

Three Years of War in Niagara

ON JUNE 18, 1812, THE AMERICANS DECLARED WAR ON GREAT BRITAIN. NIAGARA WAS A FOCAL POINT. THE BRITISH HAD FORTS AT BOTH ENDS OF THE NIAGARA RIVER (FORT GEORGE AND FORT ERIE) TO PROTECT THE PENINSULA FROM INVASION. THE MAJOR AMERICAN MILITARY BASE IN THE REGION WAS FORT NIAGARA, DOMINATING THE HEAD OF THE NIAGARA RIVER IN YOUNGSTOWN, NEW YORK, ACROSS FROM FORT GEORGE.

For three years, Niagara was under almost constant siege. In October of 1812, American forces invaded at Queenston Heights. This engagement was the first major battle between the forces and provided a prelude of things to come. It also showed the early weaknesses of the underprepared American Army.

The war resumed in the spring of 1813, with better prepared American forces. An American victory at York (Toronto) encouraged a new Niagara campaign. In May, a landing force captured Fort George. They held onto the Fort until December of 1813, at various times expanding and contracting from that point. Most of Niagara then was under American occupation. When the Americans withdrew in December, they burned the village of Niagara (Niagara-on-the-Lake).

In 1814, the Americans invaded Niagara again. This time the focus was to the south, at Fort Erie. They captured the Fort and proceeded into the peninsula again, with engagements at Chippawa (July 5, 1814) and then Lundy's Lane (July 25, 1814). Following these two devastating clashes, the Americans withdrew to Fort Erie and endured a British siege of the fort (August 15 - September 17). In November, however, compelled to reinforce their eastern seaboard, the Americans retreated across the border and the occupation of the Niagara Frontier was over.

The War officially ended on December 24th, 1814 with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent.

A Prelude to Battle

You are standing on Main Street, part of the historic Portage Road. Believed to have been an old native trail, it was used as a portage around the Falls and rapids of the Niagara River. As the main north/south road in the area, it was used by both armies during the War of 1812. Defeated at the Battle of Chippawa on July 5, 1814, the British and Canadian forces withdrew along the road to Fort George, pursued by the Americans under General Jacob Brown. Running short of supplies and needing reinforcements, Brown's forces were unable to press their advantage. After burning the village of St. Davids, they returned along Portage Road to their camp in Chippawa, where obtaining supplies from the American side of the Niagara River was much easier.

Aware of American movements, British and Canadian troops, under General Phineas Riall, began forming up along Lundy's Lane at its junction with Portage Road on the morning of July 25, 1814.

British pickets at Willson's Tavern (south of this spot, near the Falls) were spied by advance American scouts. Shortly after 5 p.m., an American Brigade, under General Winfield Scott, began marching up Portage Road from Chippawa, chasing the British pickets from Willson's Tavern and approaching within half a kilometre (approximately 500 yards) of Lundy's Lane.

General Scott began to form his brigade here (numbering slightly more than 1000 men) in and around the Chestnut woods, just south of Barker's Lane. He sent a messenger to General Brown at Chippawa with the information that British troops were facing him down in force and he was preparing for an attack. General Brown later reinforced the American forces with an additional 1500 men.

B The British Position

In the early evening of July 25th, 1814, the British commander, Lt. General Gordon Drummond stood on this hilltop. Having just received intelligence that an American force was marching northward in this direction

Walking Tour

Follow this trail to experience the American advance and the British defense on the Lundy's Lane Battlefield. Stops at key locations will help you understand what occurred here on July 25, 1814.

You may begin your walking tour (approximately 1.7 km in total distance) at any point, but we recommend starting at the Niagara Falls History Museum or the Battle Ground Hotel Museum.

If you prefer to drive part of the circuit, several parking lots are available (see map).

For more information on the War of 1812 in Niagara:

- Visit the Gale Family War of 1812 Gallery at the Niagara Falls History Museum
- Check out the books and related materials available at the Museum Gift Shop
- Tour the Chippawa Battlefield Park and visit Willoughby Historical Museum on the Niagara River Parkway.
- Visit – eighteentwelve.com, discover1812.com, 1812history.com, or visit1812.com.


Niagara Falls History Museum
5810 Ferry Street
Niagara Falls, Ontario 905.358.5082
www.niagarafallsmuseums.ca

Financial assistance provided by:

  

  

Connect with Niagara Falls Museums:

  

Ver 1.0 (07/12)

along the Portage Road, he realized this site would make an excellent defensive position. Accordingly, he set up his artillery pieces (two 24-pounders, two 6-pounders and a 5 ½ inch howitzer) and deployed his troops (initially 2000 men with later reinforcements of over 1700) in a wide arc to the right and left of the guns.

While at this location (see inset map), explore the Graves Significant to the War of 1812 and the rest of the cemetery.

C The Americans Attack

Scott's Brigade emerged from the Chestnut woods shortly after 7 p.m. Ahead, they saw the height of land at Lundy's Lane, containing a small cemetery and a meeting house, all surrounded by farmers' fields. The British had placed their artillery on this height in preparation for battle.

The Americans surged forward, attempting to take the British position. This and repeated attempts failed and they endured heavy losses. Later, under cover of darkness, the American 21st Infantry made its way up the southeast slope of the hill. In a surprise flank attack, they captured the British guns.

D The British Counter Attacks

Following the capture of his artillery by the Americans, Lt. General Drummond and his troops retreated from their defensive position on the height of land in the cemetery to this area on the north side of the hill.



British Regulars defending Lundy's Lane.

Starting before 10 p.m. and lasting over the next several hours, Drummond led three unsuccessful counterattacks to try and recapture the British guns. In each case, the fighting was vicious and bloody.

Around midnight, with both sides completely exhausted, the Americans withdrew to their camp at Chippawa. They left the British guns behind, allowing Drummond to reclaim them the following morning.

Walking Tour

The Battle of Lundy's Lane

July 25, 1814



The Aftermath

After the fiercest and bloodiest battle of the War of 1812, General Brown ordered the American withdrawal southward. The American forces were not expelled from the position they won, but retired voluntarily. The British regained possession of the battlefield, but were in no condition to pursue their enemy. Although both the British and Americans claimed victory, neither side won decisively.

Casualties

Both sides suffered heavy losses during the Battle of Lundy's Lane and these were severe in proportion to the number of combatants. The casualty rates were nearly equal, as both sides recorded around 800 casualties, which included men killed, wounded or missing. This was the highest single casualty rate for the War of 1812.

Battlefield Tourism

Following the close of the War of 1812, the battlefield became a popular tourist destination. For many decades, veterans of the battle were available to conduct personal



Lundy's Lane Observation Towers

tours. In 1845, the first of five viewing towers was erected, mostly wooden frame structures with a lofty viewing platform overlooking the battlefield. One of these towers was built on this spot by Adam Fralick, owner of the adjacent tavern which is now the Battle Ground Hotel Museum. Fralick's tower was a prominent landmark in the city, visible for several miles. In the late 1800s, the tower was dismantled and replaced with a steel structure known as the Lundy's Lane Observatory. Until 1921, its steam operated elevator whisked visitors to a viewing platform 31 metres (102 ft) high. Interest in the battlefield as a destination waned when the American Civil War provided Americans with new battlefields to visit and other local attractions gained popularity.

The Battle of Lundy's Lane

Walking Tour • July 25, 1814



Map Legend

- Walking Tour Route (Approx 1.7 km)
- Tour Stop
- Interpretive Sign
- Parking

Note: Map is Not to Scale

“THANK GOD, I ESCAPED WITH ONLY THE LOSS OF ONE HORSE SHOT UNDER ME. WE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THE ENEMY AND HOPE TO DRIVE THEM OUT OF THE COUNTRY. I WISH YOU WERE BESIDE ME JUST NOW FOR 10 MINUTES JUST TO SEE THE GRANDEST FALLS IN THE WORLD. NO DESCRIPTION THAT I HAVE EVER SEEN COMES UP IN ANY DEGREE TO THE ORIGINAL.”

Colonel Hercules Scott, 103rd British Reg. to his sister – Falls of Niagara, 30th July, 1814

“OUR VICTORY WAS COMPLETE, BUT, ALAS, THIS VICTORY GAINED BY EXHIBITIONS OF BRAVERY NEVER SURPASSED IN THIS COUNTRY, WAS CONVERTED INTO A DEFEAT BY A PRECIPITATE RETREAT, LEAVING THE DEAD, THE WOUNDED AND CAPTURED ARTILLERY, AND OUR HARD EARNED HONOR TO THE ENEMY.”

Major-General Peter B. Porter, American Army, to Governor D.D. Tompkins – Fort Erie, U.C., 29th July, 1814



Graves in Drummond Hill Cemetery Significant to the War of 1812

1 The Funeral Pyre

As bodies from the battle were too numerous for a conventional burial, many fallen soldiers were burned in a huge funeral pyre, which was constructed in this area of the cemetery. Prior to its modern day use as a Church parking lot, historians and archaeological experts confirmed that no human remains are located on the site.

2 Lundy's Lane Monument

The Lundy's Lane Monument (1895) commemorates those who dedicated their lives to the sovereignty of British North American.

3 Laura Secord

A legendary Canadian heroine, Laura Secord walked 30 kilometres (19 miles) westward from the village of Queenston to Beaverdams, to warn the British of an impending American attack in June 1813.

4 Christopher Buchner

Christopher Buchner, who fought at Chippawa and Lundy's Lane, saw the battle fought here on his own land. His fences were used to fuel the funeral pyre. He became the first lessee of the Government to operate a ferry boat below the Falls. His son, John Buchner, was taken prisoner in the Battle. It is rumoured he escaped his guards when they stopped to pick cherries.

5 Lt. Col. Cecil Bisshopp

British leader of successful earlier battles at Frenchman's Creek, Beaverdams and Black Rock, died of battle wounds and was buried here in 1813.

6 Lt. William Hemphill

The only British officer killed here whose grave is marked.

7 Richard Leonard

The British officer who held General Drummond's extreme right flank in the battle here, later built a home adjacent to the battlefield. Following the war, he became Colonel of the 1st Lincoln militia and Sheriff of Niagara.

8 Captain Abraham Hull

Son of American General William Hull (who surrendered Detroit to the British) and nephew of Captain Isaac Hull (Commander of the U.S.S. Constitution). Lying mortally wounded, he was tended by British Lieutenant John Le Couteur.

★ Memorial to Unidentified American Soldier

