

Lewiston History Mysteries

United States Invades Canada!

America Launches Historic Attack from Lewiston

In 1812, thousands of American troops came to Lewiston in an attempt to take over Canada.

The Revolutionary War was still fresh in peoples' minds, and New Englanders weren't interested in fighting the British again. But many in the U.S. Congress wanted to drive the British out of North America once and for all -- and in the process, conquer Canada and make it a state. Thomas Jefferson told President Madison, it would only be "a matter of marching."

But the Americans miscalculated and 14 months after the failed invasion, the British, who controlled Canada, got their revenge. They stormed and captured Ft. Niagara in Youngstown and marched south to burn Lewiston to the ground, killing about a dozen citizens.

Despite the slaughter, the Tuscarora Indians saved and offered refuge for many.



U.S. Major Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer, who lost The Battle of Queenston Heights, was born to a wealthy family. He later served in Congress and founded the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute near Albany.

Why the American invasion failed:

1) Most of the 4600 man force on the American side had never been in battle and many units suffered from poor leadership and discipline.

2) American commander Stephen Van Rensselaer was a general in the militia and received little respect from the regular Army officers.

3) Inexperienced boatsmen, carrying the American troops, lost control of several boats that drifted down the river.

4) Once the battle began and casualties mounted, most of the American militia refused to cross the river to join the attack. They argued that the law said the militia could only be used to defend the U.S., not to invade another country.

Invasion Timeline The Battle of Queenston Heights October 13, 1812

3 am Americans begin launching boats from Lewiston, carrying hundreds of troops to Queenston, on the Canadian side of the river.

6:30 am British General Isaac Brock arrives on the scene to defend Canada. He is killed an hour later at the bottom of the Escarpment.

9 am After fierce battles, Americans force the British from Queenston Heights in Canada and raise the American flag.

1 pm Americans appear to be victorious.

3 pm British reinforcements arrive with 1000 troops and Indian allies. The U.S. militia (citizen soldiers) refuse to cross the river to backup the U.S. Army.

4 pm Faced with low ammunition and little help from the American militia, the United States surrenders and 1000 American troops were taken prisoner. The American commander reported 60 Americans killed in action and 170 wounded. 130 British were killed, wounded or missing.

Interested in learning more about this fascinating subject?

Robert Malcomson's excellent study of the Battle of Queenston Heights, entitled: *A Very Brilliant Affair*, published by the Naval Institute Press, is available at the Old Fort Niagara Shop in Youngstown. Just a 10 minute drive north on Route 18 F.



Brock Becomes Revered National Hero for Defending Canada

If it wasn't for General Isaac Brock, some Canadians think that Canada would be another American state. Gen. Brock is considered Canada's first hero and its "savior" from American intentions of taking it over. Canadian publisher, Todd Humber, says, "He accomplished what

looked impossible in the short time he was in command during the War of 1812 and he masterminded a number of startling twists that turned the U.S. battle plan upside down and ensured that the conquest of Canada as far as Montreal would not be 'a mere matter of marching' as Thomas Jefferson opined. He ensured Canada would not fall prey to the American dream of Manifest Destiny."

Brock was killed in action during the battle of Queenston Heights, situated just across the Niagara River from Lewiston on the Canadian side, and is memorialized by a 185 foot tower where his body is entombed. Visitors can climb the 235 step spiral staircase (narrow and unnerving!) during the summer to see a spectacular vista. Brock was actually shot near the bottom of the Escarpment near another memorial where a British flag flies today. There is also a small memorial to his horse, Alfred. More information about this fascinating hero can be found on the Internet at www.GeneralBrock.com



This is what the original Brock's Monument looked like after it was bombed on April 17, 1840 by a rebellious Canadian. What remained was torn down in 1853 and replaced by the present Monument in 1856.

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Welcome to Lewiston, NY

The Historical Association of Lewiston hopes you enjoy your visit to our historic and charming village. Visit our website at: www.historiclewiston.org The Lewiston Museum is at 469 Plain Street.

Mark your calendar for this year's spectacular Historic Home Tour on Dec. 2 & 3, 2006.

To get the latest news and monthly program info, join our free email list. Just send an email to: join@HistoricLewiston.org

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