## Lewiston History Mysteries

# Lewiston Burned to the Ground

**December 19, 1813: Local citizens run for their lives as British and Indian troops burn Lewiston to the ground, seeking revenge for destroying Niagara-on-the-Lake**

The War of 1812, fought between the Americans and the British, took many twists and turns. The Americans were trying to drive Britain out of North America, while Britain was determined to keep her hold on Canada. Some consider it the second American Revolution.

Lewiston citizens found themselves right in the middle of some of the most noted battles. On October 13, 1812, the Americans invaded Canada from Lewiston and failed.

However, over the course of the next year the Americans were successful in gaining a foothold and occupied a portion of Southern Ontario, including Ft. George in Niagara-on-the Lake, known at that time as Newark.

But when the Americans were forced to give up Ft. George and retreat to Ft. Niagara across the river, the British began planning their own invasion. A few days later, hundreds of British troops and their Mohawk Indian allies, staged a surprise attack and captured Fort Niagara, while undertaking the destruction of property from Youngstown to Buffalo.

After the war, citizens returned home to rebuild Lewiston from scratch. The decade of 1815-1825 was to become Lewiston's heyday as Western New York's bustling commercial center. The Frontier House was built and became the finest hotel west of Albany and the Lewiston Academy (no longer standing) was the most prestigious high school in the region. Some of Lewiston's most impressive homes were built during that time, including the Barton House.

After the Erie Canal opened in 1825, Lewiston's prominence declined and most of the commercial business shifted to Buffalo.

*British General Phineas Riall led the attack on Lewiston*

### Welcome to Lewiston, NY
### www.HistoricLewiston.org

The Historical Association of Lewiston hopes you enjoy your visit to our historic and quaint village. Mark your calendar for our next spectacular Historic Home Tour on Dec. 6 & 7, 2008.

To get the latest news and monthly program notes, join our free email list by sending an email to: join@HistoricLewiston.org You can also see and download our past placemats at our website: HistoricLewiston.org

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## Lewiston's Countdown to Destruction in 1813

**Dec. 10:** U.S. General George McClure decides to abandon Ft. George in Niagara on the Lake (Newark), Ontario. In the process, he allows Joseph Willcocks, a Canadian who joined the American side, to destroy civilian homes to deny the advancing British troops shelter. But Willcocks methods were cruel and when the British discovered what happened, they were determined to seek revenge on the Americans. Gen. McClure was subsequently fired.

**Dec. 18:** British troops from Ft. George cross the Niagara River and storm the American troops and capture Ft. Niagara in a surprise nighttime attack. 79 Americans are killed or wounded and 344 are taken prisoners. The Americans never even had a chance to fire a shot. (The huge 15-star U.S. flag the British captured that day is on display at the new Ft. Niagara's Visitor's Center.)

**Dec. 19:** The worst day in Lewiston's history. British General Riall's 500 troops and Mohawk Indian allies land at Five Mile Meadows (now Stella Niagara) in the morning to begin their assault. Lewiston citizens ran for their lives down Ridge Road as the Indians and British burned Lewiston homes and buildings. About a dozen Lewistonians were brutally killed. Riall went on to destroy Niagara Falls and twelve days later, he destroyed Buffalo.
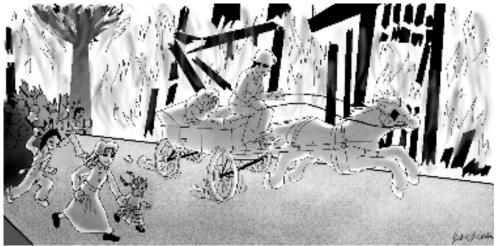


*Illustration by Lewiston-Porter student Kelsey Wilkins*

Lewiston citizens desperately tried to escape the attack by the British and Mohawk Indians on the morning of December 19, 1813. About a dozen residents were killed and everything was burned to the ground. Had it not been for the heroic efforts of the local Tuscarora Indians, more Lewiston citizens would have been killed or injured.

## Heroic Tuscarora Indians Save Many Lewiston Citizens from Brutal Attack

The Tuscarora Indians saved the lives of many Lewiston citizens the morning of the British attack.

From the top of the Escarpment, Tuscarora scouts saw the flare which signaled the British capture of Ft. Niagara. Immediately, Chief Longbeard and other braves rushed to thwart the impending invasion and warn their Lewiston friends and neighbors.

The warning enabled many Lewistonians to escape in time.

However, the overpowering British were not forgiving. They chased the Tuscaroras back to their reservation and burned their village, destroying everything, including the winter food supply.

The entire area was in ashes and lives and families were ruined. The rebuilding began after the war.

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