

THE WAR OF 1812-1815

The War That Shaped Our Nation A Survey of the Histories The Canadian Perspective

All participants in all wars, and their descendants,
have their own perspectives on events.

D. Peter MacLeod : Four Wars of 1812

*In all history there is no war which was not hatched by the governments,
the governments alone, independent of the interest of the people,
to whom war is always pernicious even when successful.*

Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

by M.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels
B.A., F.T.C.L., A.R.C.T., F.C.F. P.M.,
P.G.J.W., P.G.M.



The Heritage Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 730 G.R.C.
Brock Daylight Lodge A.F. & A.M. No. 745 G.R.C,

St. Catharines

Date: May 11, 2013

- R.W. Bro. W. Douglas Mitchell, Worshipful Master, The Heritage Lodge No. 730
- W. Bro. Ted Dunsmore, Worshipful Master, Brock Daylight Lodge No. 745
- R.W. Bro. Burns Anderson, Recipient of the Grand Masters Award of Merit
- R.W. Bro. John Siggins, Past Grand Director of Ceremonies, and Member of the History Committee of the Grand Lodge of New York
- Members of Grand Lodge, Present and Past
- Brethren

I consider it a singular honour and a distinct privilege to share this topic with our distinguished Brother from the Grand Lodge of New York. R.W. Sir, at your earliest convenience, please convey my most sincere fraternal greetings to M.W. Bro. James E. Sullivan, the Grand Master, and extend my gratitude for the assistance he provided in arranging your participation. This collaboration proves yet again that Masons are indeed ‘Brothers without Borders.’

To be invited to give this paper in a Lodge named for the hero of Upper Canada, Major General Sir Isaac Brock is symbolically significant. Here we can feel a tangible link with our beginnings. Indeed, there are those that credit this distinguished and daring British Army Officer with creating the nation we celebrate two centuries later as ‘*the true North, strong and free,*’ and credit the North American War fought between 1812 and 1815, from the Canadian perspective, with the preservation of our distinct Canadian national identity – all agree that it was a defining moment in both Canadian and American history. The bicentenary of this important event provides an opportunity to journey through time that we may be the better informed of what shaped our destiny.

Let me make a disclaimer at the outset. I can make no claim to be either an academic historian or a scholarly authority. As a Canadian with British heritage, and proud of it, I am interested in the

strange combination of cultural loyalties that makes us unique as a nation. I have read a number of the histories and biographies that have been published over the years to satisfy my innate curiosity. This paper, therefore, expresses the view of one representing the average Canadian – whatever that may mean.

During and preceding the commemoration of the bicentenary of this conflict, there have been many studies of all aspects, military, political, biographical and social published by Canadian, American, and British historians, both professional and amateur, as well as journalists in books, magazines and newspapers. As Freemasons our Grand Lodge has been well served by our professional advisors, the Grand Historian, V.W. Bro. S. Michael Jenkyns, and the Grand Archivist, V.W. Bro. Daniel J. Glenney, both of whom have written extensively on the Freemasonic connections with the War of 1812. Professor Renee Lafferty of the History Department at Brock University has done extensive research which she has generously shared with us in lectures on two occasions. Dr. Lafferty will present the fifth Annual Sankey Lecture next March 30 2014 at Brock. In the period when military lodges with travelling warrants were spreading Freemasonry abroad, especially in the New World, many officers and men on both sides, including Native Americans, were active members of the craft.

A balanced article from an American perspective by Dr. Aimee E. Newell, Director of Collections, Scottish Rite Museum and Library, Lexington, Massachusetts, entitled 'Dawn's Early Light – The War of 1812: Two Centuries Later' was published in The Northern Light, the journal of the Northern Jurisdiction of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.¹ Dr. Newell argues that it was "*primarily a naval war*" and concludes, "*In the end, the results of the war were unclear at best and a failure at worst.*"

The fourth annual Sankey Lecture given by Professor Joy Porter at Brock University earlier this year (2013) addressed "Native American Freemasonry: Joseph Brant to the 21st Century."

1 *The Northern Light*, Vol. 43, No. 1, February 2012 – available online

War always has a human side, too often submerged in the fire and smoke of battle. This War of 1812 produced heroes – Major-General Brock (1769-1812), Tecumseth (c.1768-1813), and Laura (Ingersoll) Secord (1775-1868) became the enduring icons in Canadian popular culture.

It also produced traitors, the most infamous among which was Joseph Willcocks (1773-1814). He was neither a Canadian nor an American, but an Irish-born immigrant. An ambitious opportunist, Willcocks was elected to the provincial assembly and edited an anti-establishment newspaper in Newark. In 1813 he formed a company of ‘Canadian Volunteers’ that fought with the Americans until he was killed at the Siege of Fort Erie in 1814.

The city of Brockville, originally Elizabethtown, was renamed in 1812 following Brock’s death at Queenston on October 13. Brock Township is in Durham Region. Streets and roads throughout present day Ontario bear his name. When Brock University was founded, the last order the General issued forms the motto chosen, ‘Surgite!’ – Latin for “*Push on!*” In my hometown of Orillia on Lake Couchiching, far removed from the battlefields of 1812, one of the old streets is Tecumseth, named for the Shawnee Indian Chief killed in the Battle of the Thames in 1813. Laura Secord Chocolates, founded in 1913, was named in her honour. Monuments to all three have been erected – principal among which is the Brock Monument at Queenston Heights, the cornerstone of which was laid on 13 October 1853 and officially inaugurated on 13 October 1859, replacing the original monument erected in 1823 and destroyed by Fenian sympathizers in 1840. The mortal remains of Sir Isaac Brock and those of his aide-de-camp, Lt.-Col. John Macdonell, were placed in a vault at the base of the column.

It is of interest to note in passing that the chairman of the monument committee formed in 1840 was Sir Allan MacNab, ² Provincial Grand Master of the Third Provincial Grand Lodge and subsequent-

2 *Sir Allan Napier MacNab (1760-1830) Provincial Grand Master Canada West 1844-1857; Grand Master Ancient Grand Lodge of Canada 1857-1858.*

ly Grand Master of the Ancient Grand Lodge of Canada. When the new monument was completed and dedicated nineteen years later, MacNab, himself a veteran of the War of 1812, presided over the ceremony and delivered the principal address.³ One wonders what part, if any, the Masonic Order played in these ceremonies, either of the cornerstone-laying or its dedication. The broadsheet in the Archives of Ontario announcing the ‘Form of Procession to be observed at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the Brock Monument’ in 1853 refers only to ‘National and Other Societies.’

One of the earliest biographical sketches of Major- General Brock in my possession was published in the ‘Makers of Canada’ series in a volume shared with Governor John Graves Simcoe, written by Lady Edgar Scott, and published in 1909. Two recent books, A Matter of Honour: The Life, Campaigns and Generalship of Isaac Brock (2011) by Lt.- Gen. Dr. Jonathon Riley and The Astonishing General: The Life and Legacy of Sir Isaac Brock (2011) by Dr. Wesley B. Turner provide us with detailed insight into this iconic figure. Dr. James Laxer, Professor of History at York University, has contributed Tecumseth & Brock: The War of 1812 (2012). The well-known exploit of Laura Secord has been recounted and documented by Cheryl MacDonald, Laura Secord: The Heroic Adventues of a Canadian Legend (2005) and by Peggy Dymond Leavey, Laura Secord: Heroine of the War of 1812 (2012).

Dr. Riley raises the question of Brock’s membership in the fraternity. He states: *“It is of note that the 8th Foot had a strong body of Freemasons in its ranks and operated a regimental lodge, No. 156. This had been active throughout the regiment’s service in North America, and indeed the first Masonic lodge in Upper Canada was that at Newark (modern Niagara-on-the-Lake) which had been started by members of the regiment ... while the 8th was in garrison at Fort Niagara. It is known that Brock was a member of this lodge in later life and it can therefore be safely assumed that he joined the Masonic order while a*

3 Beer, Donald R. *Sir Allan Napier MacNab. Hamilton: Dictionary of Hamilton Biography Inc., 1984. pp. 385-386*

young officer in the 8th Foot.”⁴ Most historians caution that this assumption, attractive as it may be to us, is based on circumstantial evidence and remains undocumented.

While some academics might snobbishly sneer at the popular histories written by Pierre Berton, The Invasion of Canada, 1812-1813 (1980) and Flames Across The Border, 1813-1814 (1981) and republished in one volume in 2011, it must be admitted that Berton was a great storyteller.⁵ Berton, with the keen sense of the journalist, writes in the present tense, giving the reader a sense of immediacy and presence. This is documentary story-telling at its best. In what he describes as “social history” he takes us into the centre of the action.

Here is the Canadian perspective in a paragraph. In the introductory Overview to the second volume entitled “*The All-Canadian War*” Berton writes: “*The border war of 1812 was a singular conflict. Geography, climate, weather, language, and propinquity combined to make it distinctively Canadian. It was a season war; campaigns were timed with one eye on the calendar, the other on the thermometer. It was a stop-and-go war; seeding and harvest often took priority over siege and attack. It was a neighbours’ war (but no less vicious for that): men fought their own kin; others refused to fight; trade between enemies was frowned on but never successfully suppressed. It was a pinch-penny war: ... It was a long-distance war, fought on a thousand mile front ... Finally, it was an incendiary war in which private homes as well as public buildings and military fortifications went up in flames, fuelling a desire for revenge that transcended strategy and politics.*”⁶

What is the purpose of history? What is the object of the historian in writing history? Perhaps it is not simplistic to suggest that history is written to involve the reader in the events of the past – to

4 Riley Jonathon. *A Matter of Honour: The Life, Campaigns and Generalship of Isaac Brock*. Montreal: Robin Brass Studio Inc., 2011. p. 24

5 Pierre Berton (1920-2004)

6 Berton, Pierre. *Flames Across the Border*. Reprinted Anchor Canada 2011. P. 394

provide a sense of being there. In this exercise in ‘time travel’ Berton succeeds completely.

It was Bro. Rudyard Kipling ⁷ that reminded us: “*If history were taught in stories, it would never be forgotten.*” As Professor J. L. Granatstein, Canada’s most distinguished military historian wrote of Pierre Berton, “*Berton moved into the terrain abandoned so foolishly by the academic historians, and he found broad, sweeping subjects that captured huge audiences. All were themes of national importance and national interest. ... journalists-turned-popular-historians ... found intrinsic interest in the stories of the Canadian past. ... Their stories leapt off the pages, captivating Canadians – and informing them. The best of the journalists became the nation’s story-tellers, the creators and keepers of the national mythos.*” ⁸ The words of Bro. Samuel Clemens, better known to us as ‘Mark Twain,’ ⁹ written in his Notebook of 1885 come to mind. “*My books are water; those of the great geniuses is wine. Everybody drinks water.*”

In commemoration of the bicentenary of the beginning of what has been more accurately termed the North American War of 1812-1815, the Canadian War Museum mounted a special exhibition which presented four perspectives of the conflict through the eyes of the war’s four main participants: Canadians, Americans, the British and Native Americans. ¹⁰ The following is from the promotional posting on the Canadian War Museum website: “*All four key participants have their own interpretations of the significance of the War of 1812. For Canadians, it was a series of American invasions successfully repelled by French and English-speaking Canadian militia, British Regulars (members of the Royal Navy or British Army), and First Peoples warriors. For Americans, it was about standing up to Britain, which was trying to interfere with the United States’ overseas trade.*”

7 Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) *Freemason*

8 Granatstein, J. L. *Who Killed Canadian History?* Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 1998 pp. 70-71

9 Samuel Clemens (1835-1910) *Freemason*

10 June 13 2012 – January 6, 2013 MacLeod, D. Peter. *Four Wars of 1812.* Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2012.

*To the British, the conflict was vastly overshadowed by the concurrent war against Napoleonic France and is little remembered today. For Native Americans, the war was a desperate fight for freedom and independence as they struggled to defend their homelands.”*¹¹

An oft quoted phrase variously attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte and Winston Churchill, claims that “*History is written by the victors.*” That begs the question: Who won the War of 1812? Who were the Victors? One eminent historian’s monograph is entitled, ‘The War That Both Sides Won.’¹² An article in MacLean’s Magazine written by Peter Shawn Taylor, entitled ‘Damn Yankees: The New War of 1812.’¹³ stating “*the Americans insist on imaginatively claiming that they won the war.*” The headline on the cover story boldly stated: “*It was the victory that made us a nation. Now the Americans are rewriting history to claim they won.*” The eminent historian, J. C. A. Stagg, Professor of History at the University of Virginia reasons that “*the fact that the United States had survived the war at all without incurring any significant losses became a good enough result to permit Americans to transform it into a triumph in its own right.*”¹⁴

It might be more helpful and informative to examine what parties were at war and what political and economic interests were in conflict. The War of 1812 was not a ‘made in Canada’ event. The distinguished American historian, Professor Gordon S. Wood in his classic study of the period, after characterizing it as “*the strangest war in American history*” yet ranking it as “*one of the most important wars in American history,*” describes the War of 1812 as “*a second war for independence and a defense of republicanism itself.*”¹⁵ When the American President, James Madison signed the declaration of war on June 18, 1812, it was a war against King George and Great

11 From the Canadian War Museum website

12 Turner, Wesley B. *The War of 1812: The War That Both Sides Won.* Toronto: Dundurn Press, second edition 2000.

13 Maclean’s Magazine October 17, 2011, pp. 56 -59

14 Stagg, J. C. A. *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. p. 48.

15 Wood, Gordon S. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic.* Oxford University Press, 2009. Chapter 18, p. 699

Britain. The invasion of colonial Canada was the means of bringing pressure to bear on Great Britain. Initially, it was considered an easy conquest by America – “*a mere matter of marching*” an overconfident Thomas Jefferson had boasted. It was not entirely an idle boast. The Upper Province was sparsely settled, and mainly by recent immigrants from south of the border lured north with the promise of land grants. Where would their loyalties lie? (After all ‘blood runs thicker than water.’) Many Americans thought that their former friends, relations and neighbours would view the invading army as liberating them from despotic British rule. Even Brock had concerns about the loyalty of the Upper Canadians.

There is little doubt that one of the primary causes motivating Madison and the ‘war hawks’ in Congress was territorial expansion – what in later times would be termed ‘Manifest Destiny’ when the entire continent would inevitably become American.

One of the most even handed and fair minded studies was published by Professor Alan Taylor, who teaches American and Canadian history at the University of California, Davis. The title of his book, The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies,¹⁶ indicates a somewhat different perspective by identifying the connections among the principal belligerents.

When the Treaty of Ghent was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814, it is not unrealistic to conclude that everything was put back to square one. That does not account for the loss of lives and destruction of property that the war caused. York was destroyed and looted (April 26, 1813) Newark was burned (December 10, 1813). In retaliation, the British burned Washington. (August 24, 1814). The Republic gained two iconic national symbols as a result of the war: ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ was penned by Francis Scott Key as he watched the bombardment of Fort McHenry, Baltimore in 1814. Combined

16 Taylor, Alan. **The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies.** *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Inc., 2010.*

with a melody composed by an English cathedral organist, John Stafford Smith, it was officially adopted as the National Anthem in 1931. The President's House became the White House when it was whitewashed to cover the fire-blackened walls after it was torched by the British in August of 1814.

Rather than '*the war that both sides won*' it might be considered '*the war that nobody won.*' The real losers in this conflict were the Native Americans. Tecumseth's vision of a great nation with its own territory was shattered forever.

While the administrative seat of government was located at Montreal in Lower Canada, it was Upper Canada that bore the brunt of the invasion, focused along the Niagara frontier. Here the major battles were fought – Queenston, Stoney Creek, Fort George, Fort Erie. From a Canadian perspective, Upper Canada as a British colony was preserved. The motto of the Province of Ontario, *Loyal She Began, Loyal She Remains* was proven.¹⁷

As Freemasons we understand the significance and appreciate the importance of symbols. The Canadian perspective of this conflict is symbolized by a medal – a medal never awarded. In December of 1812, the Reverend John Strachan, Anglican rector of York founded The Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada as a charitable organization to provide clothing for the Canadian militiamen serving on the Niagara frontier. In 1813 the Society had a medal cast in gold and in silver, the Upper Canada Preserved medal, for presentation to the officers and men that had fought in the defense of the colony. On one face is a laurel wreath and the words, 'FOR MERIT. PRESENTED BY A GRATEFUL COUNTRY.' The other has a stylized map of the Niagara River: on the right, or United States side of the waterway, a flustered American eagle flaps its wings, while across the border, on the left, an industrious Canadian beaver works away peacefully, protected by a British lion who sits ready to pounce should the eagle try to enter Canada. Around this image are the

17 *Latin: Ut inceptis fidelis sic permanet.*

words, 'UPPER CANADA PRESERVED.' However, the medal was never presented and the collection was destroyed in 1840.¹⁸ When Dundurn Press undertook the publication of a series of historical studies to commemorate the bicentenary, the series was issued under the title 'Upper Canada Preserved.'

The War of 1812-1815 has been summarized in an article that was published in Canadian Geographic, February 2012. "*The conflict that pitted American soldiers against British armed forces and ultimately laid a foundation for Canada's nationhood. It was a matter of sovereignty for the Americans, expedience for the British, grim choices for First Nations and survival for Canadians. In the end the War of 1812 was an inconclusive series of battles that laid the foundation for today's Canada.*"

The real cause for celebration two centuries later is the fact that this was the last war to be fought on Canadian soil – a fact for which we must all be grateful.

18 Full details of the Society and the Medal may be found in an article published in *The War of 1812* magazine, Issue 6, April 2007 by Dr. Carl Benn and posted on line *Napoleon Series*.

REVIEW

THE WAR OF 1812-1815

by V.W. Bro. Daniel J. Glenney
Grand Archivist
Heritage Lodge No. 730

Date: May 11, 2013

Brethren, every Grand Master who serves in that high office makes his own particular contributions to our Order. One of Most Worshipful Brother Raymond S. J. Daniels' many contributions as Grand Master, was his strong support to the study and interpretation of Masonic history.

It is therefore a privilege to be asked to provide a review for the paper written by Most Worshipful Brother Daniels, entitled "War of 1812-1815, The War That Shaped Our Nation, A Survey of the Histories, The Canadian Perspective."

Most Canadians know very little about their own history, and the War of 1812 is no exception. The author has given us a comprehensive foundation from which we can be introduced to the historical events, but also launch into more complex discussions about the long term significance of the War. The author stresses "all agree that it was a defining moment in both Canadian and American history." Much of this history even has a Masonic thread running throughout.

The author agrees with Professor Jack Granatstein, who bemoaned the fact that academics adopted such a dry style of writing that it actually "Killed Canadian History." Both Professor Granatstein and the author admire the inspirational history of the War of 1812 as written by Pierre Berton. The author also quotes Brother Rudyard Kipling, who wrote, "If history were taught in stories, it would never be forgotten."

Any good narrative of high drama, such as Brother Kipling would relate, requires villains and heroes. The author gives us plenty to choose from in this category, by including the worst of the villains, and the best of our heroes.

The villain, Joseph Willcocks, fought at Queenston Heights with the British. The author accurately describes him as “an ambitious opportunist.” By 1813, we see that he had switched his allegiance, raised a company of “Canadian Volunteers” to fight for the Americans, and thus was guilty of betraying not only the Crown, but also his Niagara Masonic Brethren.

On the other hand, the author introduces us to almost larger than life, well documented Canadian heroes such as Laura Secord, Chief Tecumseh, and General Isaac Brock, arguably one of Canada’s most talented military leaders ever. The author documents the adulation felt by generations of Canadians to General Brock as a hero.

The most visible memorial to the General, was the erection at Queenston Heights of Brock’s monument. On a Masonic perspective, one would be particularly intrigued by the section the author included on the inauguration of the Monument in 1859, specifically the fact that the chairman was Sir Allan MacNab. A veteran of the War of 1812, MacNab was also a prominent Freemason.

Given MacNab’s Masonic background, along the persuasive arguments that General Brock probably was a Mason, one must share in the author’s speculations. He argues that a Masonic cornerstone laying ceremony, although not documented, might have been part of the inauguration. This is a tantalizing clue, and an opportunity for further research.

The author presents an interesting assertion, about who won the War. He notes that both Canada and the United States claim to have been the victors. But when one looks at the incredible levels of devastation, the author makes a valid comment. “Rather than ‘the

war that both sides won' it might be considered the war that nobody won."

Native warriors paid an especially high price to support the British. As the author noted, "Tecumseh's vision of a great nation with its own territory was shattered forever." He also states. "The real losers in this conflict were the Native Americans." As Masons, we should never forget that many of these Native chiefs and warriors were also Masonic Brethren.

The author's most important and thought provoking specific point of all, is found in his conclusion. This is the point where he says "the real cause for celebration two centuries later is the fact that this was the last war to be fought on Canadian soil."

During the 19th century, on several occasions, it seemed that another war would in fact break out between Great Britain and the United States. If that had occurred, Canada would have been caught right in the middle once again. However, the hard lessons had been learned. Diplomacy prevailed, to the point where by the beginning of the 20th century, another war became unthinkable.

Today in the 21st century, we take the world's longest undefended border for granted. Surely this a model for the rest of our troubled world to emulate.

Respectfully submitted,
V.W. Bro. Daniel J. Glenney
Grand Archivist