarvis, Secretary.

Swearing Allegiance

The British Crown faced a number of uncertainties leading up to the war. Not the least of which, for British Officers, was the question of allegiance and loyalty of the citizenry of Upper Canada. Many were American by birth, and many more still had strong family ties to the United States. There was uncertainty as to how the population would react should American forces cross into Upper Canada.

Men who volunteered to serve with the militia during the War would have to swear an Oath of Allegiance. For volunteers of the 2nd York, this oath would have most likely been sworn at their regimental muster before their officers, and the officers in turn would have sworn their oath before the regimental colonel, Colonel Richard Beasley, and the Justice of the Peace, William Applegarth. For most, the location would have been Burlington Heights.

Captain Thomas Merigold took his oath on March 25th, 1812, while Lieutenant Stiles Stevens, Ensign Philip Cody, and Adjutant Lewis Bradley took their oaths on April 4th, 1812. Captain William Thompson took his oath on April 16th, 1812. On June 4th, the date of the militia training and muster preceding the formal declaration of war, several men connected to historic Mississauga volunteered to join the newly created Flank Companies, and took their oath on that day. These men included: Aaron Silverthorn, Daniel Greeniaus, Amos Willcox, Robert Copeland, Thomas Robinett, Aaron London, George Marlatt, and William Albertson. Some 120 men in total from the 2nd York took the oath that day.

Although, to date, we do not know the exact oath sworn before William Applegarth by men of the 2nd York, several similar versions of oath sworn by other regiments survive. The oath sworn by the men of the 2nd York would have been similar:

I swear to be true to our Sovereign Lord King George, and to serve him honestly and faithfully, in Defence of His Person, Crown, and Dignity,

against all His Enemies or Opposers whatsoever: and to observe and obey His Majesty’s Orders. I do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George, and will defend to the utmost of my person against all traitorous conspiracies and attempts whatsoever which shall be made against his person, Crown or dignity; and I will do my utmost to dissolve and make known to His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, all treasons and traitorous conspiracies and attempts, which I shall know to be against him or them, so help me god.

The Opening Weeks

Although war was officially declared on June 18th, 1812, the opening salvo of the conflict was still weeks away. The declaration of war against Britain and her colonies set into motion a series of events that would bring what was to be a bitter and drawn out war to Canada. But information often travelled slowly, and news of the declaration of war only reached Montreal on June 24th. This was relayed to Governor General Sir George Prevost in Quebec, reaching him on June 25th. In Upper Canada (now Ontario) news of the declaration of war (via another informant) reached Major General Isaac Brock at Fort George in Niagara (while British officers were entertaining their American counterparts for dinner) on the evening of June 26th. It would still be several weeks before news of war reached officials in London, England, and months more before Britain officially responded.

In this apparent vacuum of communications, American pursuit of the war began haltingly, initially with much indecision and a decided lack of preparedness. In the Canadas, the civil and military authority under Prevost and Brock, directed by officials in Britain, had to focus resources on a more defensive campaign since little help could be expected from overseas as Britain was engaged in a titanic struggle in Europe against Napoleonic France.

News Travels

In Historic Mississauga, one might wonder how news of the war arrived and word travelled amongst our citizens. The rumblings of potential war had

been known and likely discussed in the months and years preceding June of 1812. Since 1808 civilians had been enlisted, and in some sense trained, as part of the Embodied Militia. Many civilians and settlers in Historic Mississauga had grown up in families with military legacies, were of Loyalist descent, and several were veterans of the American Revolution. Nonetheless, war would have been, to many families, a disconcerting proposition. However, to many young men, war may have provided excitement and a perceived opportunity, as many volunteered to serve in the Flank Companies of the Militia in early June, before war had been formally declared.

While we do not know for certain, word of the coming war would likely have passed from township to township by word of mouth, possibly connected to the early places of gathering such as inns and taverns, while 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 the older Allen Robinet; or perhaps of the young men of the Gable, Marlatt, Merigold, Monger and Thompson families gathered at Joshua Pollard’s inn on the Middle Road pouring over and 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, and both may have been party to information earlier than others. Militia captains Thomas Merigold and William Thompson also had family connections in York and Niagara respectively, perhaps aiding the news of the coming storm to spread throughout Historic Mississauga and beyond.



Commemorative medal based on the
1812 General Service Medal



Fort at York
By C.W. Jefferys

A Confusing Narrative

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 actually commenced. Poor communications hampered the prosecution of the war, affairs were often confused and mismanaged on both sides, and battles continued to be fought after the peace treaty had been negotiated. This war, while helping to cement two emerging National identities and ideologies in America and Canada, also fractured societies, families therein, and brought the young American government to the brink of collapse. Indeed, this small, bitter war shaped the destiny and psyche of a continent.

In Canada, the war is often remembered in passing for the fall of charismatic General Brock who died within the first few months of the war and a brave farm wife, Laura Secord, who sought to warn a British garrison about an impending American attack, and not for the gallant defence of the border undertaken by regular soldiers and civilian militia over the two-and-half years of the war. Arguably in America and Britain, the war is barely remembered at all, whilst amongst the Native peoples of Canada (and the northern United States) the war is often lamented as the ending of Native sovereignty.



A Veteran of 1812:
Stiles Stevens (1775-1844)

When Canada's more populous and aggressive neighbour to the south declared war against the

British colonies in 1812 Stiles Stevens, a Toronto Township resident, was thirty-seven years old. Being of the appropriate age as outlined by the Militia Act of 1808, Stiles enrolled in the militia, along with some 11,000 other men throughout Upper Canada. Many of the volunteers were recent immigrants, including Stevens who had been born in the United States in 1775.

Stiles initially settled in Cramahe Township, Northumberland County. In 1806 he was granted Lot 5, Concession 1, SDS in Toronto Township, and was likely living here by 1807. Being an American by birth his loyalties to the Crown may have been questioned, although Stiles was officially registered as a Loyalist.

The identity of his father and mother is uncertain, although it has been speculated that his father may have been Aaron Stevens, who was executed for treason during the War of 1812, or Abel or Pennuel Stephens, both members of the Upper Canadian Council.

Stiles's wife, Margaret (1770-1854), was also from a Loyalist family. The couple had at least six children, including Letitia, Stiles Jr., and William. Stiles Stevens Jr., a local hotel keeper, is noted to have been pronouncedly British and Loyalist, and is described in local histories as a bit of a benevolent dictator and leading citizen of his time, perhaps shedding some light on the countenance of his father.

Commissioned a Lieutenant in the Embodied Militia of the 2nd York, Stiles took his oath of Allegiance to the Crown at Burlington Heights on April 4th, 1812, swearing before Justice of the Peace William Applegarth.

In 1809 Stiles was a member of the Grand Jury alongside Abraham Markle (1790-?), Allan Robinet (1787-1866), Joseph Silverthorn (1785-1879), and Philip Cody (1770-1850), other Toronto Township residents.

Like many other volunteer militiamen with the Embodied Militia, during the war Stiles served on Road Duty, Garrison Duty, Furlough, and likely transport of goods. For example, between November 5th and November 20th, 1813, Stiles worked on Dundas Street along with Captain Thomas Merigold's Company. He was also on the pay list from November 5th to November 20th, 1814, for his participation in the 2nd Regiment York Militia.

Lieutenant Stiles Stevens died on November 22nd, 1844, and was buried at Dixie Union Cemetery. His

tombstone reads:

*The Voyage of life is at an end,
The mortal affliction is past,
The age that in Heaven they
spent, For ever and ever will
last.*

Excerpts from the correspondence of Major General Isaac Brock

Letter from Major General Brock to Sir George Prevost, dated July 3rd, 1812

Sir, I have been anxiously waiting for some days to receive Your Excellency commands in regards to the measures most proper to be pursued on the present emergency. The accounts received first through a mercantile channel, and soon after repeated from various quarters, of war having been declared by the United States against Great Britain would have justified in my opinion offensive operations, but the reflection that at Detroit and St. Josephs the weak state of garrisons would prevent the commanders from attempting any essential service connected in any degree with their future security and that my only means of annoyance on this communication was limited to the reduction of Fort Niagara, which could be battered at any future period. I relinquished my original intention and attended only to defensive measures. My first object has been calling out of the flank companies of militia, which has produced a force on this line of about 800 men, they turned out very cheerfully, but already show a spirit of impatience. The King's are now at such low ebb that they can scarcely furnish any article of use or comfort. Blankets, haversacks and kettles are all to be purchased, and the troops in watching the banks of the river stand in the utmost need of tents. Mr. Couche has adopted the most efficient means to pay the militia that will be embodied, but they cannot positively say the number of militia that will be embodied but they cannot throughout the Province be 4,000. The Americans are very active on the opposite side, in the erection of redoubts. We are not idle on our part, but unfortunately, having supplied Amherstburg with the guns that post required from Fort George, depending upon getting others from Kingston to supply their place, we find ourselves at this moment rather short of that essential arm. I have, however, every reason to think they are embarked on board the Earl Moira, which according to Major McPherson's report, was to have sailed he 20th ulto.

The Americans have, I believe, about 1200 regulars

and militia between Fort Niagara and Black Rock, and I consider myself at this moment perfectly safe against attempt they can make. About 100 Indians from the Grand River have attended to my summons; the remainder promise to come also, but I have too much reason to conclude that the Americans have been too successful in their endeavours to sow dissension and disaffection among them ...

The Americans make a daily parade of their force and easily impose on the people on this side in regard to their numbers. I do not think they exceed 1200, but they are represented infinitely more numerous. For the last fortnight every precaution has been taken to guard against the least communication, and to this day I am ignorant whether the President sanctioned the war resolutions of the two houses of Congress-that is, whether war be actually declared. The car brigade has been completed for service with horses belonging to gentlemen who spared them free of expense. I have not been honoured with a line from Mr. Forster, nor, with all my endeavours, have I been able to obtain information of any consequence.

The *Prince Regent* made her first voyage this morning, and I propose sending her to Kingston to bring such articles as are absolutely necessary, which we know have arrived from Quebec. I trust she will outvail the *Onedia*.

Letter from Major General Brock to Sir George Prevost, from Fort George, dated July 12th, 1812

Sir, with the exception of occasional tiring from the opposite shore (the unauthorized act of an undisciplined militia) nothing of a hostile nature has occurred on this communication since I last had the honour of addressing Your Excellency.

The enemy is busy constructing batteries at different points on the river, but he does not appear to have yet received cannon to place in them. We are doing all we can on this side to counteract his views, and the arrival of the *Royal George* and the vessels under his convoy bringing various pieces of ordnance will give us in this respect a decided superiority.

The militia which assembled here immediately on the account being received of war being declared by the United States have been improving daily in discipline, but the men evince a degree of impatience under their present restraint that is far from inspiring confidence. So great was their clamour to return and

attend to their farms that I found myself in some measure compelled to sanction the departure of a large proportion, and I am not without my apprehensions that the remainder will, in the defiance of the law, which can only impose a fine of 20, leave the service the moment the harvest commences. There can be no doubt that a large portion of the population in this neighbourhood are sincere in their professions to defend the country, but it appears likewise evident to me that the greater part are either indifferent to what is passing or so completely American as to rejoice in the prospect of a change of government. Many who now consider our means inadequate would readily take an active part were the regular troops increased. These cool calculators are numerous in all societies.

The alacrity and good temper with which the militia in the first stance marched to the frontiers have tended to infuse in the mind of the enemy a very different sentiment of the disposition of the inhabitants, who he was led to believe, would on the first summons, declare themselves an American state ... Nearly the whole of the arms at my disposal have been issued. They are barely sufficient to arm the militia immediately required to guard the frontier. Were I furnished with the means of distributing arms among the people in whom confidence can be placed, they would not only overawe the disaffected but prove of essential use in the event of invasion. The militia assembled in a wretched state in regard to clothing; many were without shoes, an article which can scarcely be provided in the country.

After the cannon, which have arrived this morning, are mounted, I shall consider my front perfectly secure ...

The expense of defending this province will unquestionably be great; upon a rough calculation and supposing that 4000 militia be constantly embodied ...

However great the sum it will be applied to considerable advantage, provided by Your Excellency be enabled to send reinforcements, as without them it is scarcely possible that the government of the United States will be so inactive or supine as to permit the present limited force to remain in possession of the country. Whatever can be done to preserve it or delay its fall, Your Excellency may rest assured will be exerted.