

# The Fife and Drum

Newsletter of The Friends of Fort York and Garrison Common

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## Silver, booze and pantaloons: the American looting of York in April 1813

by Fred Blair



**George III Guinea, 1795,** is 8.35 grams of 22 carat gold; diameter 24 mm, a little bigger than a Canadian quarter. These circulated throughout British North America during the War of 1812. Courtesy RoyalMint.com.

Gold guineas were perfect plunder in the lawless days following the Battle of York, fought across the ground of downtown Toronto on April 27. We lost badly. After five days of American occupation, public buildings were in ruins and the treasury was gone. But how bad was the plunder of private homes? A look at the claims for compensation, p.2.

Lieutenant Ely Playter, a farmer in the 3rd York Militia, wrote in his diary that he was just leaving the eastern gate of the fort when the great magazine “Blew up.” Although it killed more U.S. soldiers than the fighting itself, ending the Battle of York, the vast explosion left Ely stunned but otherwise unharmed. He watched Major-General Sheaffe march off toward Kingston and quickly helped set fire to the dockyard, where the unfinished 30-gun frigate *Sir Isaac Brock* was one of the reasons York was attacked. Then Ely and a few other militiamen, with their frightened families, made their way to his father’s farm a mile or so up the Don River.

The next day a friend appeared at Ely’s nearby farm with a waggon (“hearing I was killed”) so he sent his wife and children with his friend north to safety in Newmarket.

It was two days after the battle that an American looting party “came to my House, Broke the door and took many things.” According to Ely’s later claim for losses, they made off with some cash and jewellery, his sword, clothing, and

other items – including his regimental head-dress. He and his brother George watched from the woods until dark.

In the morning he finally went down to the ruined fort to surrender and, after visiting some wounded friends, went back to find the American commander. “I spoke to Genl. Dearborn of his Men Plundering my House,” recorded Ely. “He said it was contrary to his orders and he had station’d an officer in Town to prevent it.” They both knew that private property was given explicit protection in the terms of the town’s surrender. The general assured the aggrieved lieutenant that he’d look into the matter and have the miscreants punished.

Major-General Dearborn, who issued few orders of *any* kind, had in fact done little to discourage the pillaging. Although the town of York was virtually lawless in those cool, rainy days at the end of April, there is no record of anyone being gravely assaulted. A few American officers took it upon themselves to prevent or discourage the pillaging. The buildings of the old garrison had been ruined by cannon fire and the explosion while the legislative building, the town blockhouse and several

government warehouses – after they’d been emptied of trophies and useful stores – were soon reduced to ashes, by accident or design. But these were public buildings. How severe was the looting of *private* homes in the wake of the battle?

This is an examination of the claims filed by individuals for losses resulting from the capture of York. The claims are focused on goods that were “taken and Plundered by the enemy,” as many of them say. They reveal some interesting aspects of the American

looting during the occupation and about the households of the town at the time. These claims for compensation open a small window into Upper Canadian social history.

During the War of 1812 and immediately after it, local military boards ruled on claims submitted for losses sustained as a result of the war. In 1815, Lieutenant Governor Gore appointed for this purpose an overarching commission which submitted a report the following year. No claims were actually paid out then, and it was estimated that the cost of covering them all would have been three

times the provincial income. A new commission was appointed in 1823, with more satisfactory results.

In 2012 Library & Archives Canada published digital microfilm records that included 23 reels from the War Loss Claims commissions. The documents recorded on microfilm include the original claims, records of the boards’ proceedings, various schedules and registers, and vouchers for the eventual payments.

Claims were categorized according to the cause of the loss. The boards recognized four causes: damage or loss caused by His Majesty’s troops, allied warriors, or the enemy; and damage or loss sustained while providing transport or supplies to the forces. A total of 2,055 claims were presented for compensation. There was a board for each type of claim and some people had to make two or more claims to different boards.

Included in this total were 130 claims that were paid in March, 1813, only a month before the battle. There were problems with the army’s accounting system at the beginning of the war and a number of Upper Canadians were not initially paid for their service in the militia, for providing accommodations or transport,

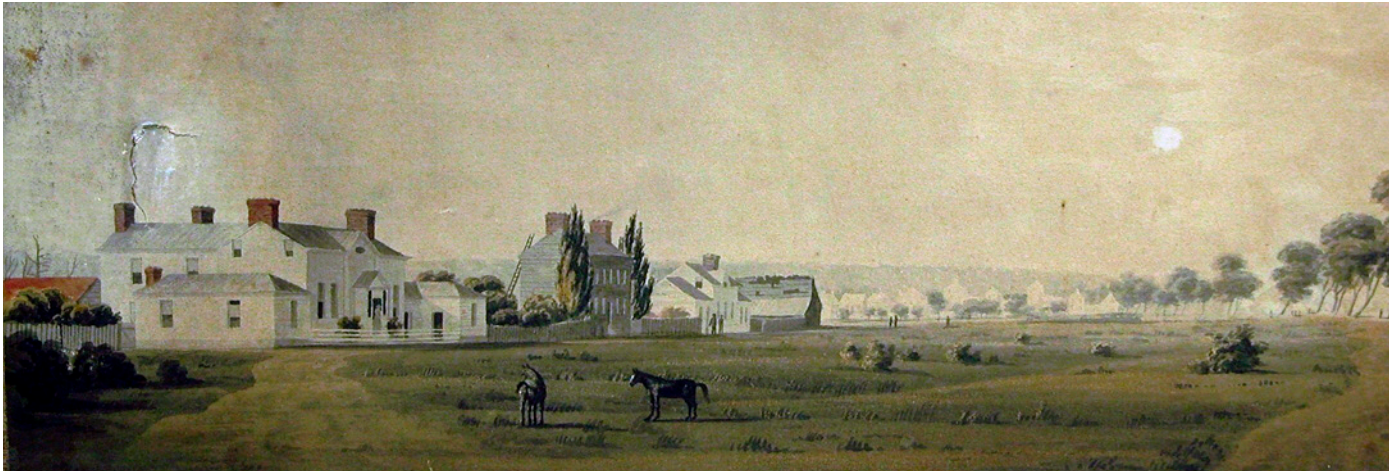


*Pine Grove* was the name of the Givins home, ransacked in the wake of the battle. Built in 1802, it was designed by William Berczy. This front section – with two big rooms above a stone cellar – was added later to a main structure, obscured in this view, that was one-and-a-half storeys tall. On April 27, 1813, these front rooms were the brief refuge of wounded allied warriors, whose blood was said to have soaked into the floorboards. This image is a watercoloured version of a sketch by Owen Staples, made in 1888 three years before the house was torn down. It stood at the top of Givins St. not far from Garrison Creek. Courtesy Toronto Public Library JRR 675 Cab

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### there is no record of anyone being gravely assaulted

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**John and Penelope Beikie** lived in the house in the middle of this tranquil scene painted just after the war. The large white house in the foreground belonged to George Crookshank, a senior supply officer of the army. Thoroughly looted, the house was used by the U.S. Army during the occupation. Crookshank's house was at the corner of Front and Peter Streets; from there to the garrison was only a wide-open field, good for grazing. A tavern stands just beyond the Beikie house. Detail of untitled oil on paper by Robert Irvine, 1815, 16" x 10" Courtesy Royal Ontario Museum 2004.85.2 (Bequest of Helen S. Heward)

for wood cutting, and for deliveries of food, firewood, candles and other supplies.

One important cause of loss was not considered by the commission: looting by the residents themselves. Some of these thieves were the “disaffected” – residents who were highly critical of the local government and openly supportive of the republican cause. Others were merely criminal opportunists (the victors had emptied the jail). Still others were happy to cart home supplies distributed by American officials at the wharves, where more public stores had piled up than the already crowded fleet could carry. There was so much that the Reverend John Strachan, the young Anglican who seemed to be everywhere that week, was given 50 barrels of flour to distribute to the poor. While he went to find a waggon, most of these barrels disappeared.

Many of the criminals and the disaffected were dealt with harshly by the justice system in subsequent months. York being a small town of some 700 souls, a few of these people were well known to their neighbours.

Claimants had to report the date and place of their loss, who was responsible, a description of the stolen items and their value (with proof when available) and a certification that the claim was “just and true,” preferably by a witness to the event. They did not have to give a detailed account of their experience with the looters.

But we have enough stories from a handful of claims, letters, diaries and other sources to construct a good sense of what went on in the days after the battle. “It appears that as soon as the last responsible American officer left the town,” writes historian Robert Malcolmson, “the prowlers went to work.” According to one acute observer – the sheriff’s wife – “every house they found deserted was completely sacked.”

I looked at 24 claims for compensation related to the occupation of York from the day of the battle (Tuesday the 27<sup>th</sup>) until the following Sunday (May 2<sup>nd</sup>) when the Americans were all back

aboard their ships. This is most, if not all, of the claims filed by citizens whose property at York was pillaged; a few other claims with absent or ambiguous dates or locations might have been included, but these 24 well represent the Upper Canadians.

The only other individual losses not counted here are the possessions of the officers of British regiments that retreated from York. Each was compensated (by the army, not the treasury of Upper Canada) typically for “three fourths of his personal baggage.” Sheaffe’s own valuable personal effects – including a dress coatee with gold embroidery and a splendid musical snuff box – were seized and taken to Dearborn. They were later auctioned off to American officers.

Of the 24 claims examined, four were rejected. Patrick Strange, an assistant barrack master at the York garrison, claimed for a list of items including all his lost clothing. Strange was also, however, a sergeant on the rolls of the Glengarry Regiment of Light Infantry Fencibles – a British regiment, not militia – so his claim was rejected as inadmissible. Jacob Clock of York Township claimed he had lost five cows and two calves to allied warriors. The board’s investigation found instead that “he had sold his cattle to the enemy.”

Joshua Leach, a carpenter working for the navy, claimed for the loss of a chest of tools. Evidence was presented that he was known to have had those tools in his possession after the occupation and that “he had amply remunerated himself by the share he took of the supplies plundered of public stores left by the enemy.” Joseph Kendrick lost his schooner, the *Governor Hunter*, that was aground near the shore and burnt by the Americans. He claimed it was worth £650. It was noted, however, that he had received £300 compensation (in stolen British army bills) from General Dearborn, which the commissioners deemed a fair value.

The remaining 20 claims were almost all the result of looting by ill-disciplined American soldiers. Thomas James Plucknett, the superintendent of the dockyard that was building the *Brock*, was

**“every house they found deserted was completely sacked”**

the one exception. The fire that Ely Playter had helped to set also consumed Plucknett's own clothing and household items, a claim initially rejected as unsupported (widely regarded as officious and incompetent, Plucknett had few friends).

Sheriff John Beikie, like many other men in the town, was briefly a prisoner on the afternoon of the battle. His wife, Penelope, searched for her husband and son and made sure they were safe before returning to their home, which was within sight of the ruined garrison. She managed to preserve most of the family's possessions by standing guard in the doorway with a broom. "Will you believe it?" she wrote to her brother, "I had the temerity to frighten, and even to threaten, some of the enemy."

Some American soldiers later helped guard the Beikie house and Major William Swan, a senior member of Dearborn's staff, stayed with the family one night to ensure their safety. He was among the various Americans commended by citizens of York (including Sheriff Beikie) for helping to guard their private property. And some U.S. troops gave supplies to the destitute families left behind when the British regiments left for Kingston.

Major James Givins, who was Sheaffe's liaison officer to the warriors, was also away from home when the looting began. A party of Americans drove his wife from their house and threatened her life. Angelique was found "in great Distress" by William Dummer Powell, a prominent citizen and friend of Sheaffe's. They soon encountered the guilty Americans.

"One of them was apprehended in my Presence who had returned loaded with Plunder," he wrote in support of the Givins claim, "& from whom a Silver Cup & Mirror was taken by the Guard." He accompanied Angelique to report the incident to Dearborn. The general told her (according to Powell) "that it was not in his Power to protect her in her own House" on the edge of the woods, and that she should take shelter with someone in town.

Reverend Strachan also saw the Americans with some of the Givins's possessions and, the following Saturday, he and Angelique went to Dearborn to protest. The commander said there was little he could do for anyone associated with the warriors, and Strachan himself suggested – in his endorsement of the Givins claim – that "Major Givins as belonging to the Indian department was particularly exposed" to the "depredations of the Enemy." The family's two claims amounted to more than £388, including £50 for repairs to the house. Among the articles lost were carpets, curtains, tablecloths, silverware, books, wine, furniture, all their clothes (they had seven children), an English saddle and one "Childs Cott with Dimity Curtains."

Grant Powell (William's son) was a local surgeon with the Provincial Marine who also left with Sheaffe's column. His wife, Elizabeth, had fled north with their

York 17 June 1823.

Claims of M<sup>rs</sup> Mary Hartney, formerly Widow Marshall  
for Losses Sustained by the Enemy at the Capture of York 16.0.  
on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of April 1813. as follows

3 Silver Watches	9 - 10 - 0
9 Silver Spoons	2 - 5 - 0
1 Silver, Stick Buckle	0 - 10 - 0
1 Silver Medal	0 - 10 - 0
Bedding	5 - 15 - 0
Kitchen Utensils	2 - 7 - 6
Wearing Apparel	35 - 2 - 6
Allowed £50	£56 - 0 - 0

Amounting to Fifty Six pounds Halifax Currency

for  
Mary + Hartney  
Mark

Wm<sup>rs</sup> } W. Stevenson  
J. M.

I hereby certify that to my knowledge  
the above claim is just and true  
York 17 June 1823

Geo: Crookshank

Bed, Bedding, Bed, and Window Curtains	£16 - 0 - 0
a large Stove	5 - 0 - 0
Family's Cloaths	12 - 10 - 0
Provisions (Sugar Tea & such)	4 - 10 - 0
Various Articles of Household Furniture	3 - 0 - 0
Allowed £50	Halifax Currency £41 - 0 - 0

I do hereby certify that the above amount  
is a reasonable estimate amounting to  
Forty one Pounds Halifax Currency

W. H. Hartney

**Mary Marshall's claim** (top) was written out on June 17, 1823, and endorsed the same day by George Crookshank as "just and true." A decade earlier Mary was an independent widow and working as the housekeeper in the government's offices. She and Patrick Hartney (below, claiming £41) were married the winter following the battle. The Barrack Master, who lost his right foot in the fighting, had seven children and was himself a recent widower. LAC RG19 E5(a) Vol.3740 micro t-1127 p.247 (Marshall), p.250 (Hartney)

servant and young daughter and did not return home until the following day. There she found, lounging in the doorway of the pantry, an American soldier eating pieces of sugar. Bessy Walters, the family's servant, berated the man – but it soon transpired that he was from a farm owned by Elizabeth's own father, a prominent citizen of New York City!

They set about exchanging the news of mutual acquaintances and, although it had already been pillaged, the Powell home was secure for the rest of the occupation. After the Americans left, Sheriff Beikie rescued a few of the family's possessions from Upper Canadian looters, but the Powells still claimed for the loss of household goods, clothing, food, and liquor.

The 20 legitimate claims for compensation that were examined were submitted by a variety of people:

Major William Allan, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, leading merchant, deputy commander of the regiment;*

Elizabeth Andrews, *of York;*

John S. Baldwin, *a merchant of Niagara with goods in York;*

Private Henry Brown, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, a messenger for the government;*

Private Thomas Deary, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, a merchant in York;*

Major James Givins, *Superintendent, Indian Department;*

Joseph Grenette, *a naval artificer;*

Patrick Hartney, *Barrack Master at fort, badly wounded;*

James Hinton, *a carpenter in York;*

John Hunter, *messenger for the Legislative Assembly who lived in an adjacent house;*

Lieutenant Edward MacMahon, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, military secretary to Major-General Sheaffe;*

Mary Marshall, *a housekeeper in Elmsley House;*

Ensign Edward McArthur, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, a merchant in York;*

Joseph Nadeaux, *of Lower Canada with baggage in York;*

Lieutenant Ely Playter, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia, a farmer;*

Thomas James Plucknett, *the Superintendent of Artificers for the Quarter Master General's Office and the Provincial Marine;*

Surgeon Grant Powell, *Provincial Marine;*

Quetton St. George, *a leading merchant of York;*

Private William Shaw, *3<sup>rd</sup> York Militia (son of Major-General Shaw);*

John Small, *of York.*

Of the two women who claimed for losses on their own, one – Mary Marshall – was well known at Elmsley House, rented as office space by the provincial government. Her claim was endorsed by no less than George Crookshank, a senior supply officer for the army and one of the claims commissioners.

The other woman – Elizabeth Andrews – may have been the mother of Angelique Givins (whose maiden name was Andrews). An Elizabeth Andrews was the widow of Captain James Andrews, a senior sailor on the Great Lakes when his new command *HMS*

*Ontario* was lost in a storm in 1780. Elizabeth and her daughters, including an Angelique, later made successful land claims in Newark (that is, in Niagara-on-the-Lake). Elizabeth claimed for her “entire wearing apparel” and some heirloom silver, all modestly valued at £25.

Comparing these claims to one another can be a problem. Like Joseph Kendrick's claim for his schooner, the values cited were sometimes inflated. Other claims, like those from Patrick Strange and Thomas Plucknett, included little detail of individual items. As a basis of comparison, then, the items listed were sorted into ten categories of goods. The ten categories, with the number of claims made for each category, are:

*Clothing 13*

*Money & valuables 12*

*Household items 11*

*Beds & bedding 9*

*Food 6*

*Wine & spirits 6*

*Books 4*

*Arms & munitions 3*

*Damages to a house 1*

*Bulk tobacco 1*



The end of April that year was cool and rainy and no doubt some of the stolen men's clothing went into immediate use. Women's and children's clothing was presumably taken home by the soldiers for their own families or for sale. Clothing was not only the most common category claimed, it also represents the largest number of individual items stolen. Some claimants lost entire chests full of wearing apparel.

Edward McMahon – who had been the Chief Clerk of the government's offices and was living at Government House as Sheaffe's military secretary – presented an itemized list of more than 180 articles of clothing, including 44 handkerchiefs, 30 fine linen shirts and six “pantaloons.” Mary Marshall and James Givins, on Angelique's behalf, more modestly claimed undefined “wearing apparel.” Mary wanted a little over £35 for hers; for the wardrobe of Angelique and her seven children, an even £100 was sought.

Any currency of money was a lucky find. The claims for loss were cited in Halifax currency, which wasn't a coinage or a set of bills but a value ultimately pegged to British sterling. The coinage of many different realms, as a weight of silver or gold, might make up the value. British gold guineas, each worth a little more than a pound sterling, were highly desirable; MacMahon claimed for 13 of them, lost in his “Port folio” of morocco leather. Paper currency was then not common in Upper Canada but the war had multiplied the use of British army bills (and most of these were seized from the treasury by Dearborn's staff, not from individuals by looters).

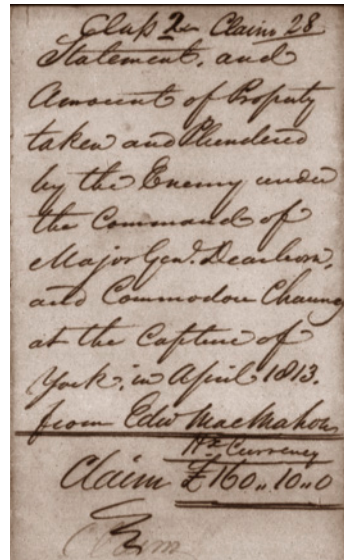
Wearing Apparel		Health (Cury)
Inside coats - six (2 New) Superfine Cloth -	5 0 0	2 10 0
Outside ditto - Five (Mountains & Great Coat)		
Pantaloons - six pair (2 New) - - - - -	7 10 0	
Breeches - 4 pair - (Capinnet) - - - - -	4 0 0	
Vests - (Silk, Marcellus, Capinnet) 13 - - - - -	4 0 0	
Woolen Gowns (Good) seven pair - - - - -	4 0 0	
Ditto Breeches (New) Two pair - - - - -	1 10 0	
Ditto Gaiters (Good) seven pair - - - - -	1 0 0	
Cotton stockings (Good) 1 Dozen pair - - - - -	3 0 0	
Ditto half ditto - (Good) 10 Pair - - - - -	2 0 0	
Woolen ditto - (D <sup>o</sup> ) 1 Doz. D <sup>o</sup> - - - - -	1 0 0	
Shirts - Linen, fine (12 New) - Thirty - - - - -	24 0 0	
Neck Handkerchiefs (12 New) Thirty two - - - - -	7 0 0	
Silk Pocket Handkerchiefs - Ten - - - - -	2 0 0	
Ditto Black ditto - - - - - Two - - - - -	10 0 0	
Carried forward -		£ 22 10 0

Included in this liquid category were small valuable items which could easily be sold. These include jewellery, watches, silver household items – sometimes referred to as “plate” and a means of storing wealth – and even tools and instruments. Mary Marshall claimed for no cash but lost three silver watches, nine silver spoons, a silver buckle and one silver medal.

Many of the household items looted, especially from the kitchen and the fireplace, would have been useful on the spot as the Americans prepared and served hot meals in their temporary camp. Plentiful food, wine, spirits and tobacco was welcome indeed to soldiers who had been eating hard rations crowded aboard rolling ships for a week. The same would have been true of much of the bedding that was plundered, including the four complete beds.

Pillaged from Thomas Deary’s store were 280 pounds of tobacco, eight hams, five gallons of wine and ten gallons of spirits. While William Allan was busy at the garrison the day after the battle, soldiers pried open the locks of his waterfront warehouse and made off with – according to his 1823 claim – “Six Cases of Shot, 2 Casks of best Quality Coppeas, One large Case English Soap & Box best Crown Glass, a Barrel of Gun Powder & two Casks of Jamaca Spirits.” When the Americans briefly returned at the end of July, he watched as again “They Broke open my Store House & took away burnt or distroyed every thing that was in it.”

Although only four claims included books, MacMahon lost over 80 volumes, including sets of Pope, Swift and Addison; collections of plays; encyclopedias, histories and travel books;



Edward Mahon's wardrobe, included in his £160 claim, must have delighted gossips for years to come. He had been the Chief Clerk in the offices that Mary Marshall cleaned and, as an officer in the 3rd York militia, was at Queenston with Major-General Brock. LAC RG19 E5(a) Vol.3757 micro t-1138 p.283

when looters approached – and he ended up losing his sword. Quetton St. George lost one and a half kegs of gunpowder (and lots else) from his business.

Some of the personal items lost were unique. There was William Shaw's masonic sash, Patrick Hartney's "large Stove," Elizabeth Andrews' silver butter boat, Henry Brown's fishing rod, the Givins's cradle, and Edward MacMahon's "Mahogany Portable Desk of the best description" – not to mention his expensive copy of *Espreille's Letters* (was that a euphemism?) and the calf-bound volumes of Virgil, in Latin and English.

It is impossible to know what proportion these claims represent of the personal losses suffered in York during the occupation. Many small losses were surely never reported. Even for significant losses, some residents would have lacked the proof or witness required; and some, having moved away, may simply have been unaware of the process. A few prominent citizens (including George Crookshank himself) never did file for compensation.

Some observers, on the other hand, may have exaggerated what they saw under the stress of the experience. Ely Playter wrote that there were gangs of American looters in York Township, but his was the only legitimate claim from there; many of the soldiers he saw were likely on scheduled patrols. It may be that the looting was limited to small gangs of opportunistic American soldiers, including some junior leaders. We've seen that some occupying officers, ashamed of the behaviour of their troops, made an effort to guard private property.

Even though these claims skew toward the more prosperous

bound magazines and miscellaneous pamphlets. The Givins family claimed £25 for their books, including a large atlas. John Hunter claimed for his gardening books. (A small public library was also looted but some of these books were famously returned by the U.S. Navy in November.)

Only a handful of weapons were looted from homes, presumably because most men had taken their firearms (those that owned any) to the garrison when they were mustered, and the Americans had already seized them. Any Upper Canadians who had the chance would also have hidden weapons and other valuables when the British retreated. Ely Playter was in the process of doing this

**“They Broke open my Store House & took away burnt or distroyed every thing that was in it”**

– who had valuable things to lose, and who could navigate the process – we can see the sorts of things that made up the household goods of a town on the Upper Canadian frontier. As such, they're another window into the social history of the province. They're also an indication of the wealth of original material that remains to be mined in the vaults of Library & Archives Canada, material that – now in the digital age – is more accessible than ever.

*Fred Blair is retired in Orillia and intrigued by stories of life in Upper Canada during the War of 1812. He has been publishing transcripts and indices for related collections, registries, and books for several years and is regularly employed as a volunteer researcher on that topic and on local history in Orillia.*

## Sources & Further Reading

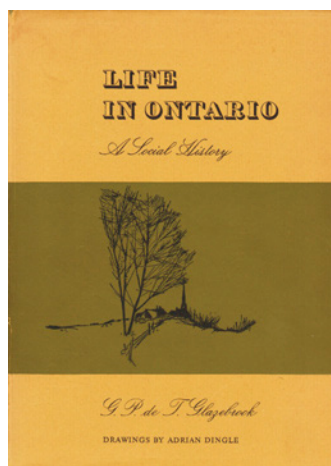
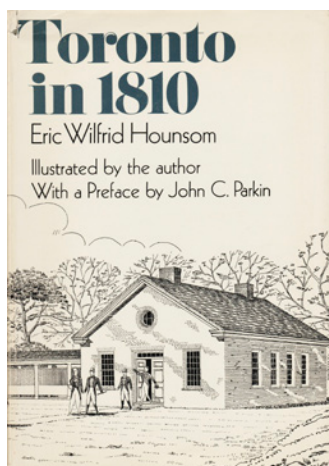
The original claims are at Library & Archives Canada in Record Group 19 as “Department of Finance, Board of Claims for War of 1812 Losses, 1813–1848.” An archival introduction and Search Help page can be found [here](#).

The digital microfilmed documents can be directly accessed [here](#).

Fred Blair has created a guide and name index to the War Loss Claims applications and generously made it available online [here](#). This index includes the locations of the losses, many dates, and the names of principal witnesses.

Richard Gerrard, the helpful City of Toronto historian, was kind enough to share work he'd done in these files while researching Fort York's own displays on the pillaging. Some beautiful items he found in the archives that *escaped* the looting will be featured in a future, post-pandemic issue of the *F&D*.

The two indispensable printed works on the Battle of York and its aftermath are Robert Malcomson, *Capital in Flames: The American Attack on York, 1813* (RBS 2008) and Edith Firth, ed., *The Town of York 1793–1815: A Collection of Documents of Early Toronto* (Champlain Society 1962). Included are the letters of Penelope Beikie, the Givins and Allan claims, various other eyewitness accounts, and the relevant days of the diary of Ely Playter (the diary is in the Archives of Ontario, which has tweeted excerpts).



Carl Benn's definitive *Historic Fort York 1793–1993* (Natural Heritage 1993) contains a comprehensive chapter on the war in York. Various insights into the social history of the town during the war are scattered throughout Dianne Graves, *In the Midst of Alarms: The Untold Story of Women and the War of 1812* (RBS 2007).

Janice Nickerson's modest book *York's Sacrifice: Militia Casualties of the War of 1812* (Dundurn 2012) – with a

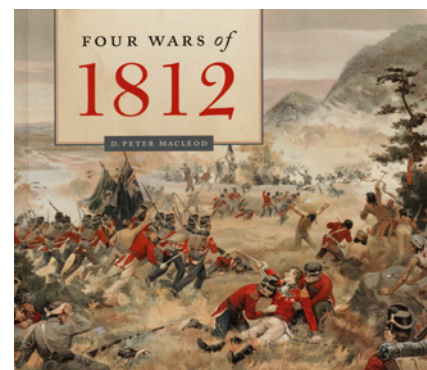
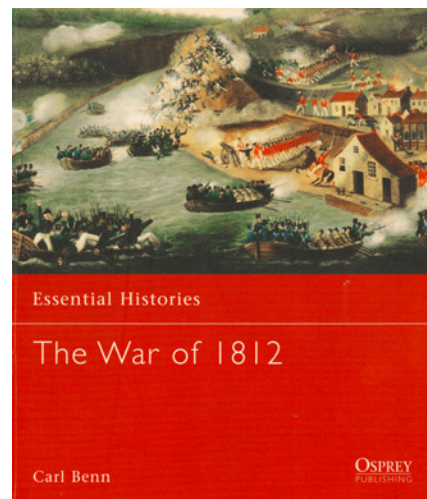
foreword by Richard Gerard – explores the family histories of all those Home District men who died during the war from causes related to service.

The story of Robert Irvine's 1815 painting of the houses on Front Street is told by Stephen Otto in the July 2018 issue of the *F&D*, accessible at [www.fortyork.ca](http://www.fortyork.ca).

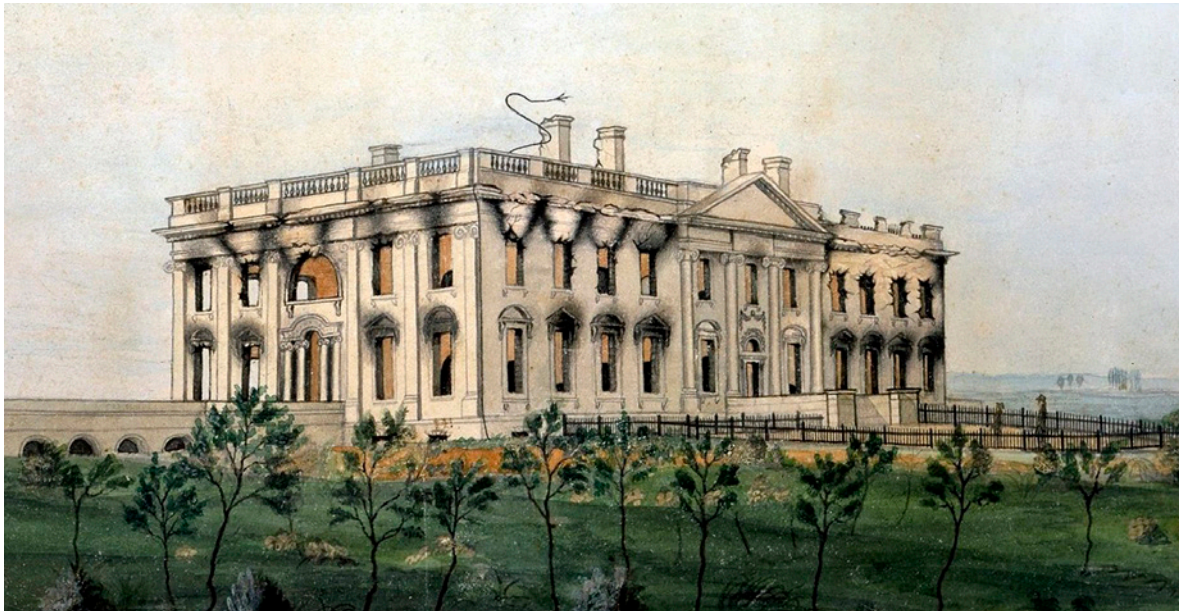
The complicated arrangements of currency in Upper Canada are explained in Eric Wilfrid Housom, *Toronto in 1810* (Ryerson 1970). Illustrated by the author, an architect, with a preface by John C. Parkin, it contains a useful critique of the widely used illustrations in J.R.R. Robertson's *Landmarks of Toronto* series. There's no index but *Toronto in 1810* contains 33 brief chapters on every aspect of the people, landscape and society of early York and it has yet to be matched.

A dated but still elegant overview is G.P. de T. Glazebrook's *Life in Ontario: A Social History* (UTP 1968), enhanced by a set of very 1960s illustrations by Adrian Dingle.

Two excellent brief accounts of the war as a whole are Carl Benn, *The War of 1812* (Osprey 2002), in their Essential Histories series, and D. Peter Macleod, *Four Wars of 1812* (Douglas & McIntyre 2012), from the Canadian War Museum. Although the latter is only the catalogue of an exhibition, both works embody the current approach of Canadian historians to the war.



## Retaliation, yes – but for what?



**The President's House**, watercolour on paper by George Munger, 1814-15 (12" x 16"). After the "conflagration" of August 24, 1814, with its roof collapsed, only the sturdy shell of the White House remained. Courtesy White House collection

It has often been said (especially in Toronto) that the burning of the White House, the Capitol and other public buildings in Washington during the War of 1812 was a direct response, indeed a justified retaliation, for the burning of York's public buildings earlier in the war. Was it?

It was during a sweltering August in 1814 that British troops landed not far from Washington, sweeping aside its improvised defences. Major-General Robert Ross, along with his naval counterpart Rear-Admiral George Cockburn, entered the city early on the evening of August 24. Failing to find any official of the American government who might arrange with them a proper capitulation of the city, they issued their orders. Although soldiers with Ross's headquarters were able to enjoy "a capital supper" and to toast the president with his own claret before torching his famous house, the army remained well disciplined and there was no pillaging of private homes.

Although he did not mention it in his official report, Major-General Ross himself seems to have believed (as reported by a Washington matron) that, in burning the city's public buildings, he was retaliating for the "burning of the British capital in Canada." He meant the destruction of the provincial parliament at York.

President Madison rejected any notion of retaliation, claiming there was nothing to retaliate for, and besides, the buildings destroyed in Washington were serving no military purpose. In a bombastic proclamation issued a week later – even as the British were approaching Baltimore – he claimed that all the destruction was "a deliberate disregard of the principles of

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### there was no pillaging of private homes

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humanity and the rules of civilized warfare." At the time, proportional retaliation was regarded as a justifiable, and perhaps even necessary, aspect of warfare.

In London, Prime Minister Lord Liverpool embraced the justification of retaliation in full. Answering an opposition politician, he argued that American forces on the northern frontier had "displayed a ferocity which would have disgraced the most barbarous nations. In one instance, a town [Newark, now Niagara-on-the-Lake] was, in the middle of December, committed by them to the flames, and the inhabitants then driven ... into the open country amidst all the severities of a Canadian winter; On another occasion, when the town of York, the capital of Upper Canada, was

occupied by the Americans they burnt the public buildings, and took possession of the property of the governor as such. It was a retaliation for this excess," concluded Lord Liverpool, "that the public buildings at Washington were destroyed."

In a seminal article published in the *Journal of Military History* in 2012, Donald Graves thoroughly explores the incidents in Canada that might have justified the actions in Washington. He details events at York, Newark and the following summer at Long Point (on the north shore of Lake Erie) and St. David's, near Queenston, as well as the British destruction of farms and villages along the entire eastern bank of the Niagara. Refusing to offer a simple equation, Graves concludes that "there is no clear answer as to whether the British destruction at the American capital was justified retaliation for the misdeeds committed by American forces on the northern frontier." It's a judgement call.

What have other historians writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century decided? Carl Benn's original account of the Battle of York (in *Historic Fort York* of 1993) describes the pillaging but notes "other vicious acts against the civilian population of Upper Canada" that were more severe. British commander-in-chief Sir George Prevost, he argues, was responding to the general problem,





*The Loxleys and the War of 1812* is a popular graphic novel created by Renegade Arts Entertainment in 2009 and approved for use in Ontario schools. The story is told by a family whose farm outside Queenston is ransacked and whose menfolk join the militia. It includes the burning and looting of the war and attributes the torching of Washington's public buildings to "revenge for the Americans' cowardly attack on York and our parliament." This artwork by Claude St. Aubin is from the cover of the book.

not a specific incident, when he asked the commander of the Royal Navy on the Atlantic seaboard to "assist in inflicting that measure of retaliation which shall deter the enemy from a repetition of such outrages." In his account of the war for Osprey in 2002, Benn leaves it to Lord Liverpool – and the prime minister cites

in the museum's description of Munger's watercolour (previous page), "to retaliate for the burning of the Upper Canadian Legislative Assembly building in York (Toronto) by American invaders the year before."

American authors tend to agree. These include Anthony Pitch, author of

York and Newark.

Among other Canadian historians, Mark Zuehlke – a populist whose focus is the Second World War – in 2006 simply observed that at Washington, "the raid and the destruction wrought by the British fell within the well-established pattern set by both sides over the past two years." Robert Malcomson (in *Capital in Flames*) thought the destruction of Newark and Long Point, both more cruel and more recent, were more relevant to the Chesapeake campaign than the pillaging of York.

D. Peter Macleod, in the Canadian War Museum's bicentennial exhibition *The Four Wars of 1812*, is clear and direct: "British troops burned the White House in 1814," he says

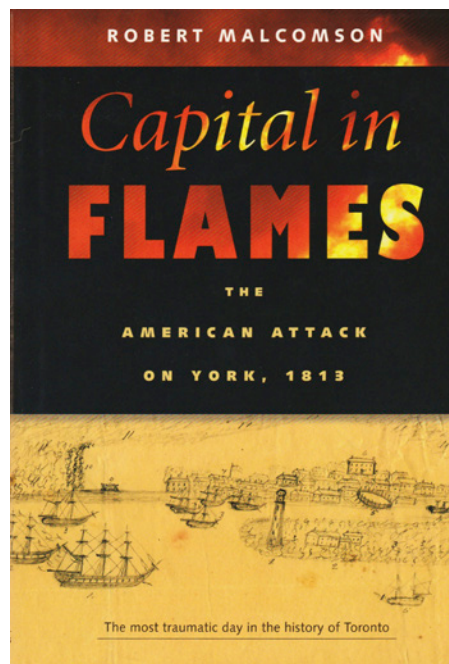
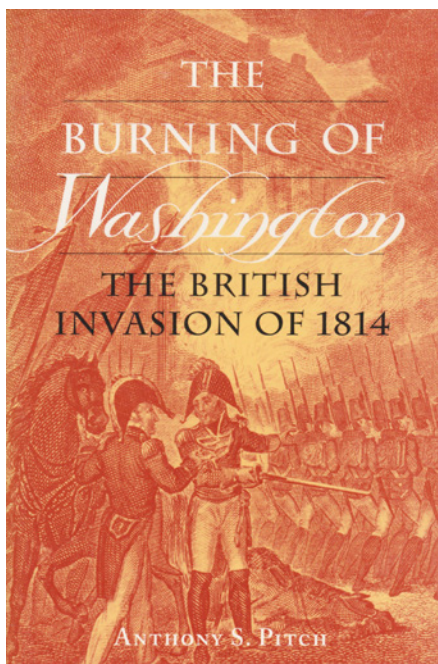
*The Burning of Washington* (1998) and Christopher George, author of *Terror on the Chesapeake: The War of 1812 on the Bay* (2000). Donald Hickey, perhaps the most prolific American author on the war, gives York as the motivation for the burning of Washington in *Don't Give up the Ship! Myths of the War of 1812* (2006) but is said to be leaning, as Benn and Malcomson do, toward the more cruel and the more recent.

Writing for a series from the Cambridge University Press in 2012, J.C.A. Stagg is silent on motivation but gets an alarming amount wrong about the Battle of York. "Realizing he was outnumbered," reports Stagg in *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent*, "Sheaffe gave orders to withdraw to Burlington Heights, Ontario, and to blow up the Government House in the course of doing so." Alan Taylor, whose revisionist book *The Civil War of 1812* was published in 2010, accurately describes events at York and then, to explain the burning of Washington, is succinct: "Taking revenge for York, Dover, and St. David's," he writes, "the British burned the U.S. Capitol and the White House." It was about a general problem, he believes, not a particular episode.

Regardless of the careful (or not) work of historians – and indeed supported by many of them – Canadian popular culture is claiming for York the credit for the flames in the White House. No less an authority than *The Globe and Mail* confirms it. "It's easy to forget, and so most have forgotten," declares the lead editorial of April 7, 2020, "that U.S. troops once burned and looted Toronto and, in retaliation, Washington was captured and torched." (The paper was disparaging the short-lived American idea of thickening their northern border with troops, the better to combat the pandemic.)

It is not hard to imagine why the narrative has developed as it has: it's a more satisfying story, certainly in Toronto, and how many Canadians have ever heard of Port Dover, Ontario? Indeed, how many read history books? Especially given the current occupant of the White House, it's what many of us *want* to believe.

*The editor*



# An early modern view of the fort's barracks

by Bob Kennedy

This view begins from an easel on the lawn of the dry moat behind the South Soldiers' Barracks, just to the southwest of the crumbling garrison. Called *The Old Fort* in a note on the back, it is an oil on canvas sketch 24"x 15" by Katherine A. Clarke, dated 1913. The shadows and foliage indicate a summer afternoon, with a firm southeasterly breeze off the lake. The painting is part of the Baldwin Collection of the Toronto Public Library (939-1-6 fra).

The whitewash on these red brick buildings is long gone but the gap between them is still Garrison Road, entering the fort's enclosure from the west. On the far side of the gap are the North Soldiers' Barracks, which now house the Museum Shop & Canteen. At the time, a mixture of families and single men still lived in these 98-year-old barracks, and it was slum housing by the tracks. Some soldiers with their families were employed managing the military stores of the garrison. Other rooms were rented to men working in the adjacent factories or rail yards (and who were likely militiamen as well). The growing industrial city looms on the horizon.

The map below – Goad's insurance atlas, as of 1912 – and the 1916 photograph suggest what the chimneys and shapes in the distance might be. City photographer Arthur Goss, standing on the northern rampart of the fort, was facing in the same direction as our painter had been three years earlier. The grand chimney



at the far end of the bridge belonged to the Berg Machinery Manufacturing Company, which specialized in brick-making presses; remnants of these works survived at the corner of Front and Bathurst until they were torn down in the summer of 2011.

To its west – at the extreme top left of the photo – is one of the huge coal-gas 'holders' of the Consumers' Gas Company, whose two round shapes are clear on the map. J.E.H. MacDonald's painting *Tracks and Traffic* (next page) takes almost the same view as this photo but, completed only in 1912, seems to belong to an earlier age. The lumber yard, as flammable as it was, is strangely absent from an atlas created for insurance purposes.

In Clarke's painting, the bulky shape above the gap in the buildings must be one of these tanks. To their left, a chimney as far away as King Street pours out more smoke, and we see the

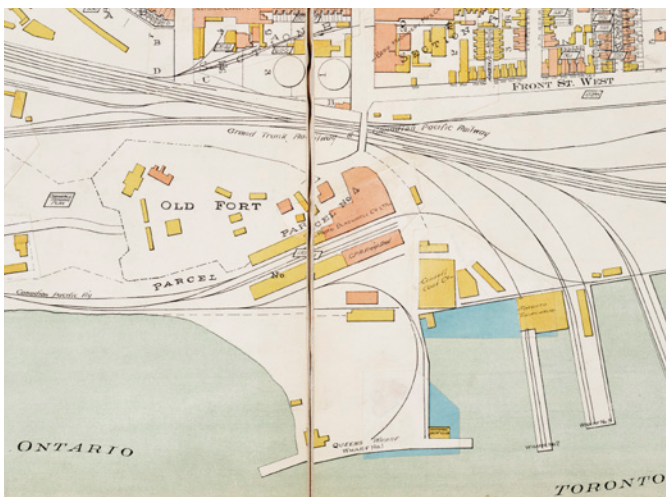


Plate 19 (detail) from Charles E. Goad, *Atlas of the City of Toronto and suburbs, 3rd Ed., Vol.1, 1910/1912*. Courtesy Toronto Public Library 912.71354



The original Bathurst bridge in April, 1916. It was replaced later that year by the current structure. Courtesy Toronto City Archives F1231 It1922

spire of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. Behind the old chimney of the northern barracks is the looming National Casket Company, whose sturdy complex of red brick buildings, now sitting empty, is likely to become a fashionable condominium.

The painter chose the low ground of the dry moat for her point of view. Our gaze is then naturally upward, and only the top half of the whitewashed barracks is visible. The day is as bright as anything painted by her contemporary Helen McNichol – who was exhibiting in Toronto at the time – although in a style unlike the Montreal painter's impressionism. Clarke is sketching *en plein air* with an open brushwork and barely mixing many of her colours.

"This sort of relaxed naturalism," remarks Toronto critic and collector Chris Varley, was "very much the house style at the time." This is the milieu of the Ontario Society of Artists, the Women's Art Association and the busy new Arts & Letters Club. Owing more to British and American painting than to any French academy, this talented amateur wasn't afraid of a risk.

"The painting's not particularly well laid out and there are some klutzy and floating passages," says Varley, "but the interplay of the fort's and the city's chimneys obviously intrigued Clarke." There is also a temporal aspect to the composition: the foreground is a moss-covered past. "The old fort looks like it's hunkered down for a long nap in the sun," he muses, "while the booming industrial city rises" like a mountain range in the distance.

Who was Katherine Clarke? Had she been one of the students of Jean Geeson (*F&D*, April 2019), the art teacher and early advocate of preserving the old fort? Her name does not appear in the index of *Independent Spirit: Canadian Women Painters*, by Prakash; she is not mentioned in the many works of Dennis Reid, long a curator and professor of Canadian art. She was not part of *Toronto Through the Eyes of Women Artists*, an exhibition from the City's collection at the Market Gallery in 2018.

A biographical index compiled by the National Gallery of Canada points to a file at the Art Gallery of Ontario – but at the time of writing, that file is blocked by the pandemic. The NGC online says Clarke, who lived at 15 Winchester, showed in the spring of 1913 a painting (priced at \$40) called "At the old fort, Toronto" – the oil sketch that is now in the library's collection. Although its accession number indicates the work was acquired in 1939, it's not clear from whom (these files also are blocked by the virus).

We might yet know something else about the artist. From 1903 to 1912, one Katherine A. Clark submitted a dozen short



**Painted only a year before** Clarke's sketch, *Tracks and Traffic* by J.E.H. MacDonald seems to come from another age. For a look at painterly views of the extraordinary gas tanks – notably, *The Gas Works* by Lawren Harris, finished in 1912 – see Scott James in the *F&D* of March 2017. Courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario, Online Item 2435.

poems and literary prose pieces to *The Globe*. Printed as fillers deep inside the paper, they rhymed on subjects of love, Christian devotion and the seasons. One, on December 29, 1906, was simply titled *Art*:

*We praise the art of an age gone by,  
And scoff at the art of our own.  
To be worshipped as great, a man must die  
Unloved of his age, unknown.*

*We laud the products of pens which lie  
Dark centuries deep in rust;  
And raise for the standard of future years  
The musician who sleeps in dust.*

*Let us praise the men who deserve our praise,  
Give each one his lawful wage.  
Whether he toiled in the good old days  
Or in this bright, golden age.*

*All glory to art of the years gone past;  
All glory to years to come;  
But let us acknowledge our own at last;  
Ere it sicken and perish dumb.*

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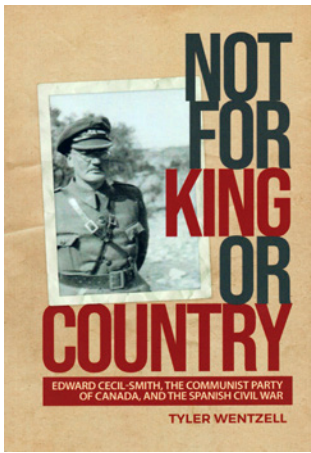
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## REVIEW

Tyler Wentzell *Not for King or Country: Edward Cecil-Smith, the Communist Party of Canada, and the Spanish Civil War* (UTP 2020)  
229 pages, maps, photos, bibliography, index

### *The education of a Canadian Communist*

by John Thompson

Remember the war against Franco?  
That's the kind where each of us belongs.  
Though he may have won all the battles,  
We had all the good songs!  
– Tom Lehrer, “The Folksong Army,” 1965

It is hard to remember now, but Canada once had a thriving Communist Party. There was even a time that it bid to be a growing social movement. Tyler Wentzell's biographical exploration of Edward Cecil-Smith in the 1930s is an excavation of those long-ago days, and one aspiring Party member, and how his experiences in the Spanish Civil War changed him.

By 1988 the “sad, po-faced Communists” (as one member of the Canadian Peace Alliance memorably described them) were a shadow of what they had been 50 years earlier. During the next five years even that shadow failed. The Communist Party of Canada took an enormous financial and philosophical blow when the USSR went under, and the 1993 changes to the *Canada Elections Act* that de-listed any party unable to pay the costs of running 50 candidates in every election finished the job. To be certain, like the unwilling addition to the plague cart in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, we still hear the occasional “I'm not dead yet!”... but the Party isn't fooling anyone.

Things were different in the 1930s.

Wentzell perfectly captures the earnestness, passion and complete naivety that animated the young Edward Cecil-Smith in the early 1930s. Born to a missionary family in China in 1903, he came to Canada only in 1919 and started life in Toronto – socializing in a network of other children of China missionaries, picking up some soldiering in the militia and clerking in a bank. By 1929 he was a cub reporter for the *Mail and Empire*.

At the start of the Great Depression, Cecil-Smith and his wife Ida were poor, he was perilously employed, and his innate sense of fairness was increasingly being triggered by the hard times and especially by the behaviour of Toronto's police. He did not see Christianity and communism as mutually exclusive; in fact, argues Wentzell, “his Christian values led him to the revolutionary ideology.” Their reconciliation was eased by the tenets of the Social Gospel, a Protestant movement of the time. Cecil-Smith came to see communism as the best ideology available to address the ills of society.

To many at the time in many countries, the powerful new ideologies had their attractions after the Wall Street Crash brought prosperity to an end. In Germany in particular, the Far Left and the Far Right were competing for supporters, and it was sometimes hard to tell the difference between the two.

Wentzell is writing a history of one individual, and a

comprehensively researched one at that, and the full tale of Cecil-Smith's drift into the growing communist party might demand access to other disciplines. Wentzell hasn't found Cecil-Smith's own road-to-Damascus moment of conversion – and there probably wasn't one. Moreover, the play of the intellectual currents of the time is not easy to follow.

It is hard to be sure if the author really captured the flavour of Canadian Communism in the 1930s. There are many delicious ironies that Cecil-Smith and his friends were probably not aware of and there is a strange and sad charm to their earnestness.

In the 1930s, Communism, like Militarist Nationalism, Fascism and Nazism, was a mass movement. Europe was dotted with 32 different “Shirt” movements – Nazi Brownshirts, Italian

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**There are many delicious ironies ...  
and there is a strange and sad charm  
to their earnestness**

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Blackshirts, British Green Shirts for Social Credit – and the Communists were no different. It was delicious to read of the Communist Party of Canada having members turn up to mass events sort of dressed in uniforms of their own. The celebration for the release of Tim Buck from prison in 1934, for example, saw the white-clad members of the Workers' Sporting Association carrying the Communist leader up onto the stage, and 14 women in identical knitted suits “walking with military precision” (according to the *Toronto Star*).

As an aspiring intellectual as well as a journalist, Edward Cecil-Smith was one of the driving forces behind the Progressive Arts Club. He played Mr Capitalism in their play *Eight Men Speak*, a production which mustered more enthusiasm than literary or theatrical skill. Propaganda, as understood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a new form and the techniques of the Progressive Arts Club and the Communist Party of Canada were not all that different from those being trialed in Nazi Germany – one of the ironies that seem to have escaped Cecil-Smith.

Wentzell's biography soon takes the reader to the high point of the 1930s Communist drama and ideological rivalry: the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War. Cecil-Smith was an early

volunteer to the International Brigades, and Wentzell's research readily depicts their enthusiasm, struggles with amateurism, scanty equipment, and appalling casualty rates. For all the romance appended to the XV International Brigade, their glorious legacy is mostly a series of catastrophic defeats for the Republican cause.

The book covers these developments in fine detail, and the author has done an excellent piece of military history here. (As well as being a lawyer and an independent historian, Wentzell is a Canadian infantry officer – trained as a Regular, now in the Reserve – with the fighting in Afghanistan behind him.) The maps are also excellent.

Cecil-Smith was at the birth of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion, helping train and lead them, and it was clear that its International Brigade needed all the help it could get. It is also clear that Cecil-Smith was motivated and, if not loved, respected (which any soldier can tell you is a very satisfactory second prize). While his militia experience in Toronto wasn't spectacular, it was enough to make a difference – particularly with the Canadian Communist Party screening out adventurers and unreliable types.

The Spanish Civil War has enjoyed decades of relatively uncritical analysis, often seeming as little more than a morality play. The Spanish Nationalists revolted against a democratic government, and accepted help from Hitler and Mussolini: bad guys, case closed, and so the International Brigades were on the side of the angels. More recent examinations suggest a less stark distinction. While Wentzell made use of some of Paul Preston's work, the more balanced look at Franco in his 1994 biography of the Nationalist leader was not used, nor was Anthony Beevor's more recent (and balanced) history *The Battle for Spain*.

Even so, Wentzell was not writing a history of the entire conflict, only one wandering Canadian's part in it – and this is where things get interesting. Cecil-Smith departed for Spain as a relatively good Communist, but he doesn't seem to have returned as one. In the years following that return, he and the party drifted apart, a decline well charted by the author.

Yet the searing paranoia generated by Stalin and his regime during the Great Terror of 1936-38 is impossible to grasp without an immersion in the Soviet experience. The works of Arthur Koestler and George Orwell only suggest the depth of the Terror's insanity. Wentzell sees the start of the process in the growing Soviet influence among the Republicans, but doesn't



*A pensive Edward Cecil-Smith, here still a company commander, is seen at the aid station after the brigade's confused, but winning attack on a town called Villanueva de la Canada. It is early July, 1937, and bandages wrap his left wrist, hand and knee. LAC PA-172401*

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### The author has done an excellent piece of military history

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Wentzell almost skips over the darker aspects of the commissars, although he addresses their suspicions about a self-inflicted injury when Cecil-Smith is withdrawn from the front line with a pistol bullet in his leg. Commissars' reports evidently were

sent to communist parties at home as well as to the Comintern. It could have been worse for Cecil-Smith: Anthony Beevor's history mentions that André Marty (the paranoid French communist who was the chief political commissar for the International Brigades)

was responsible for 500 executions.

Edward Cecil-Smith and the soldiers of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion who escaped Spain were lionized in early 1939, but events soon overtook them. He found himself separated from the party (I've no doubt a result of the reports of the commissars) and went his own way. The RCMP ceased actively watching him, and Cecil-Smith did little more in politics before his second and final stroke in 1963.

Fundamentally, *Not for King or Country* is a time machine and that makes it a really interesting read. Tyler Wentzell has done some very solid research that suggests he's a talent to watch. The Spanish Civil War and a Canadian communist of the 1930s, however, is a truly daunting topic. He tells the story with meticulous detail, but does not, in my view, quite grasp all the nuance in the reality of international communism: for that, one needs a great deal more cynicism.

*John Thompson is an independent security analyst with a lifelong interest in political violence. He may be reached through the F&D.*

# At the Birthplace of Toronto Notes from the Staff

## Richard Haynes turns in his musket

Fort York site co-ordinator Richard Haynes retired in January after just over 30 years among the barracks and blockhouses of Toronto's founding landscape. "I owe the fort (and the City) everything," he tells the *F&D*, "for providing me with a great life, career and some wonderful memories."

He made a difference to the place in all kinds of ways. "His smile, wry wit and ability to call things as he saw them," says Kevin Hebib, "always helped his colleagues."

Richard was born in Oxford, went to school in Winchester and earned his first history degree from the University College of Swansea, South Wales, in 1986. At the optimistic age of 21, he set out for Windsor, Ontario, to earn his MA. Laurie Leclair married the young scholar two years later and they sought their fortune in Toronto, where Richard was hired as an historical interpreter in August 1989.

"The fort has always been busy, sometimes crazy, but never dull," he says, "and I've been lucky to work with some wonderful people over the years." It's hard not to regard those early days (before responsibilities grew) as the best ever, "when it was so much fun" just to come to work. There was satisfaction as well, "despite all the problems and challenges that went with the job."

Although many celebrities, including royalty, passed through the national historic site while he was there, Richard considers the highlight of his career to have been the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of York, held on the sunny weekend of April 27, 2013. Among the many events planned by the City, the Canadian Army and Fort York was *Walking in Their Footsteps*, the

walking tour that began at dawn where the Americans landed and traced the course of the fighting back to the fort.

"I will never forget looking back and seeing 700 people following me on that tour," he marvels. "It was special and will never be repeated."

Richard himself, of course, will never be repeated. "I have always been in awe of his steadfastness and compassion," adds Hebib who, as a program officer at the fort, has known the man for decades. "Richard is a disciplined and measured man" who brought to his work "the thoughtfulness and focus he developed as an accomplished martial artist."

David O'Hara also worked with Richard for most of his 15 years at the fort, a period that included management of the Invictus Games, development of the Indigenous Arts Festival and the completion of the Visitor Centre. "It was a pleasure working with Richard," he says, "to see so many initiatives through to completion."

In early March the Friends of Fort York (through the generosity of its chair) held a very English dinner for Richard at an old pub in the centre of the city. Conforming to the style of its subject, there were no formal speeches. The name of the place – The Queen & Beaver – might be taken as symbolic of Richard's own career. And as a summary of those 30 years (as if we were writing the man's obituary!) we have the words of another long-standing colleague: "There never was a kinder man."



Richard as a private in the 8<sup>th</sup> (King's) Regiment, defending muddy York. This image appeared on posters all over the city during the Bicentennial of the battle in the spring of 2013. Courtesy 32 Canadian Brigade Group



A lesson on some 19th century drinks may be found in *A House Servant's directory, or a monitor for private families*, of 1827, by Robert Roberts. It was the first book written by an African-American to be published commercially and it became essential reading for its advice on etiquette. A demonstration of these recipes was part of our Black History Month programming; see p.16.

## Hungry for Comfort

Fort York's Historic Foodways program Hungry for Comfort, offered as part of Winterlicious, happened on February 9. This year, the spotlight was on the culinary stories from Jewish communities across Toronto, with speakers, demonstrations, workshops and tastings. Participants enjoyed tasting and a catered lunch from Parallel using Jewish recipes.

The day also included the annual Redpath Baking & Preserving Competition, co-hosted by Fort York and the Culinary Historians of Canada.

Hungry for Comfort keynote speaker Barbara Silverstein provided an insightful overview of the history of Jewish communities and cuisine in Toronto and Montreal, while Rosalin Krieger spoke about the ways in which the idea of Jewish food has changed over the past two centuries.

In the afternoon, participants selected from one of six food workshops delivered by local chefs, home cooks, cookbook authors, and food historians. The workshops were delivered throughout the site, meaning visitors could spend time in some of our historic buildings. The event's cultural curator, Daphna Rabinovitch, closed out the event with an intimate microhistory of challah, while participants noshed on afternoon tea and cake.

*Sherry Murphy's winning entry of Traditional Challah in the Redpath competition during Hungry for Comfort. Sherry has long been a volunteer in the fort's kitchens and is a frequent demonstrator in the foodways program. One of the fort's own cooks – Christine Leung – won a 1st Prize for her Asian Spiced Kumquat Marmalade. Photo of challah by Melissa Beynon*

### Winners of the Redpath Baking & Preserving Competition co-hosted by the Culinary Historians of Canada and Fort York National Historic Site

#### Pure Seville Orange Marmalade

1st: Muriel Thompson

2nd: Jeremy Carter

3rd: Sally D. Kelly

#### Citrus Marmalade

1st: Christine Leung (Asian Spiced Kumquat)

2nd: Muriel Thompson (Chunky Whisky)

#### Apple Chutney

1st: Jeremy Carter (plain Apple Chutney)

2nd: Lori Jamieson (Farmer's Advocate 1907 AC)

3rd: Jean Sterritt (Spiced AC)

#### Challah Bread

1st: Sherry Murphy (Traditional)

2nd: Mark D'Aguilar (Oatmeal Honey Maple Sourdough)

3rd: Karen Hemingway (Loren Lea's)



## African-Canadian cuisine fills Blue Barracks



**Mawuli Chai** of the Ontario Black History Society was the day's Master of Ceremonies.

On Saturday, February 29, Fort York and the Ontario Black History Society hosted Exploring Our Culinary Roots, a half-day Historic Foodways program that celebrated African-Canadian cuisine from the early 19th century to the present. The topic attracted a full house and included cooking demonstrations and samples from Chefs Warren Ford and Jamie Beeston. Mackenzie House Museum supported the program with their printing press. The event also included a film about 19th century anti-slavery activist and newspaper publisher Mary Ann Shadd Cary. The occasion at Fort York was part of the Black History Month programming of Toronto History Museums.



This Jerk Pork on Risotto with a Mango Slaw was created by **Chef Warren Ford**.  
Photos by Melissa Beynon



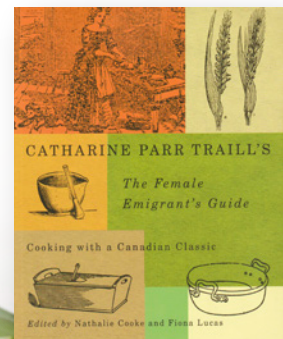
**Chef Jamie Beeston** with his recipe of Dumpling with Ackee & Salt-fish.



### *Mrs. Traill's Advice* ON ASPARAGUS

What the old bed requires in the Spring is to cut off the last year's stalks just above the ground, and burn them; loosen the earth about the roots, and clean up the whole bed. As the sweetness and tenderness of this plant depends upon its rapidity of growth, the soil should be made very rich.

From *Catherine Parr Traill's The Female Emigrant's Guide / Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, edited by Nathalie Cooke and Fiona Lucas (MQUP 2017), originally published at Toronto in 1855. "Mrs. Traill's Advice" on selected seasonal topics will henceforth appear in each future edition of *The Fife and Drum*. Soon, you'll want your own copy of this beautiful and comprehensive new edition of an indispensable Canadian reference.





## Editor's Notes

The photo illustrates the state of Fort York National Historic Site at the beginning of April 2020: closed until further notice. Our usual Site Manager's Report – always a feature of the *F&D* – will be back when the crowds, the staff and the historians return. Kaitlin Wainwright, now the Acting Site Manager, moved into her new office in the Visitor Centre just as the virus was getting out of Wuhan. She and the rest of her staff (except for some security and maintenance) have been remotely refocused. We all look forward to hearing the sounds of the musketry and the fifes and the drums of the Guard as soon as we safely can.

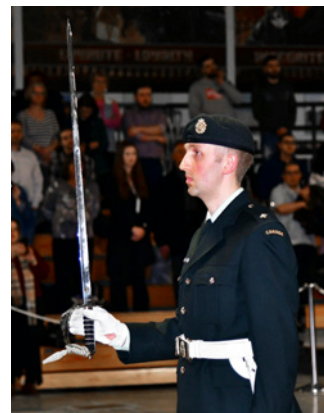
Meanwhile, news has arrived from a veteran of the Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry. Mike Locksley-Hebib, who carried a musket through four campaign seasons here, has graduated from the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. Now a Second Lieutenant in the Regular army, his soldiering with the Fort York Guard was put to good use when he filled the role of second-in-command on the school's big graduation parade. He's now attached to the infantry school at Gagetown, N.B., where billions of mosquitoes, who eagerly await each year's influx of fresh young officers, are just now hatching.

Early in March the City sent out notices warning that the Sir Isaac Brock Bridge – that is, the Bathurst bridge over the rail corridor – would be closed for “rehabilitation” for an incredible eight months, from May until December. According to the Pre-Construction Notice, crews will repair the concrete underneath and on the deck of the bridge; will replace the TTC tracks and overhead wiring; repave the road surface; and widen the sidewalks on the approach to the public library. (For an outline of the complicated ownership and maintenance arrangements of this bridge, see Stephen Otto in the *F&D*, September 2016).

Public meetings were to have been held at the end of March to explain this but these, of course, were cancelled, and the project necessarily delayed. When it does begin, the work will close the bridge to vehicles and bicycles, allowing only pedestrian passage. We'll take a look in the next issue at the abundant transit options (including south on Bathurst) that will remain in touch with Toronto's founding landscape.

The directors of the Friends of Fort York & Garrison Common have been busy in the background. Some uncertainty surrounds the deployment of the Fort York Guard this summer (hiring would be starting soon) as well as the annual Indigenous Arts Festival, scheduled for the end of June. Before the pandemic arose, the Friends had no fewer than four grant applications in the pipeline related to these.

Discussions have continued with the City on the completion of the steel escarpment of the Visitor Centre – especially across the face of the Bentway's Zamboni garage – but the funding, sourced in Section 37/42 development charges, was still not quite pinned down when the pandemic descended. We're also still thinking about some kind of coffee bar at the Visitor Centre, since the busy Garrison Crossing improves the business case. At the same time, while the world spends more of its life online,



**Second Lieutenant Michael Locksley-Hebib** on his graduation parade February 20, 2020, at the ancient base of the Canadian Army in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. A more care-free Mike is seen in the barracks of Fort York in 2016. Photos courtesy of his proud father, Kevin Hebib



**Sir Isaac Brock Bridge** in a view looking north; the white condominium is on the site of the old Berg plant (see p.10). This steel structure was built in 1903 over the Humber River and moved here in 1916, when the streetcar tracks were added. The riveted surface is the top of a wall between the sidewalk and the traffic (it's visible across the street). Photo by the *F&D*

we've launched a full-scale review and rebuild of the Friends' long-standing web site.

There are still rich resources – maps, imagery, articles and a complete collection of the *F&D* – at [www.fortyork.ca](http://www.fortyork.ca). Thanks to CyArk and its partner Iron Mountain, there is also in cyberspace an awesome three-dimensional version of Fort York. Founded in California as a non-profit organization, CyArk is focused on the digital capture of heritage and archaeological landscapes. They have undertaken digital conservation projects in places as varied

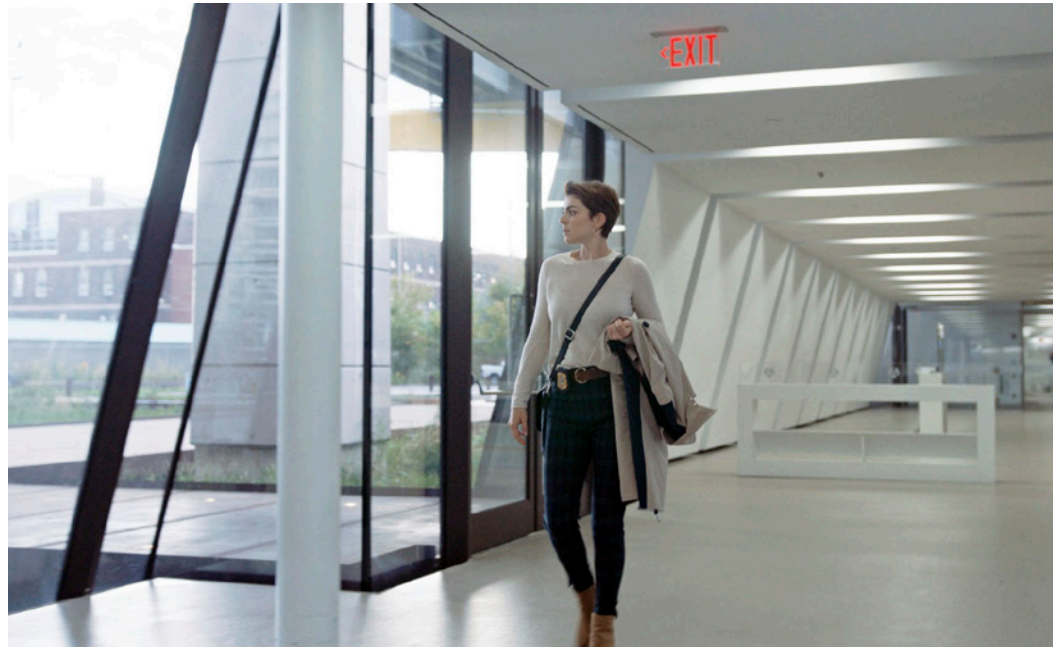
as Mount Rushmore, Angkor Wat and Fort York (see William Carter's story in the December 2017 *F&D*).

In the context of the pandemic, Kasey Hadick, CyArk's Director of Project Development, thoughtfully sent us a link to their remarkable digital model of Toronto's founding landscape, completed only last year. With the fort's gates in the real world firmly closed, it's an amazing way to explore the finest collection of original War of 1812 buildings on the continent. [Here's the link.](#)

Serinda Swan walks through the pristine space of the lobby of a near-empty Fort York Visitor Centre. The image is from an episode of the CBC drama *Coroner* recorded on site last fall.

Swan plays Dr. Jenny Cooper, a coroner who investigates unexplained or sudden deaths in Toronto, and who is herself the recently widowed mother of a teenager. Her boyfriend is a veteran of the Canadian Army's mission to Afghanistan. Cooper's police partner is Detective 'Mac' McAvoy, seen in the exterior shot (below) and played by Roger Cross. McAvoy is a 25-year veteran of the force and a skeptical foil to the new coroner's drive and idealism. He has some complicated affairs of his own.

Through the windows beyond Swan we see the curving roofline of Fort York Armoury. In the exterior shot are the Corten steel panels that create the centre's dramatic escarpment. The wooden surface (below right) beneath the Gardiner Expressway is the Wharf, the centre's outdoor programming venue that's now shared with the Bentway.



Designed by Patkau Architects of Vancouver with Kearns Mancini Architects of Toronto, the Fort York Visitor Centre was awarded a Governor General's Medal in Architecture in 2018. [The Fort York Foundation](#) played a large role in funding the \$15 million project.

Agamede Research is the fictional pharmaceutical company at the core of the high-tech episode titled "Crispr Sistr" in Season 2. *Coroner* is now streaming on CBC Gem (images courtesy CBC).



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**A Canadian rifleman in the summer of '44**

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**Fort York Is Better for the Bicentennial**