

# The Fife and Drum

Journal of The Friends of Fort York & Garrison Common

Vol.25, No.1 Spring 2021

## Inside



- 8 A young officer and his mother
- 9 The lands of the Asylum

- 20 Canada's women in the Great War
- 22 Revolution of Love leaves out Toronto

- 24 Update from the fort
- 25 Wayne Reeves retires as Curator
- 26 Mrs. Traill's Advice



PROVINCIAL LUNATIC ASYLUM, TORONTO.

*The grounds of the Asylum* were an elegant place for a leisurely stroll in 1870. The predecessor of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, it was regarded in its day as progressive, innovative and humane. Yet even its name is a stark reminder that the past – a foreign country, as L.P. Hartley wrote – can be an uncomfortable space. These lawns may once have been the council and camping grounds of Mississauga warriors. Story, page 9. Illustration is a hand-coloured version of an ink drawing published in the *Canadian Illustrated News*, May 21, 1870, artist unknown; courtesy CAMH Archives

## Why military history matters to all of us

by Margaret MacMillan

War. The word alone raises a range of emotions from horror to admiration. Some of us choose to avert our eyes as if the very act of remembering and thinking about war somehow brings it closer. Others of us are fascinated by it and can find in

*“War remains, as it always has been, one of the chief human mysteries.”*

Svetlana Alexievich,  
*The Unwomanly Face of War*

war excitement and glamour. As a historian I firmly believe that we have to include war in our study of human history if we are to make any sense of the past.

see MacMillan, page 13



*In the summer of 1813, USS Oneida sails out of Sackets Harbor, its base at the eastern end of Lake Ontario. The attack on York was launched from here, and it's from here that John Hoppock wrote his last letter. His barracks are on the left in the distance. The Oneida was a fast brig of 18 guns, 129 sailors and 32 U.S. Marines. Modern illustration by Peter Rindlisbacher, courtesy of the artist*

## *A young officer and his mother*

*by Brian Murphy*

“We have this day received orders to embark, on board the ships tomorrow,” wrote a young officer to his mother on April 19, 1813, from Sackets Harbor. “What is to be our place of destination, or our fate, time alone can determine.” We know now what his destination was – York, at the other end of Lake Ontario – and we know what fate had in store for Captain John Hoppock, a company commander in the newly raised and trained U.S. 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry.

Hoppock’s letter is among a wonderful collection of papers that my wife and I have acquired over the years. They reveal not only some detail of the Battle of York but, more especially, the conditions of service of American soldiers of the period and the warm relationships that animated this young officer’s family. Although cited by Robert Malcomson in *Capital in Flames* – the definitive account of the Battle of York – the letters below have never before been published.

Born to George and Amy Lambert Hoppock, John Lambert Hoppock was raised in Amwell township, a farming community bordering the east bank of the Delaware River in western New

Jersey. After his father died young, John’s mother raised him and his younger siblings, William and Susan, on a large and well-cultivated farm owned by Amy’s father, John Lambert, a gentleman farmer and life-long public servant.

“Grandfather” Lambert (as the family called him) had served in the New Jersey legislature during the 1790s, was acting governor of New Jersey in 1802 and 1803, and represented the state in the U.S. Senate from 1809 to 1815. He would ultimately lose his seat to the politics of the war.

John Hoppock served an apprenticeship at *The True American*, a newspaper published by James J. Wilson at Trenton, the capital of New Jersey. Wilson, with his own boisterous platform and influential in state politics, was among the “war hawks” who had been clamouring for a showdown with Great Britain. Outside of work, John belonged to a local militia unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Infantry Company of Trenton. He resolved to seek a commission in the regular army, and it’s not a stretch to believe that Lambert himself delivered his grandson’s request to the Secretary of War.

John Hoppock received his captain’s commission in March, 1812, as part of an expansion of the army newly authorized by Congress. He was assigned to Colonel Zebulon Montgomery Pike’s 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry, sometimes just called Pike’s Regiment or The New Jersey Regiment. Col. Pike, already a

famous explorer, was a rising star in the growing army. John was likely in his early to mid-twenties at the time and began recruiting volunteers in and around Coryell's Ferry (later Lambertville) on the Delaware River. The old stone tavern near the ferry landing was likely the local recruiting headquarters, and a recently commissioned neighbour, Ensign John Scott, was part of his team.

One of the first to enlist was a 41-year-old relative, Thomas Dennis, a wheelwright by trade. The first recruits were often friends, neighbours and relatives, indicating the importance of personal connections in the search for volunteers. Other neighbours who took the oath were 29-year-old Andrew Aston, a farmer, and Charles Wilson, a 21-year-old weaver. Four other Wilsons also enlisted – Oakum, Christopher, John and Joseph – and all five were probably brothers. Most recruits were farmers, laborers and tradesmen, and many signed their enlistment papers with a simple X. William Heaton, a school master by profession, was an exception, autographing his name with a great flair.

In May, John sent his mother a note (pictured, below) from Coryell's Ferry, only some two miles distant from the Lambert farm. "Please to send me some clean clothes by Thomas," he asks, "as I shall be under the necessity of marching to Trenton on Saturday next, with what men I have enlisted." It's the sort of request of home that soldiers have been making for as long as they've been able to write. "Send me a pair of thin stockings and my clothes Brush," he adds, saying he'll call on her soon.

In Washington, meanwhile, Congress was voting narrowly for war, and President Madison formally agreed on June 18, 1812. Senator John Lambert of New Jersey had bravely crossed party lines to vote No.

By July the new recruits were assembling at Camp Narrows outside Fort Richmond on Staten Island. It was likely there that Col. Pike assumed personal command of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment and where training began in earnest. In late August the troops were transported up the Hudson River (Canada being the ultimate goal) and landed at Greenbush Garrison, opposite Albany.

On September 1 John wrote to his grandfather from Greenbush: "We expect to be in actual service in a very few weeks, as the British are fortifying within twenty-five miles of Plattsburgh." He boasts that "should this be the case you may rely upon hearing a good account of the 15<sup>th</sup>

**Captain John Hoppock** was enlisting recruits for his company of the U.S. 15th Infantry when he sent this note to his mother from the village of Coryell's Ferry on May 14, 1812. Thomas was an uncle and among the first to join. He did not survive the war. Private collection



**Senator John Lambert** of New Jersey in a rare and evocative wax portrait by J.C. Rauschner, made about 1803. Lambert's political career was ruined by his opposition to the war. This albumen photo of the portrait was probably taken in the 1880s. Private collection

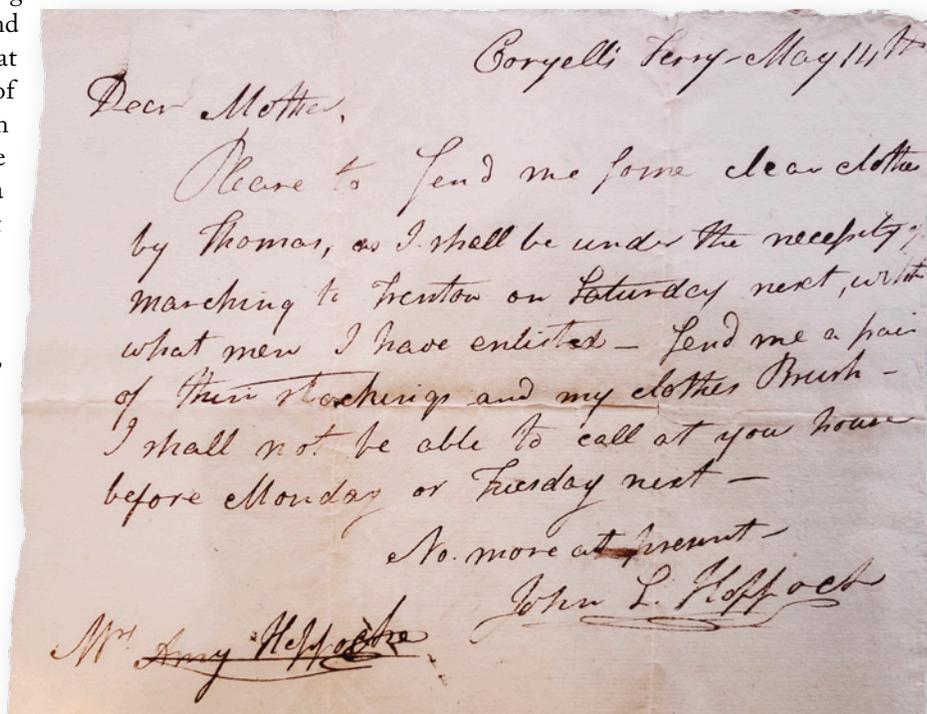
Regiment." But he soon turns reflective: "Whether I shall have an opportunity of seeing you soon is a matter of uncertainty – perhaps I shall never have it." He reports that a neighbour from Amwell, Lieutenant George Runk of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, is also in Greenbush and expects to head north with the rest of the brigade.

From a camp near Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain, John updates his grandfather on November 17 as his regiment prepares to move again. He has

had time to think about what may be in store for him, and he's determined not to disappoint the man he so clearly looks up to: "The fifteenth Regiment, to which

I belong, is in the best state, and is generally looked up too to perform something more than common – we shall of course have the hottest part of the fight, where in case we are victorious, we shall crown ourselves with immortal honor ... Whatever may be the event of the Campaign, if I survive you shall have the earliest information. – Let my fate be what it may, I assure you that my name shall not be coupled with that of Dishonor."

Among the books that John bought by subscription was the 1809 edition of *The New Whole Duty of Man, Containing the Faith as well as Practice of a Christian: Made Easy for the Present Age*, published at Trenton by James Oran (and largely a reprint of a much older book). More than 500 pages long, it contains a passage that John may have lingered over: "We may lawfully kill a man in battle, if we are satisfied that such a war is undertaken by a state or kingdom to support and maintain its just rights, or even to preserve itself or its allies from utter ruin."



John also subscribed to an 1809 reprint of patriotic Revolutionary War poems by the popular Philip Freneau. John Hoppock's father and grandfather had both fought King George's army during the American Revolution, and in the period leading up to 1812 there remained strong pockets of antipathy toward Great Britain. Thomas Dennis' family history may illustrate a case in point.

During the earlier war his father had been killed by the Pine Barren Tories – a criminal gang in New Jersey aligned with the British – and his mother had been strung up, beaten and left for dead. She survived and later married John Lambert, our officer's grandfather (hence "Uncle" Thomas). I have long thought that some of the young men who signed up for what many regard as the Second War of Independence did so in order to prove themselves equals to their fathers and grandfathers who had fought the British a generation earlier. We can only imagine what moved young John Hoppock – but we've seen what he promised his grandfather.

Not everything in war is glorious; not at all. This was a period when armies in the field were still liable to lose more men to disease than enemy action. On January 7, 1813, John wrote again to his grandfather at Washington. "Poor Charles Wilson is numbered among the dead – he died on the 25<sup>th</sup> [of December] after a tedious sickness," he reported. "Col. Pike has just recovered from a severe attack of the Inflammatory fever. We were very fearful for several days that we should lose him." A week later, they did lose Private William Heaton, the young school master, most likely also to the ambiguous camp "fevers."

Yet, life in the army wasn't all bad: "We have pretty cold weather here, and good sleighing the whole time," he told his grandfather. "I have never been so hearty for the same length of time in my life as I have been since I entered the Service."

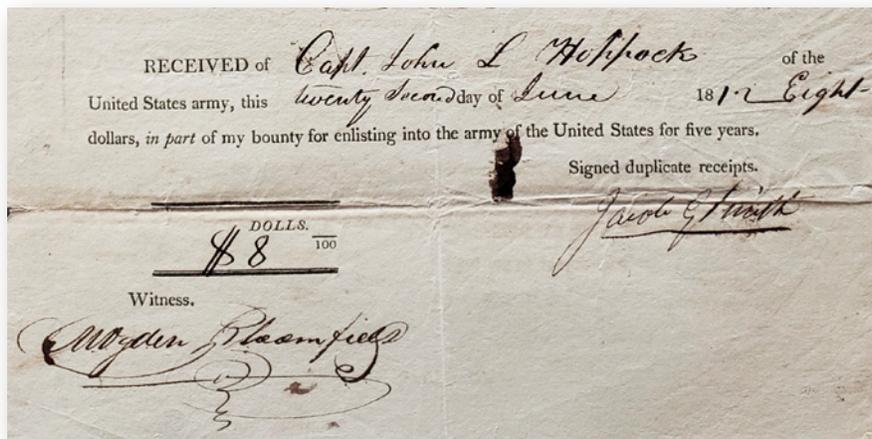
The troops were ordered to move from Plattsburgh the 200 miles to Sackets Harbor in early March. The late-winter weather was brutal; there were blizzards and the snows (amply supplied by Lake Ontario) were very deep. Two soldiers froze to death along the way, one of John's colleagues regarding them as victims of their own insobriety.

On April 19 John wrote to his mother from Sackets with plenty of news. He tells her first that "I have been to Kingston (Canada) with a Flag of Truce, and have therefore had an opportunity of seeing some of our enemies." He writes nothing else about it, but we know what his orders were.

On March 29, Brigadier-General Pike (promoted from colonel

a few weeks earlier) had sent him to Kingston with a message for the commander of the British garrison, only 60 miles away. Pike complains that "messages of an insulting nature" were almost daily being sent across the St. Lawrence from Prescott – some 100 miles farther downstream – into New York state. In February, Ogdensburg (directly across from Prescott) had been raided by the British and its garrison driven away; since then, more-or-less normal intercourse had apparently resumed between the two border towns.

Pike declares that any further messages from "his Britannic Majestys officers" would henceforth only be received "through my advanced pickets" and (as he separately told his scouts) anyone presuming to enter St. Lawrence County under a flag of truce would be arrested. Whatever was going on, General Pike's choice of Captain Hoppock for this intriguing mission suggests that he regarded John as a smart and reliable



*Part of the bounty for enlisting in the U.S. Army was eight dollars up front, and this is the receipt that Jacob Smith signed for his cash. Dated June 22, four days after war was declared, it is witnessed by Lt. Moses Bloomfield, a nephew of Brig.-Gen. Bloomfield. Hoppock and young Bloomfield were shot within minutes of each other during the assault on York, and both died. Smith survived the war. Private collection*

young officer.

John then updates his mother on news of men in his company from around Amwell, including Uncle Thomas and the Wilsons. He advises her on how to ensure the family of Charles Wilson – who died before the usual issue of pay at the end of December – receives the money that he was owed. And although he notes how primitive are the cabins they're living in, the army had in fact built a series of new barracks near the harbour during that winter.

John goes into considerable detail on that subject of perpetual interest to all deployed soldiers: their rations. It's curious that he quotes the prices in British currency, although it's not clear that he's actually buying any (the army, of course, supplied rations, but soldiers have always tried to supplement these, one way or another). We don't know the origin of John's groceries but throughout the war, foodstuffs were smuggled across the border, in both directions at different places, to the constant chagrin of opposing quartermasters (and in defiance of frequent official edicts). Regardless, he knew that his mother – who managed a large household – would be interested.

The irony of his friend George Runk's failure to keep his family informed is poignant, to say the least. "He appears to be too lazy to write as I have frequently wished him to do," he tells his mother. "He told me today that he had written but one letter since he left home." The next one we have from Lt. Runk is to Senator John Lambert, informing him of his grandson's death.

John closes by fondly recalling the "fine frolics" of the past. He playfully explains to his mother how he longs for a future



**Casualties of the victory** at York appeared nearly a month later in this edition of *The True American*, a pro-war newspaper in Trenton, New Jersey. It noted especially the death of John Hoppock, who had apprenticed at the paper. This is the copy kept by John's grandfather, whose name is written above the nameplate. Private collection

where he can return home and once again “torment” the girls in the old neighbourhood.

This was probably the last letter Amy ever received from her son. In none of the others in our collection does John close with “Goodbye.” It sounds so final. Did Captain Hoppock perceive the fate that awaited him? Perhaps, but he did share with his commander a common understanding of duty. Six days earlier Zebulon Pike had informed Brig.-Gen. Joseph Bloomfield – who had commanded at Plattsburgh – that “The Ice began to move [on Lake Ontario] last night – and before you receive this I will be in possession of [blank], or perish in the attempt. Should we not be Victorious you will not hear of me again.”

On April 20, John and the rest of the raiding force began boarding 14 ships of the American fleet at Sackets Harbor. The embarkation of 1,800 men would take three days, and another two of miserable weather were spent waiting for favourable winds. On April 23, as John waited uncomfortably aboard *USS Madison*, his younger brother wrote to their sister Susan from Philadelphia. “Mother tells me she has not herd from Lambert since I left there,” reports William, using the name they always called their brother. “You must write to me as soon as you hear from him and tell me where he is so as I can write to him.”

Early on the morning of April 27, in choppy waters and a stiff easterly breeze, the American troops clambered from their small ships and schooners down into flat-bottomed boats to begin the perilous approach to shore.

According to Captain John Scott, John's boat was the second one of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry (behind his) to make the narrow beach. But “Hoppock was wounded in the Boate & never went on shore – Returned with the Boate to the Ship & died next day.” He had been struck by a musket ball fired from the trees.

*The tender mother mourns,  
but not alone  
For all who knew him,  
mourn her worthy son.*

This verse is from “Lines Composed Upon the Death of Captain Hoppock,” whose author is unknown but was likely a junior officer in John's company. In Trenton, his comrades in the militia resolved to “wear crape on our left arms” for three months.

The day after the victorious force returned to Sackets Harbor – much reduced, and with almost all of them sick – Lt. George Runk put pen to paper. “It is with extreme regret,” he wrote to

Senator Lambert, “I have to announce to you the Death of your Grand son Captain John Lambert Hoppock of the 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infy. who gloriously fell in the attack of York in the Province of Upper Canada on the 27<sup>th</sup> April last.” He reassures John's grandfather that “it is a great consolation to Capt. Hoppocks friends to hear he was a brave officer and beloved by all the officers of his regiment.”

Runk continues with details of John's death and those of others they both knew, including the fate of the commander ashore. Brig.-Gen. Pike “got a wound in his side in consequence of the explosion of one of their Deceptive mines” – this was the monumental explosion of the fort's magazine, which accounted for most of the American casualties that day. He adds that the general's body was preserved “in a Hogshead of Spirits” while “Capt. Hoppock and Lyons were [buried] with the honors of war – Lieut. Bloomfield was committed to the Lak.”

When my wife Cindy first discovered George Runk's letter in 2000 in an antique shop in John's hometown, I could see her begin to shake as she read it. I didn't know what she had found but I knew it was important. We had acquired the first batch of Hoppock's papers the previous year and, already knowing the family, she understood the weight of the news in her hand.

Another paper in our collection is a copy of an inventory of John's personal effects made after his death by a staff officer. It is in his grandfather's handwriting. Among the effects listed are “5 pair short Cotton Hose – something worn” (like the ones he'd asked his mother to send) and a clothes brush.

The war did not end well for many of the soldiers from around Amwell. Thomas Dennis died in an army hospital on Christmas Eve, 1813. Private Andrew Aston was discharged in 1814 after losing one of his feet to frostbite. George Runk (still a lieutenant) was mortally wounded defending the Saranac River bridge during the Battle of Plattsburgh and died on September 7, 1814.

William, the captain's younger brother, went on to become a postmaster and successful businessman. Susan married one of the Amwell Wilsons and apparently lived a long and happy life. Little is known about Amy, John's mother, except that she remained in Amwell and died there in 1848 at the age of 79.

I have never found any letters written by Amy but she was clearly a person who cherished life-long bonds with others. Two letters that she saved (also in our collection) are from her friend Mary Ent, who had moved 400 miles away. Mary closes her epistles to Amy with an emotional “friends until death” – who writes like that anymore?

Grandfather Lambert was left embittered by a war he had voted against and which had cost him so much. Pouring salt into his wounds, his old political allies in New Jersey made an example of him by choosing James Wilson to replace him in the Senate. This was the same Wilson who was the publisher of the partisan *True American*, the newspaper in Trenton where his young grandson had worked.

In March of 1814, John Lambert was in touch with his brother Joseph. "We shall never see the times we had before the declaration of war," he wrote. "I know I have been unpopular for the stand

I made.... If we had been at Peace we should have paid off the debt of our revolution ... and had monies for cannals and a general turnpike from Main to Orleans. But the Majority have done otherwise."

*Brian Murphy is a collector and a part-time dealer in antiques as well as an amateur historian. When not immersed in history, he enjoys painting watercolours and carving traditional duck-hunting decoys. He and Cindy live in Richmond, Virginia.*

Dear Mother,

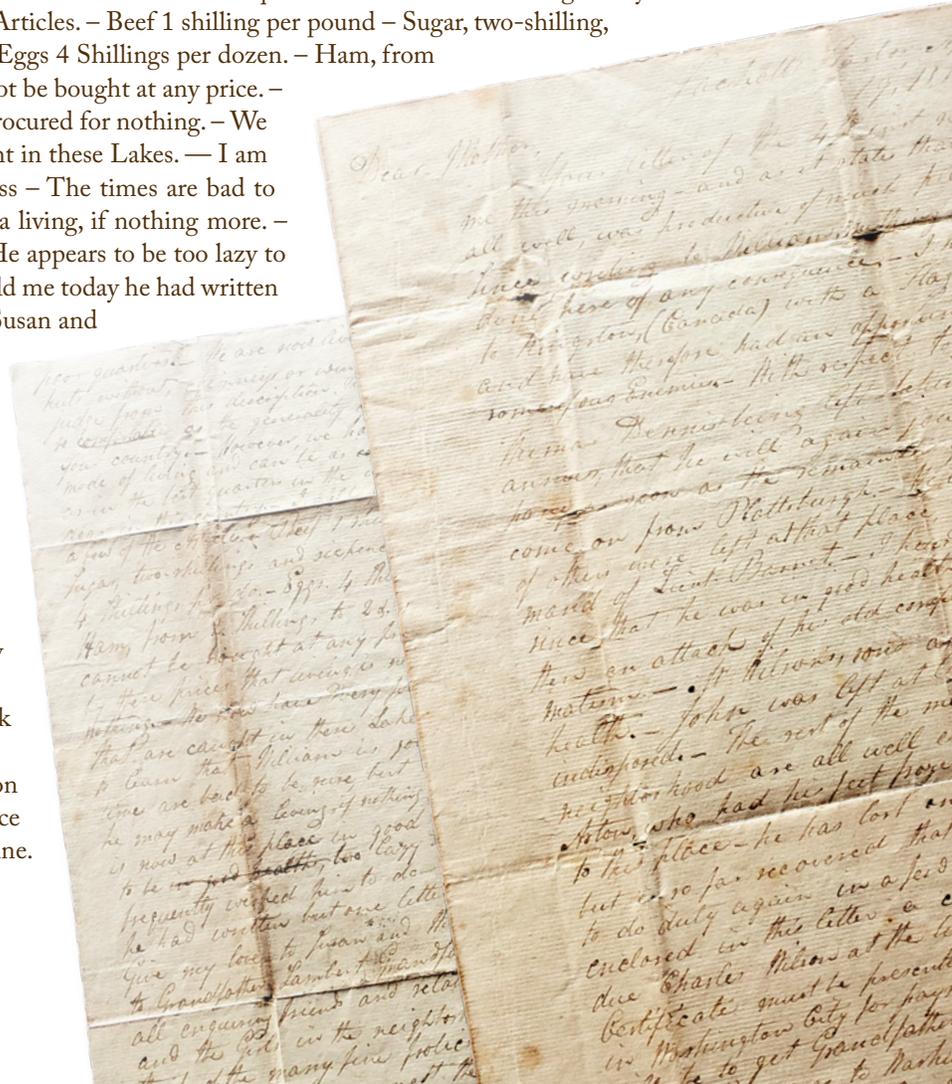
Sackets Harbor, April 19, 1813

Your letter of the 4th inst reached me this morning – and as it states that you are all well, was productive of much pleasure. – Since writing to William, nothing has been done here of any consequence. – I have been to Kingston, (Canada) with a Flag of Truce, and have therefore had an opportunity of seeing some of our Enemies. – With respect to Uncle Thomas Dennis being left behind – I can answer, that he will again join my company as soon as the remainder of the Troops come on from Plattsburgh. – He with a number of others were left at that place, under the command of Lieut. Barnet. – I heard a short time since that he was in good health, except now and then an attack of his old complaint the Rheumatism. – Mr. Wilson's, sons are all in good health. – John was left at Plattsburgh, slightly indisposed. – The rest of the men enlisted in your neighborhood are all well except Andrew Aston, who had his feet froze on the march to this place – he has lost one of his little toes, but is so far recovered that he will be able to do duty again in a few days. – I shall send enclosed in this letter a certificate of the pay due Charles Wilson at the time of his death. – The Certificate must be presented at the War Office, in Washington City for payment. – Their best way will be to get Grandfather Lambert, to carry it on when he goes to Washington again. – We have had pretty tough times since we left Plattsburgh having had a good deal of bad weather, and poor quarters. – We are now living in small Log huts without, chimneys, or windows, and you will judge from this description, that they are not quite so comfortable as the generality of the Houses in your country. – However we have got use to this mode of living and can be as cheerful here as in the best quarters in the world. – Living is very dear in this country. – I will give you the prices of a few of the Articles. – Beef 1 shilling per pound – Sugar, two-shilling, and six pence per do – Butter 4 Shillings per do. – Eggs 4 Shillings per dozen. – Ham, from 2 Shillings to 2. &.6. per pound. – the Poultry cannot be bought at any price. – You will see by these prices that living is not to be procured for nothing. – We now have very fine fish in abundance that are caught in these Lakes. — I am pleased to learn that William is going into business – The times are bad to be sure, but with care and attention he may make a living, if nothing more. – Lieut. Runk is now at this place in good health. – He appears to be too lazy to write as I have frequently wished him to do – He told me today he had written but one letter since he left home. Give my love to Susan and William. – My respects to Grandfather Lambert Grandfather Hoppock and all enquiring friends and relations. – Tell Maria and the Girls in the neighborhood that I frequently think of the many fine frolics we had once, and that I hope to be amongst them again to torment them as much as lays in my power. – Tell Wm Prall, that I shall write him again as soon as we give our British friends one good Drubbing. – Wishing you and all our friends may enjoy good health, I remain, Yours Affectionately

Mrs Amy Hoppock

John Lambert Hoppock

P.S. We have this day received orders to embark, on board the ships tomorrow – what is to be our place of destination, or our fate, time alone can determine. – Goodbye.



Dear Sir,

H.Q. Sacketts Harbor May 14th - 1813

It is with extreme regret I have to announce to you the Death of your Grand son Captain John Lambert Hoppock of the 15th U.S. Infy. who gloriously fell in the attack of York in the Province of Upper Canada on the 27th April last it is a great consolation to Captain Hoppocks friends to hear he was a brave officer and beloved by all the officers of his regiment and in the early part of the engagement he rec'd a wound in the thigh which occasioned his Death - he and Capt. Lyons of the 16. Infy same Brigade were buried in one grave under the American Standard at York - Lieut. Bloomfield of the 15th Infy was Shot in the head as he was - getting up the bank after landing - and Died immediately - B. Genl. Z.M.Pike got a wound in his side in consequence of the explosion of one of their Deceptive mines - of which wound he died the same day - he was brought to this Harbor the day before yesterday on bord the fleet which returned - perserved in a Hogshead of Spirits - yesterday his funeral took place it was a very solemn Sene - the Genls. Horse was led by his faithful Servant - Dressed in the Genls. Usual military accoutrements - when he rode him

Capt. Hoppock and Lyons were entered with the honor of war - Lieut. Bloomfield was committed to the Lake - I have not the number of men lost in the action as to the taking possession of York you no doubt have heard [all?] this - tomorrow I leave this port for

Niagra - the reason why I was not at York in the Battle was I was ordered by Detail to command of a Detachment of the 6th Infy left at the Harbor when the troops embarked - Capt. H.s property will be taken in the care of Major Whitlock of the 15th Infy - who will take an inventory and send a copy to the War Office with another to the Capts. friends I will give the major your address should he wish to write to you he may - you will please write to me at Niagra - and when I get there I will be able to write more particular - about 1000 troops leave here tomorrow on board the fleet please give my respects to all the family

Respectfully  
Your Humbl Sev.  
J. Lambert Esqr, Geo. W. Runk  
6th Infy  
Amwell  
M. Gilboa

Dear Sir, H.Q. Sacketts Harbor May 14 1813  
It is with extreme regret I have to announce to you the death of your Grand son Captain John Lambert Hoppock of the 15th U.S. Infy. who gloriously fell in the attack of York in the Province of Upper Canada on the 27th April last it is a great consolation to Capt. Hoppock's friends to hear he was a brave officer and beloved by all the officers of his regiment and in the early part of the engagement he rec'd a wound in the thigh which occasioned his death - he and Capt. Lyons of the 16th Infy same Brigade were buried in one grave under the American Standard at York - Lieut. Bloomfield of the 15th Infy was shot in the head as he was getting up the bank after landing - and died immediately - B. Genl. Pike got a wound in his side in consequence of the explosion of one of their Deceptive mines - of which wound he died the same day - he was brought to this Harbor the day before yesterday on board the fleet which returned - preserved in a Hogshead of Spirits - yesterday his funeral took place it was a very solemn scene - the Genl's horse was led by his faithful servant - dressed in the Genl's usual military accoutrements - when he rode him

Amwell  
M. Gilboa

... of the troops  
... with a number  
... under the command  
... except you  
... cannot be  
... all in good  
... slightly  
... enlisted in your  
... respect - Andrew  
... give the major  
... of his little son,  
... he will be able  
... I shall read  
... of the day  
... of his death - he  
... at the War Office,  
... ment - This is the best way  
... Lambert, to carry it  
... again - We have  
... left Sacketts Harbor  
... and

## Sources & Further Reading

Histories of the War of 1812, like those of every war, are exposed to many risks: ordinary patriotism and the distorted history that results, is one; to be the raw material of an historian's particular argument is another. Books of the first kind abound, while two recent books by American scholars are of the second type, and display their argument in the title: *Union 1812: The Americans Who Fought the Second War of Independence*, by A.J. Langguth (Simon & Shuster 2006) and *The Civil War of 1812*, by Alan Taylor (Knopf 2010). Neither is recommended.

The best American account remains Don Hickey's *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Illinois 1989), which puts the fighting into its context of American politics. His more recent *Don't Give Up the Ship! Myths of the War of 1812* (Robin Brass 2006) belongs in every library of the war. The best comprehensive account by a Canadian is still *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History*, by J. Mackay Hitsman, in the second edition updated by Donald E. Graves (Robin Brass 1999). An elegant modern summary, which outlines the war from the point of view of all the participants (and is beautifully illustrated) is Carl Benn's *The War of 1812*, in the Essential Histories series from Osprey (2002). For military narratives of the land campaigns in the northern theatre, see the many fine works of Donald Graves, especially those published by Robin Brass Studio.

The definitive story of the Battle of York, with many appendices (including Orders of Battle and casualties) is Robert Malcomson's *Capital in Flames: The American Attack on York, 1813* (Robin Brass / Naval Institute Press 2008). And just published is *New York's War of 1812: Politics, Society and Combat*, by Richard V. Barbuto (Oklahoma 2021). Colonel Barbuto is on the staff of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

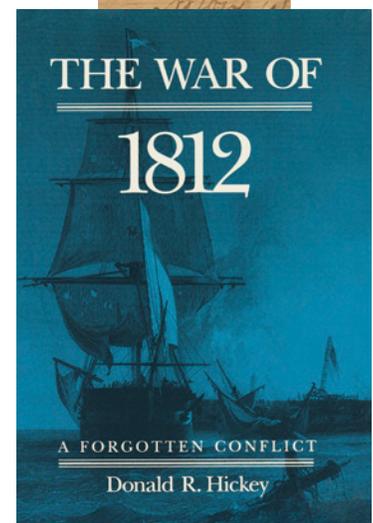
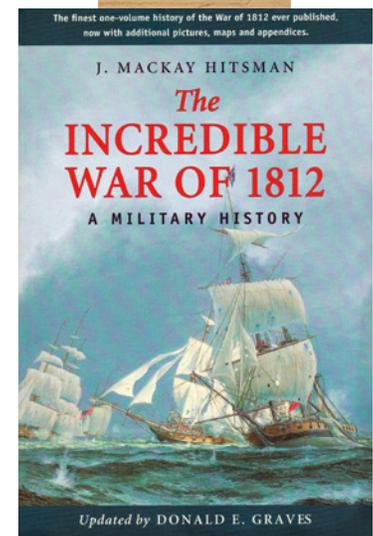
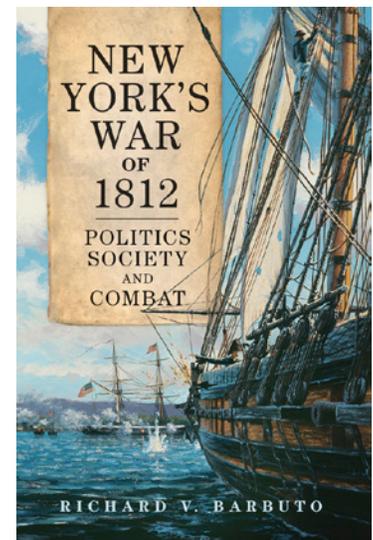
The painting *Oneida Off Sackets* was generously loaned by its artist, Peter Rindlisbacher, who is the premier illustrator of the naval War of 1812 and whose work also appears on the covers of the books by Hitsman and Barbuto.

Some insight into the winter march of Hoppock's brigade might be gained from an account of the epic movement of the 104th Regiment of Foot from Fredericton, N.B., overland by Quebec City to Kingston during that same later winter of 1813; see the wonderful *Merry Hearts Make Light Days: The War of 1812 Journal of Lieutenant John Le Couteur*, 2nd Ed. (Robin Brass 2012), edited by Donald Graves.

The letters published here are in the private collection of Brian and Cindy Murphy of Richmond, Virginia. John Hoppock's story is drawn from this collection and from archival sets of letters and other papers, both published and unpublished, in the United States. A helpful summary of the family is "The Lamberts of Amwell" by Henrietta Van Syckle and Emily Abbott Nordfeldt (Lambertville Historical Society, 1976).

The Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, holds a trove of John Lambert's letters – many written from Washington dealing with revealing matters at home – in the Emma Finney Welch Collection. More of his letters are in the Holmes Family Papers at the Monmouth County Historical Association.

The recruits that Hoppock enlisted are in *Records of Officers and Men of New Jersey in Wars 1791–1815* (Adjutant General, Trenton, 1909) while original military papers of his company are still in the Trenton Free Public Library, Trentoniana Extension (MS1812). The Bloomfield-Pike Letterbook is in the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. The John Scott Papers (of the officer in the boat, not the ensign recruiting) are held by the N.J. Historical Society and they've been given an accessible and entertaining introduction; see John C. Fredriksen, "The Letters of Captain John Scott, 15th U.S. Infantry: A New Jersey Officer in the War of 1812," *New Jersey History*, Fall / Winter 1989.



# The lands of the Asylum

by John P.M. Court

The Land Acknowledgement for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health declares that “the site of CAMH appears in colonial records as the council grounds of the Mississaugas of the New Credit.” That site now is a 27-acre campus (originally 50 acres) on the south side of Queen Street West, between Shaw Street and Dovercourt Road. The original acreage was carved out of what was then the Military Reserve – just over 1,000 acres of land set aside by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe in the 1790s west of the Town of York for military purposes.

Recalled in the traditions of the Ojibwe as having been in use by the Mississaugas ever since their arrival in the Toronto region around 1700, the site was described in materials they prepared for a meeting with British colonial officials in 1860 (and these materials have been recovered from microfilm at the Archives of Ontario by our volunteer researchers here at CAMH). The presentation by the Ojibwe in 1860 declared that “a lot of three

acres... near or where the Provincial Lunatic Asylum now stands was a Reserve for Camping and Council purposes.”

There had, of course, been modest settlements of the Ojibwe and especially their predecessors along the waterways on the north shore of Lake Ontario – including what we know as Garrison Creek – for thousands of years. A beautiful map of York prepared by a British officer in 1817, recently acquired by Library & Archives Canada (and supported by two other maps from 1816 and 1818) may finally locate this long-remembered council and camping site of the Mississaugas.

Most of the First Nations around the upper Great Lakes and in Upper Canada were allied during the War of 1812 with the Crown. Led by the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, they saw the British as essential to stemming the westward flow of American settlers and preserving a land for themselves west of the Ohio River. Early British victories at Detroit and Fort Mackinac, in

the straits between Lakes Huron and Superior, gave them confidence in their choice. Despite their ambiguous pre-war land settlements with the Crown, as well as some violent disputes (including murder) in the vicinity of York, the Ojibwe remained allies throughout the war.

Early on the morning of April 27, 1813, when an American fleet appeared off York and began sending its powerful raiding force toward the shore, the warriors were the first to engage. Coordinated by their liaison officer with the British Army, Major James Givins, and led by several of their own chiefs, including Chief Yellowhead, perhaps 75 men (estimates of their number vary



Plan of York, U.C., detail; surveyed and drawn in August 1817 by Lieutenant E.A. Smith. The three cabins are centre left. Courtesy LAC R2513-188-6-E Box 33

widely) spread out along the shoreline. A mixture of Ojibwe, Chippawa and Mississauga warriors, they had the bad luck to face the best unit of the invading force and were soon badly outnumbered. They fell back through the woods and at least five were killed. The day ended badly for everyone fighting on the side of the Crown.

While the barracks of the garrison were only a few kilometres east of the landing site – where the Fort York branch of the Toronto Public Library is now – the warriors clearly were also not far away, camped somewhere on the Military Reserve. A beautifully drawn map now in the national archives (and supported by the other two

maps) suggests where that camp may have been.

Surveyed and drawn by Lieutenant E.A. Smith of the British Army in August 1817, that map is part of a trove of maps, architectural drawings and engravings once owned by Sir John Sherbrooke, a career soldier who had been Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia during the War of 1812. The collection was bought by LAC at auction in 2013, having been in Sherbrooke's family since his death in England in 1830.

This map shows the Town of York shortly after the war, with the newly rebuilt fortifications of the garrison – the present Fort York – on the west side of Garrison Creek. About 150 buildings are shown, with a dozen of the government buildings and homes of prominent citizens labelled. Among these is the home of James Givins, at the top of what is now Givins Street, a few blocks from Trinity-Bellwoods Park. The ravine of Garrison Creek dominates the landscape and what is labelled “Dundas” is the present Queen Street.

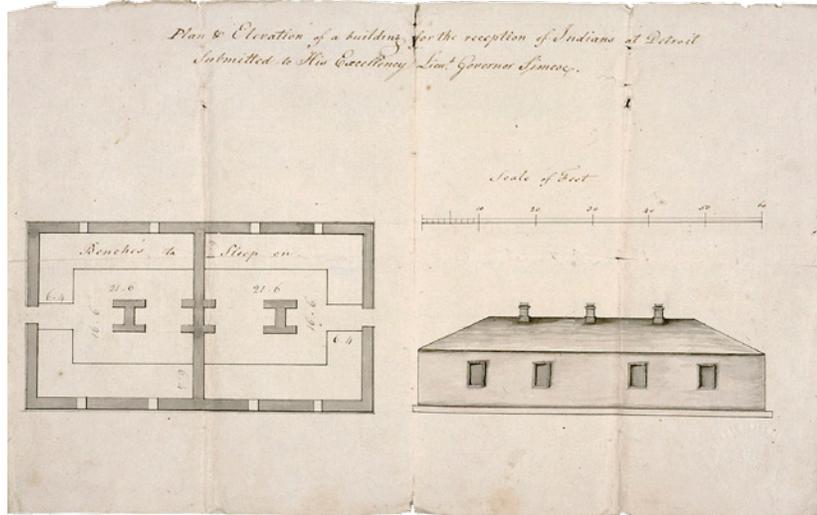
Three modest buildings can be seen on the south side of Queen, at the foot of the road to the Givins home. On open ground of the Military Reserve, they are unlabelled and would have been unremarkable as outbuildings of the garrison. No army records have been found for the construction here of three structures for the Mississaugas. However, an interesting precedent exists.

In the Archives of Ontario is a drawing of a building proposed (and presumably built) at Detroit in the 1790s for the use of visiting allied warriors. This was when, despite the outcome of the American Revolution, the western posts were still in British hands. With six central fireplaces, and wide benches around the inside of the exterior walls, it vaguely suggests a longhouse and could have sheltered 40 or more people at once (the warriors having little equipment). Labelled “a building for the reception of Indians,” it was what the army now calls “transient barracks.”

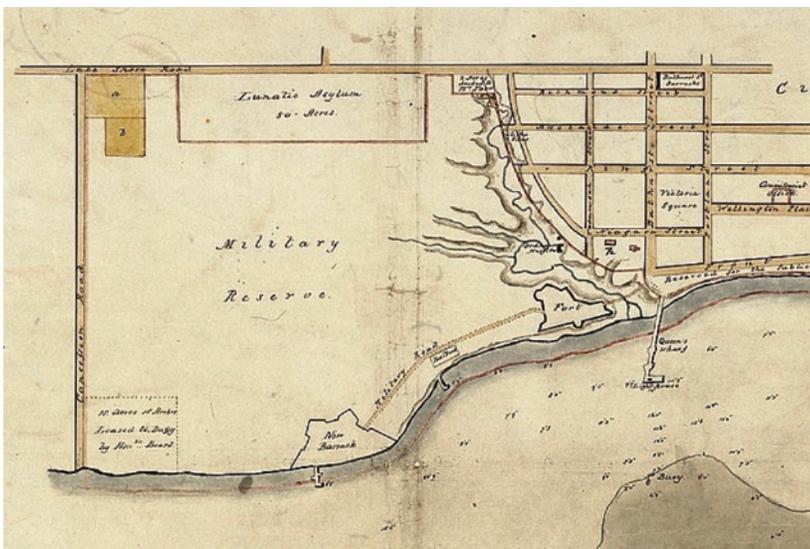
If the three structures on the south side of what is now Queen Street were built for the Mississaugas, it would have been a sensible place to put them. Although on land of the Military Reserve – that is, on land controlled by the Ordnance Board – they were still a comfortable distance away from the garrison, which both the warriors and the soldiers would have preferred. And it is significant that they were close to the Givins home.

James Givins, 53 years of age in 1812, was a man with long experience and solid relationships among the Ojibwe. He had learned their language as a teenager in frontier Detroit, when he had gone there in 1775 from England with the new lieutenant governor. He later joined Simcoe's

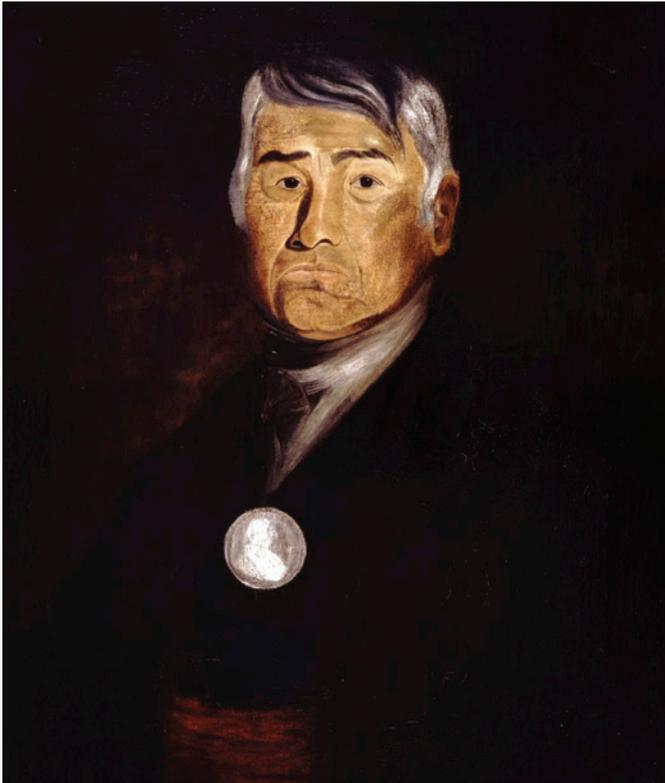
## The warriors were the first to engage



**This “Plan & elevation”** shows a building in early Detroit built as barracks for visiting warriors and, perhaps, their families. Although no army records have been found for similar structures in York, it may have been the precedent for three structures on the south side of Queen Street. Courtesy Archives of Ontario F 47-1-2-45.



**Toronto, C.W.** was a sketch of the harbour and Ordnance property (this is a detail) drawn in 1846 by C.G. Gray, a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers posted to Canada West. It shows the original 50 acres for the Asylum as well as other “encroachments” and leased parcels of land in the Military Reserve. We see the road to the Givins home, an army barracks at the corner of Bathurst and Queen (then known as Lake Shore Road) and a complete Victoria Square, the garrison's original graveyard. Courtesy LAC, NMC 11444.



**Portrait of Nawahjegezhegwabe, a.k.a. Credit Head Chief Joseph Sawyer** (ca. 1784 – 1863) This was painted in 1846 on the eve of the Mississaugas' departure from their Credit River lands. He wears his King George III medal, given to those chiefs who had helped the British during the War of 1812. He and James Givins served together at Detroit, Niagara, and possibly York, and would have known each other well. When Chief Sawyer's portrait was recently restored, his expression, as Donald Smith has written, was revealed as one of "dejection, deception, and betrayal." Attributed to James Spencer, courtesy TPL Baldwin Room JRR 4.

regiment of Queen's Rangers and served as an interpreter and liaison officer. In 1797 he was made Assistant Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Home District around York, responsible for the distribution of annual gifts (or tribute, as some regarded it) and diplomacy with First Nations in general.

He bought his substantial lot in 1802, not far from his fellow Queen's Ranger veteran Aeneas Shaw and right across the road from the Military Reserve. By 1812, he and his wife Angelique had seven children and their home – designed by William Berczy and named Pine Grove – was one of York's more substantial houses.

When war broke out, his job was to make sure that First Nations got the rations and ammunition they needed and, in battle, to coordinate their action with that of other British forces. He was with Brock at Detroit, fought alongside the warriors in the Niagara Peninsula and, as we've seen, at York. There is every indication that he and the Ojibwe leaders regarded one another with respect.

John Ross Robertson observed (years later) that few Mississaugas lived in muddy York before the war, preferring only to visit, for trade or otherwise, or to stop at the Givins home (which Robertson called a farm). On the morning of the battle, half a dozen of the wounded warriors took refuge there; Angelique famously cleared the front room of their solid house to dress

their wounds (while Major Givins, on the staff of Major-General Sheaffe, was obliged to retreat eastward with the British column). That afternoon, her life was threatened and their home thoroughly ransacked by renegade American soldiers, who were aware of her husband's connection to the warriors.

More than 30 years later, under pressure of all kinds, the Mississaugas accepted an offer of the Six Nations of the Grand River to move from the mouth of the Credit to better farmland

---

## incompatible understandings of land use and ownership

---

within the Six Nations tract (and it remains the home of the Mississaugas of The Credit First Nation today, at Hagersville). A map of the Military Reserve drawn in 1827 shows no trace of the three cabins. And by 1846, the land where they had stood – now severed from the Reserve – had become a construction site for the new Provincial Lunatic Asylum.

Ojibwe First Nations of southern Ontario held a council at Sarnia in September 1860. They agreed that their persisting land claims should be the main item on the agenda of their forthcoming meeting with the Duke of Newcastle, who was then Colonial Secretary and a member of the retinue of the visiting Prince of Wales. Among nine properties they considered non-surrendered and uncompensated was the parcel of about three acres that was "a Reserve for Camping and Council purposes." That it had been on the Military Reserve was only one of many complicating factors, which included the inefficiency and poor record-keeping of the pertinent government departments.

Their meeting with the Duke of Newcastle happened on the day the Prince of Wales was welcomed to Queen's Park. Only three Ojibwe elders were allowed to attend. The Duke met separately with his British and Canadian advisors, who reminded him that recent legislative changes in the United Kingdom – the passage of *An Act Respecting the Management of the Indian Lands and Property* in June – had handed all matters of land claims to Canadian authorities. Newcastle accepted that advice, agreeing that there was nothing he could do for the Ojibwe and that he should not interfere.

It was not until 1997 that a settlement was reached for the 200 acres of land set aside at the mouth of the Credit River in 1820 as a permanent home for the Mississaugas; it had been sold long before but never formally surrendered. By then it was prime real estate, and the Mississaugas in Hagersville accepted a settlement of \$12.8 million for the land. Finally, to deal with the injustice of the 1805 purchase for ten shillings of what is now much of Toronto – a "purchase" that exploited two incompatible understandings of land use and ownership – the federal government offered a settlement of \$145 million, which also encompassed a block of land in Burlington. Subsumed in the settlement was the question of the council and camping ground on the old Military Reserve. The offer, structured as modest individual payments and a substantial trust fund, was accepted in late 2010.

The three unlabelled cabins on Queen Street recorded on the 1817 map are an example of what Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called “retrospective significance” – an event or a feature that was considered unremarkable at the time, but which is of great interest to us now. Yet because the events, people or buildings that were considered unimportant in their day are less likely to have left behind an archival record, many simply fade from history. The current imperatives of Reconciliation are driving reassessments of this past, not least throughout Canada’s archival profession, and at CAMH. The most apt metaphor may be in the title of the latest book by Donald Smith, a leading scholar of First Nations and of the Mississaugas in particular: those council grounds on the Military Reserve, we understand now, were “Seen but Not Seen.”

*John Court is the Corporate Archivist for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and a Temerty Medical Faculty historian (an Associate Professor) at the University of Toronto. He has worked as an archivist or manager in organizations including The Hudson’s Bay Company head office, the Archives of Ontario, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Ontario Heritage Trust and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. He has long been a Friend of Fort York & Garrison Common.*

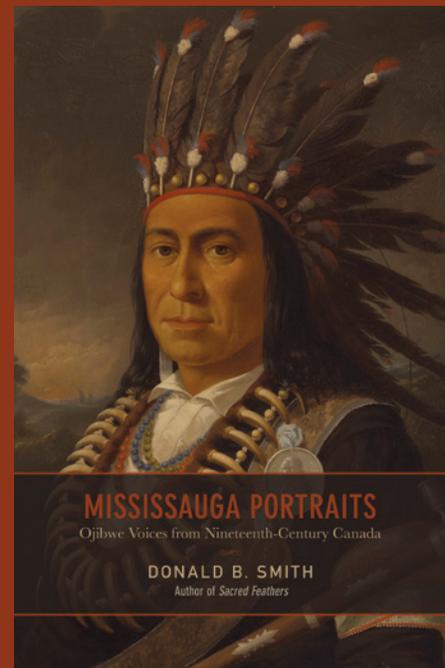
## Sources & Further Reading

The revealing story of the painting of Chief Joseph Sawyer is told by Donald B. Smith in *Mississauga Portraits: Ojibwe Voices from Nineteenth-Century Canada* (UTP 2013), which is also a source of material here on the meeting of 1860. His latest book is *Seen but Not Seen: Influential Canadians and the First Nations from the 1840s to Today* (UTP 2020). It explores the history of Indigenous marginalization. For the concept of “retrospective significance,” see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press 1995).

The claim presented by Ojibwe elders in 1860 is in the Archives of Ontario, MS-45, reel 91, 4-73 as “Mississauga Indian Land Claim ... To the Right Honourable the Duke of Newcastle, Her Majesty’s Minister for the Colonies, etc.” A copy of this, including translations, is in the Archives of CAMH. Although out of date, a still useful account of the tortuous early land negotiations of the Mississaugas may be found in Peter Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (UTP 1991). For the 2010 settlement, see the News Release “Canada and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation Celebrate Historic Claim Settlement,” October 29, 2010, from what was then Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

We are indebted to City of Toronto historian Richard Gerard for drawing our attention to the Smith map and to Ryerson University professor Carl Benn for pointing to the structure in Detroit. There is another British Army map, dated March 16, 1816, which also indicates three cabins in the same place, but with less elaborate detail. For a broad selection of maps of York, early Toronto and especially the vicinity of the fort – including those relevant to this story – see the Maps link at [www.fortyork.ca](http://www.fortyork.ca).

The definitive story of the Battle of York is Robert Malcomson’s *Capital in Flames* (Robin Brass Studio 2008); for other sources on the War of 1812, see page 8. Summaries of the lives of James Givins and Joseph Sawyer (Nawahjegezhegwabe) are in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. For the story of the lawlessness following the battle – including a list of items lost by the Givins household – see “Silver, booze and pantaloons: the American looting of York in April 1813,” by Fred Blair in the *F&D* April 2020.

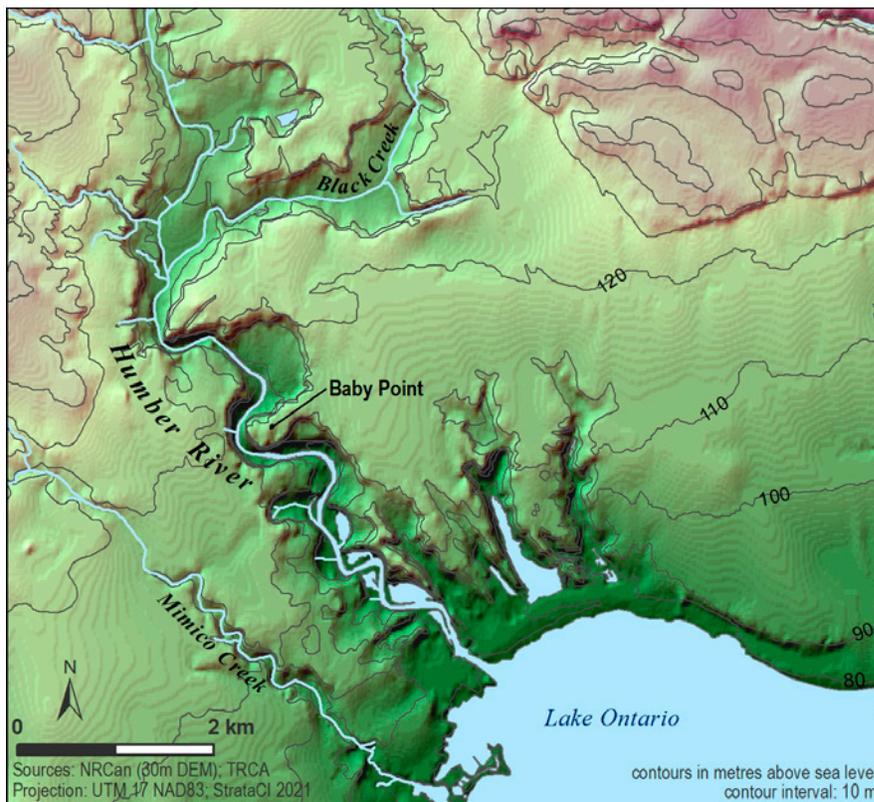


War's effects have been so profound that to leave it out is to ignore one of the great forces, along with geography, resources, economics, ideas, and social and political changes, which have shaped human development and changed history. If the Persians had defeated the Greek city-states in the fifth century B.C.; if the Incas had crushed Pizarro's expedition in the sixteenth century; or if Hitler had won the Second World War, would the world have been different? We know that it would although we can only guess by how much.

And the what-ifs are only a part of the conundrums we face. War raises fundamental questions about what it is to be human and about the essence of human society. Does war bring out the bestial side of human nature or the best? As with so much to do with war, we cannot agree. Is it an indelible part of human society, somehow woven in like an original sin from the time our ancestors first started organizing themselves into social groups? Our mark of Cain, a curse put on us which condemns us to repeated conflict? Or is such a view a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy? Do changes in society bring new types of war or does war drive change in society? Or should we even try to say what comes first, but rather see war and society as partners, locked into a dangerous but also productive relationship? Can war—destructive, cruel and wasteful—also bring benefits?

Important questions all, and I will try to answer them, and others that will come up along the way, as I explore the subject. I hope to persuade you of one thing, however. War is not an aberration, best forgotten as quickly as possible. Nor is it simply an absence of peace which is really the normal state of affairs.

If we fail to grasp how deeply intertwined war and human society are—to the point where we cannot say that one predominates over or causes the other—we are missing an important dimension of the human story. We cannot ignore war and its impact on the development of human society if we hope to understand our world and how we reached this point in history.



*After destroying the Wendat (the Huron) to the north, in the 1650s the Seneca – whose homeland was in modern New York State – established colonies in southern Ontario. The most important was a palisaded town on the Humber called Teiaigon, on the high ground of what's now Baby Point. Above a ford of the river, and where the rapids began, the Seneca from here controlled the Toronto Passage, the strategic link from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe and beyond. On the plateau to the east, imagine fields of corn with squash and beans. By 1700 the Seneca had withdrawn and were being replaced, through negotiations, by the Mississaugas, and the town was abandoned. How did the First Nations warfare of the 1600s shape Toronto? Map courtesy of Dr. Andrew Stewart*

---

### we cannot ignore war and its impact on human society if we hope to understand our world

---

Western societies have been fortunate in the last decades; since the end of the Second World War they have not experienced war firsthand. True, Western countries have sent military to fight around the world, in Asia, in the Korean or Vietnam Wars or in Afghanistan, in parts of the Middle East or in Africa, but only a very small minority of people living in the West have been touched directly by those conflicts.

Millions in those regions of course have had very different experiences and there has been no year since 1945 when there has not been fighting in one part of the world or another. For those of us who have enjoyed what is often called the Long Peace it is all too easy to see war as something that others do, perhaps because they are at a different stage of development. We in the West, so we complacently assume, are more peaceable. Writers such as the evolutionary

“Introduction” excerpted from *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* by Margaret MacMillan. Copyright ©2020 Margaret MacMillan. Published by Allen Lane Canada, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.



**Women Filling Shells**, painted by Mabel May in 1919, portrayed the extraordinary influx of women into industry during the previous four years. In Ontario and Quebec – and mostly in Montreal and Toronto – more than 35,000 women worked in munitions industries. During the Second World War, the influx was far greater; the GECO complex in Scarborough alone hired some 15,000 women. Although most returned (many reluctantly) to more conventional roles after each war, many thousands of women had enjoyed an income and independence they had never before known. How did their taste of freedom shape Toronto? Oil on canvas (84½" x 72") courtesy Beaverbrook Collection of War Art CWM 19710261-0389



**Workers at GECO** – General Engineering (Canada) Ltd – admire an anti-aircraft gun, whose ammunition they helped produce. Women made up most of the workforce at a complex of 172 buildings spread over 364 acres south of Eglinton Avenue between Warden and Birchmount. Photo by James Norman, published June 30, 1944; Toronto Star archives courtesy TPL Baldwin Collection, tspa 0018945f

psychologist Steven Pinker have popularized the view that Western societies have become less violent over the past two centuries and that the world as a whole has seen a decline in deaths from war.

So while we formally mourn the dead from our past wars once a year, we increasingly see war as something that happens when peace—the normal state of affairs—breaks down. At the same time we can indulge a fascination with great military heroes and their battles of the past; we admire stories of courage and daring exploits in war; the shelves of bookshops and libraries are packed with military histories; and movie and television producers know that war is always a popular subject. The public never seems to tire of Napoleon and his campaigns, Dunkirk, D-Day or the fantasies of *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings*. We enjoy them in part because they are at a safe distance; we are confident that we ourselves will never have to take part in war.

The result is that we do not take war as seriously as it deserves. We may prefer to avert our eyes from what is so often a grim and depressing subject, but we should not. Wars have repeatedly changed the course of human history, opening up pathways into the future and closing down others.

The words of the Prophet Muhammad were carried out

of the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula into the rich settled lands of the Levant and North Africa in a series of wars, and this has had a lasting impact on that region. Imagine what Europe might be like today if Muslim leaders had managed to

conquer the whole continent, as they came close to doing on a couple of occasions. Early in the eighth century Muslim invaders conquered Spain and

moved north across the Pyrenees into what is today's France. They were defeated at the Battle of Tours in 732, marking the end of the surge northward. Had it continued, it is possible to imagine a Muslim and not a Catholic France shaping French society and European history over the next centuries.

Some 800 years later the great Ottoman leader Suleiman the Magnificent swept through the Balkans and most of Hungary; in 1529 his troops were outside Vienna. If they had taken that great city the centre of Europe might have become part of his empire and its history would have been a different one. The spires of Vienna's many churches would have been joined by minarets and a young Mozart might have heard different forms of music played on different instruments. Closer to our own times, let us imagine what might have happened if the Germans had wiped out the British and the Allies at Dunkirk in May 1940 and then destroyed Britain's fighter command

---

**war is perhaps the most organized  
of human activities**

---

in the Battle of Britain that summer. The British Isles might have become another Nazi possession.

War in its essence is organized violence, but different societies fight different sorts of wars. Nomadic peoples fight wars of movement, attacking when they have an advantage and slipping away into vast open spaces when they do not. Settled agricultural societies need walls and fortifications. War forces change and adaptation, and conversely changes in society affect war.

The ancient Greeks believed that citizens had an obligation to come to the defence of their cities. That participation in war in turn brought an extension of rights and democracy. By the nineteenth century the Industrial Revolution made it possible for governments to assemble and maintain huge armies, bigger than anything the world had seen before, but that also created an expectation among those millions of men who were conscripted that they would have a greater say in their own societies.

Governments were obliged not only to listen but also to provide a range of services, from education to unemployment insurance. The strong nation-states of today with their centralized governments and organized bureaucracies are the products of centuries of war. Memories and commemorations of past victories and defeats become part of the national story and nations require stories if they are to be cohesive.

Such centralized polities, whose people see themselves as part of a shared whole, can wage war on a greater scale and for longer because of their organization, their capacity to use the resources of their societies and their ability to draw on the support of their citizens. The capacity to make war and the evolution of human society are part of the same story.

Over the centuries war has become more deadly, with greater impact. There are more of us; we have more resources and more organized and complex societies; we can mobilize and engage millions in our struggles; and we have a much greater capacity to destroy. We had to come up with new terms to describe the two great wars of the twentieth century: world war and total war.

While some threads run consistently through the history of war and human society—such as the impact of changes in society or technology, attempts to limit or control war, or the differences between warriors and civilians—I will

be paying a lot of attention to the period since the end of the eighteenth century, because war has become not just quantitatively different but qualitatively. I will also draw many of my examples from the history of the West, because it has pioneered so much in the recent past in war, as well as, it must be said, attempts to keep it under control.

Yet in the majority of Western universities the study of war is largely ignored, perhaps because we fear that the mere act of researching and thinking about it means approval. International historians, diplomatic historians and military historians all complain about the lack of interest in their fields, and of jobs too. War or strategic studies are relegated, when they exist, to their own small enclosures where those called military historians can roam away, digging up their unsavory tidbits and constructing their unedifying stories, and not bother anyone else.

I remember years ago, in my first history department, we had a visit from an educational consultant to help us make our courses more appealing to students. When I told him that I was drawing up plans for a course called “War and Society” he looked dismayed. It would be better, he urged, to use the title “A History of Peace.”

It is a curious neglect, because we live in a world shaped by war, even if we do not always realize it. Peoples have moved or fled, sometimes disappeared literally and from history, because of war. So many borders have been set by war, and governments and states have risen and fallen through war.

Shakespeare knew this well: in his plays war often provides the mechanism by which kings rise and fall while the ordinary citizens keep their heads down and

pray that the storm will leave them unscathed. Some of our greatest art has been inspired by war or the hatred of war: the *Iliad*, Beethoven’s “Eroica” Symphony, Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*, Goya’s *The Disasters of War*, Picasso’s *Guernica* or Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*.

War is in the games children play—capture the flag or the fort—and one of the most popular video games of 2018 in the United States was *Call of Duty*, based on the Second World War. The crowds who go to sporting events sometimes treat them as battles with the other team as the enemy. In Italy those who are known as Ultra fans arrive at soccer matches in

---

## different societies fight different sorts of wars

---



**Toronto's population** by 1918 was just under 500,000 and some 70,000 men and women had worn a uniform during the war. Nearly 5,000 were killed and many of those who survived were scarred, physically or otherwise, for life. Every family in the city had lost someone or knew a family that had. Communities large and small built memorials to those they had lost; this one – among a dozen across the city – is at Kew Gardens. How did such widespread grief, and the thousands who were lost, shape Toronto? Photo F&D

**The aftermath** of the Second World War in a devastated, impoverished Europe sent floods of immigrants to Canada. Between 1951 and 1961 some 25,000 a year came from Italy alone, most heading for Montreal and Toronto. They were soon a big part of the booming construction industry's labour force, building everything from the Yonge subway to the first skyscrapers. Eventually, men like Alfredo DeGasperi (pictured) were leading developers of the city's suburbs. How did these postwar immigrants shape Toronto? Photo of workers at the TD Centre, 1965, Clara Thomas Archives, York University; portrait from Vescio Funeral Homes website



highly organized groups with a firm hierarchy of command. They wear uniforms and give themselves names such as Commandos, Guerrillas and, much to the dismay of many of their fellow Italians, some borrowed from the partisan bands of the Second World War. They come to do battle with supporters of the rival team more than to watch the match.

The modern Olympics were meant to build international fellowship but from almost their first moment they mirrored competition between the different nations. The games were not war but they took on many of its attributes, with the awarding of medals, the playing of national anthems and teams in uniforms marching in unison behind their national flags. Hitler and Goebbels famously envisaged the 1936 Berlin Olympics as key in their campaign to show the superiority of the German people and, during the Cold War, tallies of medals were read as showing the superiority of one side over the other.

Even our language and our expressions bear the imprint of war. After they defeated the Carthaginians in the Punic Wars the Romans continued to use the expression “Punic good faith” (*fides Punica*) sarcastically. In English we say dismissively that someone or something is a flash in the pan without realizing that the expression originated with early guns, when the gunpowder meant to ignite the charge flared to no effect. If the British want to be rude they will call something French or Dutch, because those nations were once enemies. Taking French leave means departing rudely and abruptly, while Dutch courage means drinking gin. (And the words “British” and “English” fill the same role for the French and the Dutch.) So many of our favourite metaphors come from the military, for the British especially from the navy. If we are three sheets to the wind, eating a square meal might help. If we run into a spot of trouble we can wait for it to blow over or give it lots of leeway. If you don't believe me you can always say, “Go tell it to the marines!”

---

### in most Western universities the study of war is largely ignored

---

Our conversation and writing are sprinkled with military metaphors: wars on poverty, on cancer, drugs or obesity (I once saw a book entitled *My War on My Husband's Cholesterol*). Obituaries talk about the deceased as having “lost the battle” with their illness. We speak freely of campaigns, whether in advertising or to raise money for charity.

Business leaders read a Chinese work on strategy written 2,000 years ago for tips on how to outsmart the opposition and carry their enterprises to victory. They boast of their strategic goals and their innovative tactics and are fond of comparing

themselves to great military leaders such as Napoleon. When politicians go to ground to avoid questions or scandals—firestorms, they are often called—the media

report that they are in their bunkers trying to rally their troops and planning an offensive. In December 2018 a *New York Times* headline read: “For Trump, a War Every Day, Waged Increasingly Alone.”

War is there too in so much of our geography. In the names of places: Trafalgar Square in London after Nelson's triumph; the Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris after one of Napoleon's greatest victories; Waterloo Station in London after his final defeat. In Canada there is a town which was once called Berlin because it had been settled in the nineteenth century by German immigrants; when the First World War broke out, it suddenly became Kitchener. Our towns and cities almost always have their war memorials with the names of those who died or monuments to long-gone heroes. Nelson stands on his column in London; Grant's tomb is a popular meeting place in New York's Riverside Park.

Increasingly in the past century, memorials have appeared to the rank and file, the often anonymous participants in war, such as nurses, pilots, infantry soldiers, marines, ordinary seamen and even, in the case of the United Kingdom, to the animals used in the two world wars. Reminders of past wars are so much part of the scenery we often do not see them. I have walked

up and down Platform 1 at London's Paddington Station more times than I can remember, never noticing a large memorial to the 2,524 employees of the Great Western Railway company who died in the First World War. At Paddington too is a striking bronze statue of a soldier who stands there, dressed for war, reading a letter from home. Without the commemorations of the hundredth anniversary of the war I would not have stopped to see it, or taken the time at Victoria Station to search for the plaques to the vast numbers of soldiers who entrained there on their way to France, or the one to the body of the Unknown Soldier which arrived back in 1920.

If we pause to reflect on our own histories we can often find traces of war in our memories. I grew up in a peaceful Canada but many of the books and comics I read were about war, from the seemingly inexhaustible supply of G. A. Henty's, with stories of noble and heroic boys in most of the major conflicts before 1914, through the intrepid pilot Biggles and his crew in the Second World War to the Black Hawk comic books, which had started out in that war but moved seamlessly into the Korean one. At Brownies we sang songs—much cleaned up, I later realized— from the First World War and learned semaphore and how to make bandages. At school in the early 1950s we collected string and foil for the war effort in Korea. We also practiced sitting under our desks in case nuclear war broke out between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Many of us will have heard stories told by older generations who knew war firsthand. Both my grandfathers were in the First World War as doctors, the Welsh one with the Indian Army at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, and the Canadian one on the Western Front. My father and all four of my uncles were in the Second World War. They told us some but not all of what they had experienced. My father, who was on a Canadian ship escorting convoys across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean, mostly had funny stories, but once and only once he told us how close they had come to being sunk. His voice shook and he could not go on.

His own father never told him much about the trenches, but

as often happens he talked to a grandchild, my sister, who was too young to understand much of it. Our grandfather also brought back a hand grenade as a souvenir which sat in my grandmother's curio cabinet along with such treasures as a miniature Swiss cottage and a tiny wooden Scotty dog. We played with the grenade as children, rolling it around

on the floor, until someone noticed that it still had its pin. Many families must have such stories and mementoes, the packages of letters from war zones, artifacts picked up on

battlefields, the old binoculars and helmets, or the umbrella stands made out of shell casings.

And the souvenirs keep coming as the battlefields around the world give up their debris. Eurostar has had to put up signs to remind passengers who have been to the battlefields of the First World War not to bring on board shells or weapons they have collected as souvenirs. Every spring Belgian and French farmers along what was once the Western Front pile up what they call the Iron Harvest. The winter frosts have heaved the land, bringing to the surface old barbed wire, bullets, helmets and

unexploded shells, some of them containing poison gas.

Units of the French and Belgian armies collect the munitions for safe disposal, but the war still claims its victims, among farmers and the bomb disposal experts, workers who dig in the wrong place or the woodcutters who build a fire for warmth on top of a live shell. Construction in London and Germany still turns up, from time to time, unexploded bombs from the Second World War. And relics surface from much older wars. A ship dredging Haifa

harbour in Israel found a magnificent Greek helmet from the sixth or fifth century B.C. A retired schoolteacher out for a walk with his metal detector found a Roman helmet buried in a hill in Leicestershire. Scuba divers on a routine training exercise on the Shannon River in Ireland found a Viking sword from the tenth century.

Many societies have war museums and days of national commemoration when they remember their dead. And the dead themselves make unexpected appearances to remind us

---

**as we have gotten better at killing, we  
have also become less willing to tolerate  
violence against each other**

---



*Soufi's cuisine is "from Syria with love" to a restaurant on Queen Street West. Small wars and violent regimes in distant parts of the world have continued to send waves of refugees to Toronto. They've fled from Hungary, Vietnam, Tibet, Uganda, Iran, San Salvador, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Even the earliest residents of York included political refugees from the war-torn United States. How have refugees shaped Toronto? Photo by the F&D*

of the costs of war. On the quiet Swedish island of Gotland archeologists unearthed the body of a local soldier in his chain mail. He had been killed along with many of his fellows fighting Danish invaders in 1361. Bodies can be preserved for centuries if they are buried in mud or mummified in hot countries. In the summer of 2018 archeologists surveying land near Ypres for a housing development found the remains of 125 soldiers, German mainly, but also Allied, who had lain there since they fell in the First World War. In 2002 thousands of corpses, still dressed in their blue uniforms with buttons bearing the numbers of their regiments, were discovered in a mass grave outside Vilnius. They had died during Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812.

When we pause to remember war we think of its costs—the waste of human beings and resources—its violence, its unpredictability and the chaos it can leave in its wake. We less often recognize just how organized war is. In 1940 Germany tried to force Britain into surrender and for nearly two months London was bombed day and night. Many nonessential civilians were evacuated to the countryside. Those who remained slept in makeshift shelters or the Underground. The British Broadcasting Corporation—the BBC—which was based in the centre of London, sent several departments away. Music went to Bedford, Drama and Variety to Bristol, until that got too dangerous, and Variety went off to languish rather glumly in the sedate town of Bangor in North Wales.

The remaining staff often could not get home at night so the BBC—not nicknamed Auntie for nothing—turned its Radio Theatre into a dormitory, with a curtain down the middle to keep the sexes apart. In October two bombs hit the building. Seven members of staff died as they tried to remove an unexploded one and the fire department rushed to the scene to keep the flames from spreading. The news reader for the nine o'clock news paused briefly as the building shook and then kept going, covered in soot and dust. By the next morning scaffolding had gone up around Broadcasting House and the rubble was being cleared.

Think for a moment of the organization that was involved in that single episode, a tiny one in the overall history of the war. The German bombers, with their fighter escorts, were the products of Germany's war industry, which had mobilized resources from materials to labour and factories in order to get the planes made and into the air. Their crews had been chosen and trained. German intelligence and planners had done their best to select important targets. And the British response was equally organized. The Royal Air Force tracked the incoming planes and did its best to stop them, while on the ground crews manned barrage balloons and searchlights. The blackout over London and other key cities was complete and carefully monitored. The BBC had made contingency plans, the fire department came and the work of clearing up started at once.

War is perhaps the most organized of all human activities and in turn it has stimulated further organization of society. Even in peacetime, preparing for war—finding the necessary money and resources—demands that governments assume greater control over society. That has become increasingly true in the modern age because the demands of war have grown with our capacity to make it.

In increasing the power of governments, war has also brought progress and change, much of which we would see as beneficial: an end to private armies, greater law and order, in modern times more democracy, social benefits, improved education, changes in the position of women or labour, advances in medicine, science and technology. As we have gotten better at killing, we have also become less willing to tolerate violence against each other. Murder rates are down in most parts

of the globe, yet the twentieth century saw the greatest deaths in war in absolute figures in history.

So there is yet another question: How do we reconcile killing on such a scale while simultaneously deploring violence? Most of us clearly would not choose to make war to get its benefits. Surely there is some other way of doing it. But have we yet found it?

There are many such paradoxes about war. We fear war but we are also fascinated by it. We may feel horror at the cruelty of war and its waste, but we can also admire the courage of the soldier and feel the dangerous power of war's glamour. Some of us even admire it as one of the noblest of human activities. War gives its participants license to kill fellow human beings, yet it also requires great altruism. After all, what can be more selfless than being willing to give up your life for another?

We have a long tradition of seeing war as a tonic for societies, as bracing them up and bringing out their nobler sides. Before 1914 the German poet Stefan George dismissed his peaceful European world as “the cowardly years of trash and triviality” and Filippo Marinetti, founder of the Futurist movement and future fascist, proclaimed, “War is the sole hygiene of the world.” Mao Zedong later said something very similar: “Revolutionary war is an antitoxin which not only eliminates the enemy's poison but also purges us of our own filth.”

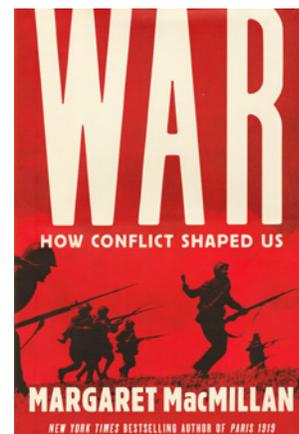
But we have another, equally long tradition of seeing war as an evil, productive of nothing but misery, and a sign, perhaps, that we as a species are irredeemably flawed and doomed to play out our fate in violence to the end of history.

Svetlana Alexievich is right. War is a mystery, and a terrifying one. That is why we must keep trying to understand it.

---

## does war bring out the bestial side of human nature or the best?

---

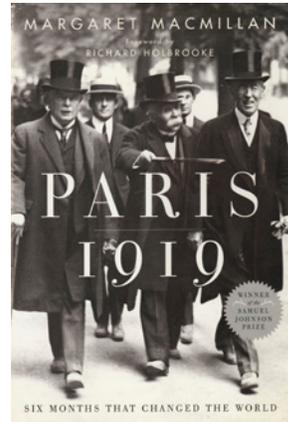


# Dr. Margaret MacMillan, CC, LL.D, F.R.S.L.

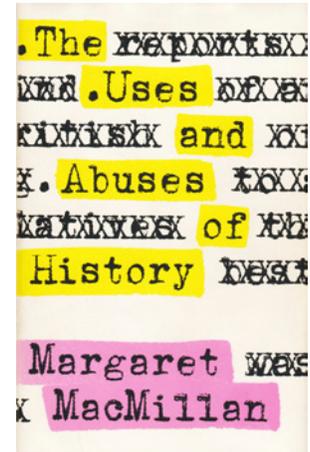
Raised in Toronto, Margaret MacMillan began her life in education at Whitney Junior Public School not far from the Rosedale Ravine. She then went to St. Clement's, an independent school for girls a few subway stops farther north. She earned a history degree from the University of Toronto (Trinity College) before gaining her doctorate at the University of Oxford (St. Antony's College). Her dissertation was on the British in India.

Dr. MacMillan was a member of Ryerson University's history department for 25 years and then Provost of Trinity College from 2002 to 2007 (when she was also, in 2004, the Young Memorial Visitor at the Royal Military College in Kingston). Returning to Oxford, she was the Warden of St Antony's and a Professor of International History until 2017.

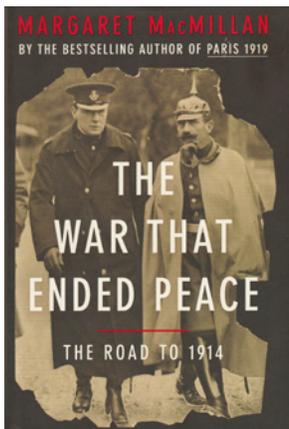
She is now a Professor of History at Toronto; Emeritus Professor of International History at Oxford; the visiting Distinguished Historian at the Council on Foreign Relations; and a Distinguished Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy. Dr. MacMillan is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a Companion of the Order of Canada.



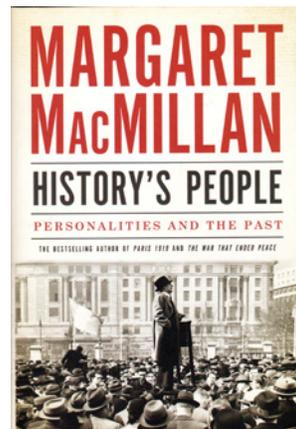
**Paris 1919**  
Six Months that Changed the World  
Random House, 2002



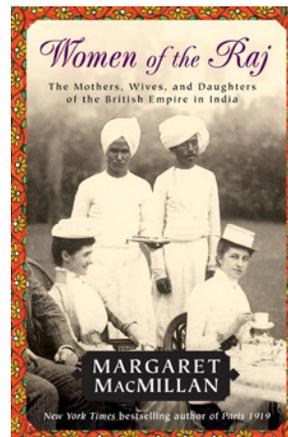
**The Uses and Abuses of History**  
Joanne Goodman Lectures,  
University of Western Ontario  
Viking Canada, 2008



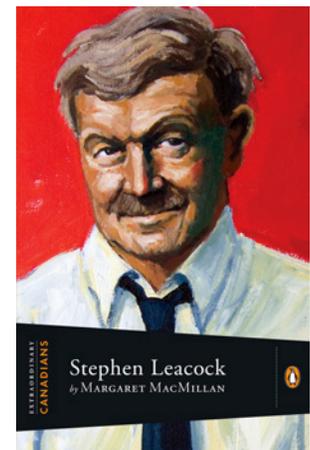
**The War That Ended Peace**  
The Road to 1914  
Allen Lane, 2013



**History's People**  
Personalities and the Past  
House of Anansi, 2015



**Women of the Raj**  
The Mothers, Wives, and  
Daughters of the British Empire  
in India  
Thames & Hudson, 1988

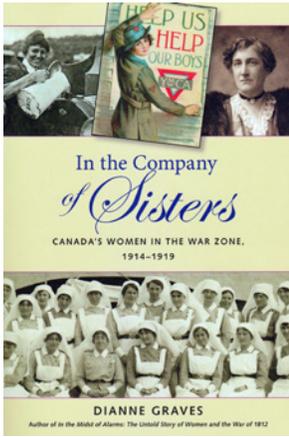


**Stephen Leacock**  
Extraordinary Canadians Series  
Penguin, 2009

Toronto History Museums

# UNIQUE ONLINE SHOPPING

click here to visit today!  
courier delivery / curbside pick-up



## REVIEW

Dianne Graves, *In the Company of Sisters: Canada's Women in the War Zone, 1914-1919*  
(Robin Brass Studio 2021) 384 pages, copious illustration, paperback

### *Shining a light on Canada's women in the Great War*

by Debbie Marshall

Dianne Graves has done it again. In the compelling *In the Midst of Alarms: The Untold Story of Women and the War of 1812*, Graves illuminated the forgotten role of women in the midst of that violent conflict. In her newest offering, *In the Company of Sisters*, she casts her gaze on the multilayered experiences of Canadian women in the war zone during the First World War. The result is a fascinating, brilliantly researched, and often poignant book that adds much to our understanding of the Great War.

Each November 11, in services across Canada, our war dead are commemorated, along with the service of our military men and women. Yet, as the famous words of John McCrae ring out and we especially recall the First World War, most people think of battlefields and the soldiers who fought on the front lines. Yet 30,000 Canadian women served overseas in various services between 1914 and 1919 and their names and stories are rarely mentioned.

These women faced physical danger and witnessed terrible suffering, all the while contributing to the well-being of the men at the front as well as those civilians living in the shadow of war. Some of the women themselves were wounded or became dangerously ill, and a small number lost their lives. In

her book, Graves brings these women to life again, sharing story after story of courage, humour, and sacrifice.

As one might expect, *In the Company of Sisters* details the service of nurses serving with the Canadian Army Medical Corps. These women received the rank and salary

---

#### Graves brings these women to life again

---

of commissioned officers and, as such, were often envied by military nurses of other countries. Canada had a little over 3,000 professional nurses when the war began and there were a limited number of positions for nurses in the CAMC

so many Canadians served in American, British, and French nursing corps.

The nursing that they would do overseas, as Graves points out, would be far different from anything they would ever encounter in civilian nursing. They would minister to devastating wounds caused by bullets, shrapnel, flame throwers, machine guns and mines. They would treat meningitis, gastrointestinal complaints, the effects of poison gas, and complications such as hemorrhage, infection, and gangrene.

Graves provides many intimate snapshots of the personal experiences of these courageous Canadian medical workers. Nursing Sister Edith Hudson describes gas casualties: "There they lay... fully sensible, choking, suffocating, dying in horrible agonies. We did what we could but the best treatment for such cases had yet to be discovered, and we felt almost powerless." The working conditions of the nurses were appalling. In Lemnos it was baking hot, water supplies were often inadequate and flies were everywhere. Despite this, Nurse Katherine Wilson wrote "we were all young, earnest, unafraid, taking things in our stride." In France, nurses faced muddy, cold weather and inadequate billets. They spent long hours caring for the wounded and assisting with surgery, sometimes during bombing raids.



**Mabel Anderson** led an effective effort to provide relief to those Belgians still living in the narrow sliver of land not occupied by the Germans. She's seen here in 1915 with two Belgian officers. Energetic and resourceful, she was a daughter of the Cawthras and married to an officer of a battalion (Princess Patricia's) fighting in France. Agar's daily letters to her – which have been published – are a potent record of the war in the trenches. They both survived the war. Courtesy TPL, Baldwin Room, S259 B6 F13

Graves' skill as a story teller and historian is especially clear in her in-depth portrayals of individuals such as 29-year-old Dorothy Cotton. Raised in a family with a strong military tradition, Cotton trained as a nurse in Quebec and at the outset of war was appointed to the Canadian Active Militia. Two younger brothers enlisted for overseas service in 1914, along with a brother in law—all three of whom would later die in the conflict. In late 1915, Cotton travelled to Russia and helped establish a military hospital there. She would witness the last days of the monarchy and the start of the Russian revolution. As the war progressed, she made trips back to Britain to mourn the loss of her brothers and comfort her mother and sisters.

While seven chapters chronicle the medical work carried out by Canadian women (six focus on the work of professional nurses, one explores the contributions of voluntary nurses), the remaining chapters raise up the unheralded work of non-medical volunteers. These include women who gave their time and effort to organizations catering to the comfort of soldiers as well as civilians directly affected by the war.

My favorite among these is Graves' description of Mabel Adamson's spearheading of the Belgian Canal Boat Fund. Adamson, who was married to a senior Canadian officer at the front, was deeply concerned about the situation of civilians living in the sliver of Belgium that had not fallen into enemy hands. Constantly bombarded, they had little access to food, medical necessities, clothing and other basics. Adamson and her supporters came up with the idea of buying a barge and distributing supplies to residents via the waterways that crossed the land. Though they often faced "entrenched male chauvinism" and the physical threat of German bombing and shelling, Adamson raised money and brought relief to many suffering Belgians.

The concluding section of *In the Company of Sisters* contains four chapters, each detailing the wartime life and work of a woman "with a mission." They include Lady Drummond (who lost her only son

during the war), singer and actress Lena Ashwell, peace activist Julia Wales, and artist Mary Riter Hamilton. These women rarely get even a passing mention in Canadian histories of the Great War. Yet they wielded tremendous influence on people both at home on the front lines.

Among her many accomplishments, Lady Drummond would found the Canadian Red Cross Information Bureau, providing news to families at home and

---

## working conditions of the nurses were appalling

---

soldiers in hospital, "tracing troops missing in action, maintaining files on Canadian prisoners of war...arranging volunteer visitors for convalescent Canadian soldiers in Britain, and informing families in Canada about the status and condition of their wounded, sick, missing, or captured loved ones."

Ashwell, a prominent actress, theatre manager and suffragist, would become the first woman to arrange large-scale entertainment for serving troops during the First World War. Her "concerts at the front" scheme not only provided employment for entertainers during the war, it brought much needed comfort and enjoyment to war-weary troops. In one crowded, smoke-filled hut near Le Havre, singer Ivor Novello would sing "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and Ashwell would watch as troops joined in with gusto and called for more.

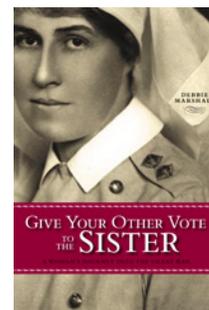
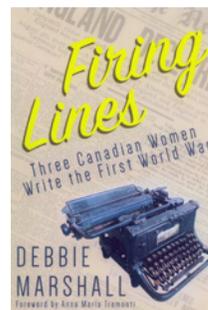
After the war, artist Mary Riter Hamilton was commissioned by the Amputation Club of British Columbia to go to the battlefields and paint "that portion of the front line in France held by the Canadian Corps." It took a prodigious effort on her part, but Hamilton created an impressive body of work that speaks clearly about the terrible experiences of the men who fought and the devastation the war created.

No book about women and war would be complete without a chapter on pacifism and Graves does not disappoint. There was a significant international movement for peace during the Great War and the

women who championed it were often vilified. Grace Wales, a Canadian academic, supported the Women's Peace Party in the United States, a feminist and pacifist organization. She developed the Wisconsin Plan, a proposal to convene a conference of representatives from around the world committed to finding a peaceful solution to the war. She attended the International Congress of Women at the Hague in 1915, where her proposal was adopted by the delegates. While Wales did not succeed in her goal of ending the war by peaceful means, she would work for peace for the rest of her life.

If there is anything negative thing to be said about *In the Company of Sisters: Canada's Women in the war Zone, 1914-1919*, it would be that it ends too soon and that every profile almost deserves a book of its own. Graves has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the Great War, and this book should be on the shelf of anyone who wants to have a deeper understanding of the experience of Canadians in that long-ago conflict.

*Debbie Marshall is a British Columbia writer and editor whose work has appeared in many local and national magazines. Her books include Give Your Other Vote to the Sister: A Woman's Journey into the Great War (University of Calgary 2007) and Firing Lines: Three Canadian Women Write the First World War (Dundurn 2017).*





# REVIEW

A Revolution of Love, 4:36 minute video; producer Wayne Burns, directors Weyni Mengesha and Lucas Dechausay; choreography by Esie Mensah

## *A powerful expression that misses the stories of Toronto*

by Michelle Mayers-Van Herk

Can dance initiate a dialogue in the struggle against oppression, racism, and colonialism and re-define what revolution means? Esie Mensah’s contemporary work *A Revolution of Love*, filmed on location at Fort York in partnership with SoulPepper Theatre Company, endeavors to accomplish exactly that during this period of social and racial reckoning.

Her choreography is one of many digital shorts commissioned and curated by the Toronto History Museums “Awakenings” series. Launched late last year and available on YouTube, these digital shorts have been created by Black, Indigenous and artists of colour to celebrate the city’s cultural and racial diversity and to explore its history.

Her artform is an important part of her message. “I think the wider world really just sees dance as a forgotten art,” Mensah says in a YouTube conversation about her work. “The way that people view words, they don’t bring the same type of value towards dance.”

Esie Mensah, born in Hamilton of Ghanaian heritage, is a dancer, choreographer, teacher and director. Graduating from George Brown’s CDance program in 2007, she has performed at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, Soulpepper and the Shaw Festival. She’s well known for creating dance pieces that are powerful, meditative explorations of race and culture, and she’s a rising star in contemporary choreography.

One of her most important works is *Shade*, which addresses structural racism and shadeism in commercial dance and was the focus of Mensah’s 2019 TEDxToronto talk. “Shade” is cogently defined by the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as “comparative darkness” – and so “shadeism” is the discrimination within Black communities against people with darker skin.

In her digital short *A Revolution of Love* – a tight 4:36 minutes – Mensah portrays a young Black woman who is affected by

the violence in her community, who grapples with her sense of her own cultural identity, and who contemplates her role in an uncertain future, all through the language of dance. The setting of Fort York is intentional.

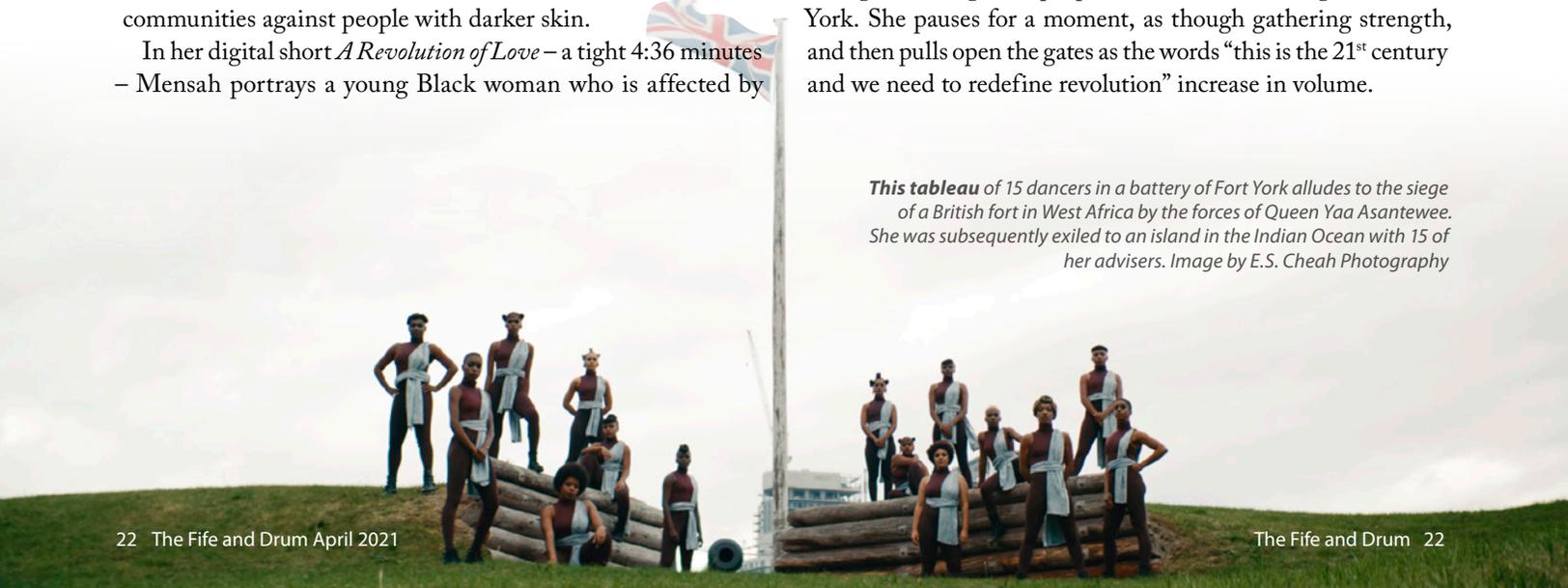
“As we animate historic sites, that is the only way that we can move forward,” she explains. “You know, people need to be able to see it and art in a dialogue ... We have to be able to talk about it. So how do we find those spaces where we can come together and talk?” Space is not merely a landscape; it’s a metaphor.

The piece begins with a mid-shot showing Mensah’s back turned to the viewer. She wears contemporary clothing, a grey hoodie and her hair wrapped in a piece of cloth called a duku. It’s a cultural statement. Head scarfs have evolved from being used to identify ethnicity, status and wealth in African communities, to marking a slave woman in the United States during slavery, to the global black-power movement of the 1970s – when these head scarves were worn with pride – up to the present, where they are an aspect of the natural-hair movement.

The soundtrack is composed by d’bi.young anitafrika, a African-Jamaican-Canadian dub poet who features the words of Assata (Olugbala) Shakur. The writer is a Black activist who, during the 1970s, was a leader of the Black Liberation Army, was charged with a variety of felonies, including armed robbery, and eventually convicted of murder; she is now living in exile in Cuba. Although a compelling writer, Shakur is hardly a model of non-violent revolution.

Her words “they keep disenfranchising us, we keep going” echo from nearby towers and grow louder; they propel Mensah to begin striding with purpose toward the closed gates of Fort York. She pauses for a moment, as though gathering strength, and then pulls open the gates as the words “this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we need to redefine revolution” increase in volume.

*This tableau of 15 dancers in a battery of Fort York alludes to the siege of a British fort in West Africa by the forces of Queen Yaa Asantewee. She was subsequently exiled to an island in the Indian Ocean with 15 of her advisers. Image by E.S. Cheah Photography*



This gate is hugely symbolic, especially to Mensah herself. “I am not just me – I am my ancestors,” she told a CBC Arts interviewer in 2019. “The feeling I get when I’m being spoken through feels like time stops only for a moment,” she continued. “It’s just like ‘okay, you’ve opened the gate,’ okay so now just sit back and just listen and allow us to dictate what it is that we’re gonna do.”



*Esie Mensah and her dancers meet the gaze of the viewer in A Revolution of Love, a short video in the Toronto History Museums “Awakenings” series on YouTube. Image by E.S. Cheah Photography*

are signature Mensah elements, revealing her unique Afro Fusion.

Mensah physically moves in and out of time and space as she grapples with the intersectionality of the dialogue among race, identity, and a place in history. Her arm movements are languid and ethereal. Her dilemma is manifest.

When she pulls open the gate, 15 Black female dancers emerge; they are of all shades, of all body types, and with their hair in a variety of natural styles. They’re wearing maroon-coloured leotards. The choice points to the Maroons, descendants of Africans who fought and escaped from slavery and established free communities in the mountainous interior of Jamaica. The leotard is paired with a contrasting pseudo-military sash worn over the shoulder and around the waist. The dancers are in rigid formation.

Fort York now becomes the scene of a violent episode on the African continent. Has this national historic site evolved beyond its own narrative to symbolize British colonialism writ large?

The shot references Yaa Asantewee, who was the queen of the Edweso tribe of the Asante in what is modern-day Ghana. In March of 1900 she raised an army of thousands against a British force that was endeavouring to subjugate the Asante. Queen Yaa Asantewee laid siege to the British fort of Kumasi for three months, unsuccessfully; Asantewee and 15 advisors were exiled to the Seychelles.

This dance phrase, a series of movements connected to the overall theme, begins the deconstruction of stereotypes of Black female capability and worth. The dancers’ gaze confronts our own. Mensah transcends time and space. She is absorbed by and enmeshed in the group; she now wears the same uniform as the dancers, and her separateness vanishes.

A dialogue begins on how cultural narratives are constructed and who gets to tell them. We the viewers are drawn in by close-ups. Mensah breaks that fourth wall to confront our gaze upon herself and her dilemma. Passive viewing is not expected: we are offered an opportunity.

The soundtrack’s question “Are you going to sacrifice?” is not for Mensah alone. Assata Shakur’s words are made real by the dancers. Traditional dance elements, pathways and formations meet; shots from a drone show the dancers moving across the fort’s parade ground, completing drills.

These drills are not of the British Army but reflect traditional dances of the Ewe tribe of Ghana, ancient dance moves here infused with contemporary pathways, groupings, and levels. These

The final phrase finds Mensah in contemporary clothing, dancing between two cannon.

The title of her piece declares a non-violent revolution, a revolution of love, yet these beats and bars are juxtaposed with Mensah and her militia. We see a long shot of the dancers grouped beneath the fort’s British flag, with the cannon’s mouth aimed straight at the viewer. The video ends with a drone shot pulling above and away from the fort; the dancers are seen dwarfed by the city, in a small space, a place seemingly vulnerable yet defended by those who occupy it. They are not engaged in violence but the narratives – Mensah’s and the fort’s – are by now vividly in collision.

*A Revolution of Love*, set in Toronto’s premier historic site, confronts the deep issues of oppression, racism and colonialism.

It does so with grace, beauty and a sophisticated intelligence of dance. Yet, all of Mensah’s references – to Ghana, Jamaica and a Black Panther in exile – are remote from Toronto.

The great risk is that the viewer, knowing the video is sponsored by Toronto History Museums but unaware of the fort’s unique narrative, will understand this choreography – this *art* – as somehow embodying and explaining the story of Fort York (few will note the website’s disclaimer of “the quality, accuracy or completeness of the information presented.”) Some Twitter commentary bears this out, while most of the comments in YouTube reflect the potency of the dance.

But if the work is disappointing, it is because so many of the unique struggles with racism and oppression suffered by the Black residents of muddy York and early Toronto – among whom were slaves, servants, soldiers, farmers, managers, businessmen and politicians – were in lives that remain to be explored. I’d like to meet these people some day, in character and in person, animating the space of Fort York.

*Michelle Mayers-Van Herk holds a BA in Fine Art History, a Bachelor’s in Education and a Certificate in Modern Dance, and has taught Canadian history through dance in middle schools for many years. Born in Barbados, raised in Montreal, she lives not far from Fort York.*

---

## how cultural narratives are constructed and who gets to tell them

---

# At the Birthplace of Toronto *Notes from the Staff*

## *Update from the Fort*

by Kaitlin Wainwright

Acting Manager, Fort York National Historic Site

Fort York has provided both essential and approved services over the past year. We have played our part in several film shoots, and staff have been coordinating shipping and curbside pickup of books, toys, and décor inspired by Fort York and the other Toronto History Museums. You can shop online by visiting [toronto.ca/museums](http://toronto.ca/museums) and clicking on “Shop.”

Among the film shoots have been *Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Man From Toronto* and Drake’s music video for “What’s Next.”

Last summer, we welcomed more than 50 children to Fort York for CampTO, the first time that Fort York had ever offered camp programming. Although in-person CampTO Spring Break was cancelled due to the stay-at-home order, Fort York is hopeful to be operating a summer 2021 CampTO program alongside a modified Fort York Guard season.

We have exciting online food programming lined up for Museum Month in May and encourage you to follow @TOHistoryMuseums on social media to learn more as the program is announced.

With the cancellation of large, in-person City-run events through July 2, 2021, we are disappointed to not be able to host the Indigenous Arts Festival for the second year in a row. However, we are excited to offer online programming celebrating Indigenous arts and culture in the month of June. An official program announcement will follow.

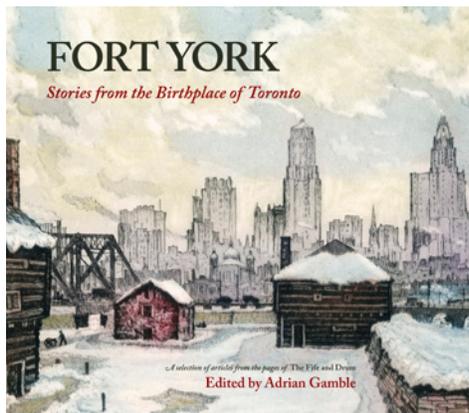
We hope that the Fort York community is staying safe and

healthy, and that our site is able to play a small part in providing you with fresh air and exercise during the most recent stay-at-home orders. We look forward to welcoming you back in person when it is safe to do so.



David Juliusson, one of Fort York’s longest serving staff, retired in December 2020. A dedicated member of the Joint Health and Safety Committee, David served as a Museum Program Officer for 29 years and his tours were a perennial favourite of school groups. He’s seen here in the uniform of the 8th Regiment of Foot – which served at Fort York during the War of 1812 – inside the fort’s shop among its outstanding selection of no-battery-needed toys for small children.

Happy retirement, David!



Featuring a selection of articles from the past 20 years of

## *The Fife and Drum*

• 136 pages & 130 illustrations

Available at: Toronto History Museums Shop  
& Spacing Store

(all proceeds in support of the Fort York Guard and Fife and Drums)

# Wayne Reeves retires as Chief Curator

by Andrew Stewart

Wayne joined what was then called City of Toronto Museums in 2009, providing leadership for the Collections and Conservation unit, responsible for managing Toronto's 1.3-million-item artifact collection. He had previously led policy and research projects for Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation as a historical geographer. His specialty was the history of Toronto's waterfront – contributing substantially to master plans for parks and development along Toronto's ever-evolving shoreline.

He has written widely for scholarly and public readerships on topics relating to the history of Toronto. These include water infrastructure (including sewers and waste disposal – see “Burying and burning trash on Toronto's Military Reserve” in the *F&D*, March 2015), brewing and, most recently, *Packaged Toronto: a Collection of the City's Historic Design*, together with *Spacing's* Matt Blackett and Alexandra Avdichuk, the City's Supervisor of Collections and Conservation.

Wayne was hired just as planning for the City's War of 1812 Bicentennial commemoration was getting underway. He directed the research and exhibit program for the bicentennial and was deeply involved in the design of exhibits unveiled in the Fort York Visitor Centre in September 2016. The building and the exhibits were never meant to dominate the National Historic Site but rather, as Brian Leigh Dunnigan writes in his review (*F&D*, December 2016), serve to introduce the site and the conflict at the heart of the story of the fort.

Together with David O'Hara, manager of Fort York, and his staff, and a great many other people, Wayne and his staff rose to the challenge of designing, costing and ultimately opening the Visitor Centre, one of Toronto's great attractions, and internationally recognized for its architecture as well as its exhibits. Wayne wrote about his vision for the Vault (in the *F&D*, October 2010), a special room inside the Visitor Centre built to highlight prized artifacts with unique stories in the City's collections. He then oversaw a joint effort by the Canadian Conservation Institute and the City to restore and exhibit the colours of the 3rd York Militia in the Vault (*F&D*, June 2013).

Together with War of 1812 Bicentennial Historian Richard Gerrard, Wayne curated *Finding the Fallen: The Battle of York Remembered*, which opened in the Market Gallery in 2012 (and is still on display in Fort York's Brick Magazine) and included a book of remembrance with names of all participants in the conflict. So many commemorative events, talks, concerts, walks and exhibits during that and the following year put the fort under a favourable spotlight, setting the stage for the opening of the Visitor Centre building.

The 1812 commemoration was followed closely by that of 1914 – the commemoration of the Great War, which occupied Fort



Wayne Reeves, who retired on February 25, is seen here thinking hard at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan on May 20, 2018. Photo courtesy Julia Madden

---

## he generously gave his time and expertise

---

York with another intricate set of exhibits, events and programs involving public participation. These were, again, curated by Wayne and special projects coordinator Sandra Shaul. *The Great War – in your Attic, Closet or Storage Locker* was just one of many. The First World War touched many families in Toronto, as well

as many who came here after the war, and this commemoration was deeply felt.

Wayne's collegial nature served the interests of the fort and the community at large. He and Jane French from his staff worked closely with the Mississauga of the (then New) Credit First Nation on the exhibit *Outcome of the War of 1812: First Nations Betrayed*, which opened in their new community centre near Hagersville. He worked with the late Steve Otto and Michael Peters of The Friends, and the late Chris Baker, exhibition coordinator for Toronto Culture, to mount *At Ease: The Military at Play in Nineteenth-Century Canada* in the Blue Barracks. He generously gave his time and expertise, contributing articles and book reviews to *The Fife and Drum*.

He has also worked closely with fort staff and volunteers at The Friends and the Fort York Foundation in acquiring and exhibiting historic items of special affinity to the history of the fort and Toronto. These include the Cawthra family heirlooms, Upper Canada Preserved medals and Chewett's War of 1812 regimental order book. He worked collaboratively with fort staff on two layers of interpretive panels – one inside the fort walls, the other installed as wayfinding posts across the National Historic Site, bringing an unprecedented depth and visibility to the historic interpretation of the site for visitors. These panels,



beautifully designed and fabricated, have held up well over the course of a decade now.

Wayne, still a young man, and with a depth of experience, has much more to contribute. He and his wife Julia are accredited judges of craft beer and have planted heirloom varieties of apples from which they make cider. We wish him well in his future endeavours. Exploring and writing about the history of our city we're sure are among them.

*Dr. Andrew Stewart is an award-winning archaeologist, an expert digital map-maker, and the Chair of the Fort York Foundation.*

*The latest book from Wayne, Matthew Blackett and Alex Avdichuk is filled with the colour and design of Toronto's early marketers – including work by the city's most accomplished graphic artists. It's available from the [Toronto Museums online shop](http://Toronto Museums online shop) and at [www.spacing.ca](http://www.spacing.ca).*



## Mrs. Traill's Advice NATURAL DYES



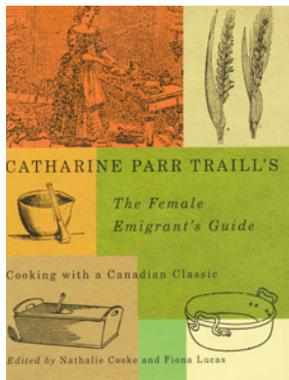
Those who spin their own wool should also know something about dying it. The industrious economical Canadian farmers' wives generally possess some little knowledge of this kind, which enables them to have many varieties in the colours of their home spun garments ...

There are many vegetable dyes that are made use of here, such as the butternut, which dyes a rich, strong, coffee-brown, by steeping the inner bark in cold water for several days, and soaking the yarn in the strained liquor. The flowers of the golden-rod, a plant which grows abundantly in Canada, and blooms in the latter end of summer and fall, boiled down, gives a fine yellow; and yarn steeped first in this, and then in indigo, turns to a bright full green. The lie of wood-ashes, in which a bit of copperas has been dissolved, gives a nankeen-color or orange, if the strength of the lie be sufficient to deepen it; but it is hurtful from its corrosive qualities, if too strong ...

The yarn before dying must be well and thoroughly washed, to remove the oil which is made use of in the carding-mill; and well rinsed, to take out the soap used in washing it; as the soap would interfere with the colours used in the dying process.

Horse-radish leaves boiled, give a good yellow; and the outer skins of onions, a beautiful fawn or pale brown.

To cloud your yarn of a light and dark blue, for mitts, socks or stockings, braid three skeins of yarn together, before you put them into the indigo-vat; and when dry and wound off, the yarn will be prettily clouded with different shades, from dark to very pale blue.



From Catherine Parr Traill's **The Female Emigrant's Guide** originally published in 1855 by a printer in Toronto. "Mrs. Traill's Advice" appears regularly in *The Fife and Drum*, sampling from this attractive recent edition from McGill-Queen's University Press. An indispensable Canadian reference, it is available from the Toronto History Museums online store. The illustration is from the 1836 edition of Mrs. Traill's **The Backwoods of Canada**.

It's a great time to catch up on past issues of  
*The Fife and Drum*  
 Click on the covers to download these stories of Toronto!

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 1 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 1 April 2015



Silver, brass and parchment: the American history of York in April 1812

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 2 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 2 Dec 2015



A warship is launched from Spadina Quay

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 3 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 3 Oct 2015



A Mohawk warrior at Queenston Heights

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 4 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 4 April 2016



Fort Randall an outpost of French diplomacy and trade

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 5 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 5 April 2016



Conversation Peck is being restored

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 6 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 6 Oct 2016



Fort York's brick history is revealed

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 7 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 7 June 2016



St. John's fire clinic served the poor

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 8 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 8 June 2016



A Canadian rifeman in the summer of '44

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 9 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 9 April 2017



Rentary Skate Trail Opens @ Fort York on January 6

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 10 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 10 April 2017



The Invicta Games at Fort York

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 11 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 11 July 2017



Fort York Guard Features for Canada

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 12 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 12 Dec 2017



The mystery of Toronto

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 13 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 13 April 2018



New Exhibit Introduces Historic Fort York

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 14 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 14 May 2018



Toronto's First Historical Plaques

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 15 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 15 April 2018



CityPlace Schooner built for shallow water

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 16 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 16 July 2018



Compelling Plaque Narratives of Handmaiden warfare in Ontario during the 1660s

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 17 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 17 Dec 2018



For King and Country: WW I and the Motors of Toronto

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 18 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 18 Sept 2019



Not Taking Freedom for Granted

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 19 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 19 April 2020



The New Fort and the origins of Hockey in Toronto

**The Fife and Drum**

Number 20 of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common Vol. 24, No. 20 April 2020



Fort York & Better for the Bicentennial

Visit our website at: [www.fortyork.ca](http://www.fortyork.ca). Learn more about Fort York, subscribe to the free newsletter, become a member, donate or browse our historical image gallery.



Editor  
 Graphic Design  
 Circulation

Bob Kennedy [rhkennedy@gmail.com](mailto:rhkennedy@gmail.com)  
 Ted Smolak [tedsmolak.design](http://tedsmolak.design)  
 Chris Henry



The Fife and Drum is a quarterly publication of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common. ISSN 2562-363X (Print) ISSN 2562-3648 (Online)