Anticipating the end of the War declared on Upper Canada on June 18, 1812, Barbara Chisholm reminds the people of her community of the events and the people the war has affected. Barbara Chisholm’s is a story written and told in first person by Pauline Grondin on May 24, 2012 for the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Directors and their invited guests for Tourism Burlington.

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Here we are still anticipating the end of the war, a war declared on our homeland of Upper Canada by those Americans on June 18, 1812. Few of us will ever forget that date. What an eventful time it has been for the residents of our community and so many others. When will it end?

My husband (Captain) George is always quick to assure me, “Barbara Chisholm, now don’t you worry, everything will be alright.”

Well, I do worry.

Not that the men of our community haven’t been prepared for such an event all along. Do you remember the Militia Act that was passed in 1793 as they reflected back to the Revolutionary War? It says that every male from the age of 15 to 50 must bear arms and must appear on demand once a year in the field bringing a musket with six charges of powder and ball. Being a wife and mother of three sons I know the requirements all too well. Not only does this form of census taking keep track of the men in the area in case they should be needed but I
understand it has always been quite the social affair at the annual counting of heads.

As it turns out, our men were needed and somewhat trained as well.

Major General Brock realized early on that a trial of arms with the United States would come sooner or later and as you know, in January of 1812 he organized two flank companies (consisting of one Captain, two Lieutenants, one Sergeant, a drummer and 35 ranks). They include men of loyalty who would come out immediately in an emergency. Many of the men in our community are included in those flank companies of the 5th Lincoln and the 2nd York Militia.

I remember that when those men were first called up they didn’t have any equipment or uniforms. They set off in their homespun in most cases with a blanket instead of a musket. The officers of course had to pay for their uniforms out of their own pockets.

Mr. Brock outfitted the new soldiers from the stores at Fort George, their cross belts, cartridge box, and their bayonet on the end of a musket.

Our family moved to the Head of the Lake in 1793 the same year that the Militia Act was passed. George and his good friend Charles King purchased adjoining tracts of land from Dr. Robert Kerr. Dr. Kerr is now serving as a British Army surgeon with the 4th Lincoln Regiment.

Dr. Nathaniel Bell was called to duty as assistant surgeon to Dr. Kerr. As if working hard as a healer on the battlefield was not enough, Dr. Bell also made house calls. On one of these occasions he was captured by the Americans (July 25, 1814) and the next day was shot in the leg while trying to escape. Dr. Bell is now being held at (Pittsfield) Massachusetts.
Word carried home is that he suffers greatly from the wounds inflicted upon him. (for the rest of his life)

(In 1793 Barbara and George had 5 children; Mary Christina 11, John 9, William 6, Barbara 3, George and twin girls born in 1794.)

My husband was 60 years old when he enlisted along with our three sons John, William and George. You can just imagine what a worry that is to myself and our daughters.

Our oldest son John is a colonel with the 2nd flank 2nd York Militia

Charles King’s two sons, James whose rank is private and George whose rank is Lieutenant are both fighting beside all three of our sons in the same flank company. John’s letters home to us includes news of how both of the King men perform their duties as a soldier ought to. He sings praises of their honour and their efforts.

Their father Charles King is serving building the barracks (Sept. 21 to Oct 25 1813) at Burlington Bay as well as standing duty there. July 04 to Aug. 10 1814).

Barely three months after his marriage to Rebecca, our second oldest son William, went off to Detroit as an ensign in the same Militia as his father and his brother John. Many of our locals including John Applegarthis, John Lucas, William Bates and William Johnson Kerr started off to Fort Detroit with Major General Brock. He decided to strike at Fort Detroit which had been conceded to the Americans at the close of the Revolutionary War. It was a daring thing to do since there were few troops on the Niagara Line and Detroit was a strong fortress. The Major General landed on our shores and collected the soldiers he needed including volunteers from the men in our local militia. They picked up other soldiers along the way including the support of Tecumseh and his Indians. Apparently the American General Hull was so terrified of the
possibility of an Indian attack, that he surrendered without a single shot being fired. (August 16, 1812).

My husband George and all three of our sons fought together at the Battle of Queenston Heights. That endeavour earned our William the promotion of lieutenant with the Battalion of Incorporated Militia. (His promotion to Lt. would have been because he had recruited at least ten other men.)

Do you know that the land that battle was fought on, Queenston Heights, belongs to my husband’s brother John?

George’s war endeavours ended at that battle and my husband is safe home with us again.

The last battle our William fought in was at Lundy’s Lane in July of 1814. It started in the evening of the 25th and carried on into the morning of the 26. So many other brave soldiers, including David Fonger of our community fought in what has been declared the bloodiest battle of the war. We are indeed happy to have all of our brave soldiers, home again.

Our youngest son George has learned to speak the Mohawk language as well as several other Indian languages. His translation skills have proved most useful for communicating with the Indians who support their flank company.

My husband George and Joseph Brant had been friends and Freemasons together. We were saddened at Mr. Brant’s passing in 1807. We look on with pride to his son as he carries on his father’s tradition. Joseph of course was a brave warrior in the Revolutionary War and his son John is determined to carry on his father’s traditions.
Young John Brant was 18 years old when the Americans declared war back in June of 1812. He was proud to sign on with the Indian Department.

At the Battle of Queenston Heights in October of 1812, John Brant, John Norton, and William Johnson Kerr of our community led the Six Nations forces and helped push back the invading Americans.

In November of 1812, they lead the Indians again and stemmed an American attack at Fort Erie.

When the Americans were defeated at the Battle of Beaverdams on June 24, 1813, John Brant, John Norton and William Johnson Kerr proved their leadership again at the head of 100 warriors from the Grand River who fought bravely with the Six Nations from Lower Canada. Five Hundred Indians fighting together to help the British soldiers whose numbers were far less. After that victory we heard that the British officer James Fitzgibbon gave the entire credit for the victory to the Indian contingent. Our community is proud of the contribution of our citizens who took part.

William Johnson Kerr is no longer fighting with the Indian department. He was captured at the Battle of Lundy’s Lane in July of 1814 and is being held prisoner in Massachusetts. We all wish him safe home again.

William McKerlie of Nelson was also taken prisoner of war at St. David’s in July of 1814 along with Daniel O’Reilly and Hugh Rose. The American Colonel Wilcox had them captured while dining and they were removed to the United States.
It was in July (29) 1813 that an American Colonel (Winfield) Scott landed on the shores of our lake with 250 troops. Their intention was to capture British supplies at Burlington Bay. We heard that the guide whom Colonel Scott hired, took him off course and they landed at the Brant House instead where they caused considerable damage and harassment to those residing in the house. Colonel Scott then set off through the Aldershot woods and became lost. In trying to disentangle from the forest they found themselves faced with the steep cliff (100 ft.) across Grindstone Creek. There was not one shot fired despite the rumours Colonel Scott tells of his adventures. After finally finding their way out of the forest, Colonel Scott and his men headed towards York where they burned one building and took four prisoners, all of whom were sick in the hospital at the time. Colonel’s Scott’s report makes it sound like an enduring hardship that they managed a great victory on our shores. We witnessed their adventures first hand and know the true account.

The rumours we heard were that Colonel Scott’s Aunt Phoebe Scott lives with her Loyalist husband Robert Land on the other side of the Bay. We wondered that if Colonel Scott had known that, would he have taken a different action. Most likely he would have become lost none the less.

As coincidence will have it, Phoebe and Robert Land’s daughter Phoebe lives with her husband Clement Lucas in Nelson. The two met and married in New Brunswick and then moved here. Major Lucas and his four eldest sons are all serving in His Majesty’s ranks and fought at the Battle of Queenston Heights as well as other battles in this war.

So many friends and neighbours have left their homes and gone off as soldiers, to fight for our protection.

Many of the soldiers, as the men in our family did, joined up with a militia, in the beginning. My husband George has explained the
differences to me. The militia units are not as well disciplined as a flank company or regular military unit although just as necessary and brave. The men in the militia units are permitted to come home for planting, harvest and such. Those men in a flank company or regular military do not share the same liberties.

I am sure you have heard of young Elizabeth Kerns and how the war effort has affected her life. In 1803, Elizabeth’s father Nicholas was the first man to purchase land from Joseph Brant. The Kerns home welcomes many travelers including First Nations warriors. They sleep by the fire, rise early and quietly go on their way.

Elizabeth Kerns is no more than a teener, but when the war broke out, she became absorbed in the plight of the sick and injured. She assists the village doctor with his rounds helping to heal the soldiers who have returned home to us. I understand that Elizabeth is determined to become a doctor one day.

So many farms have been left to be tended by wives and children as their men march off to war.

Captain John Ireland came to Upper Canada with the British army before the war broke out. Mr. Ireland serves with the 1st flank company of the 2nd York Militia as Quartermaster in charge of the supply lines along Dundas Street.

Other local residents who have worked along the same route during the war include Ephraim Van Norman and his four sons of Nelson (with the 2nd flank company of the 2nd York Militia), William Mc Kerlie of Nelson (Oct. 24 to Nov. 10 1813), Peter Thomas of Nelson and Ralph Morden (Oct. 27, 1813 and Nov. 8 to 9 1813) who is settled on part of Brant’s Block. Captain Morden also served at Burlington Bay (July 21 to 30 1814) as did his brother James.
Dundas Street is an important artery of troop movement and a necessary supply line.

A drill hall is located north at the cross roads at Hannasville. The 1st Halton Rifles drill in the field just north of the Guelph Road. It is a bustle of activity along that route.

John Applegarth, whom as I have said was at Fort Detroit with Major General Brock, arrived in our community from England in 1801 and joined his brother William in building the grist mills along Grindstone Creek (in 1809). The first time his mill burned down was in January (21) of 1812 just as Major General Brock was forming the flank companies. Unfortunately, the mill burned again, just after the war started, and John Applegarth joined up with the 2nd York Militia 2nd. Flank company, the same one the men in our family joined up with. Later in the war Mr. Applegarth joined up with the Battalion of Incorporated Militia fighting with our William.

William Hepburne had lost a large quantity of merchandise in the first burning of the Applegarth Mill in January of 1812. He took his oath in a flank company in March of 1812 before the war started.

Mr. Augustus Bates bought land from Joseph Brant’s estate (after his passing) and built his lovely house at the mouth of the Hagar Creek. As you know, his house is also used as an inn.

During the winter of 1813, the Mohawks attached to General Proctor’s Forces were billeted at the Brant House and at Mr. Bates’ Inn. Mr. Bates has now petitioned to the government for War Losses damages (L991 12s 6p) including crops, timber, fence rails and farm animals. His petition is supported by a Lt. James Fraser of the Indian Department who was also boarded there. It sounds like the petition will be ongoing for some time to come. (settled October 20, 1823 and he was paid only a fraction).
What an exciting story to tell of young James Cleaver. His family is settled on their farm at Dundas Road and Walker’s Line. He was only 13 years old when the war broke out. Recruiters from the army came to the area scouting for men and horses, and found that John Cleaver had a good team but of course he did not want to let them go. Mr. Cleaver finally agreed on the condition that his 13 year old son James would go along with his team of horses to care for them. One report we have heard was that young James and his horses were present at the Battle of Stoney Creek in June (06) of 1813. Now there is a boy who will have some stories to tell when the war is ended and he is back home again. (one of the youngest veterans of the war of 1812)

Aashel Davis comes from a strong Loyalist family as so many soldiers do. Mr. Davis was selected for service (rank of Private) in the 1st Flank company of the 2nd York Militia. He worked on Dundas Road for the first year and a half of the war. He served only four days on the field of battle when his wife Nancy died and left him with six children to care for. I understand that he has however made a land claim as a result of contributions to the war effort.

Caleb Hopkins and three of his brothers founded Hannasville when they arrived in our area as Loyalists. How romantic of Mr. Hopkins to name a town after his wife Hannah. We have heard that Mrs. (Green) Hopkins nephew, Billy Green (age 19) bravely warned and then lead the British soldiers away from Burlington Bay to a successful surprise attack against the Americans at the Battle of Stoney Creek in June 1813. There are many of us who hope that the teener will one day be recognized for his bravery and expertise.

Mr. Hopkins was employed with his (2nd Lincoln) flank company to build barracks at Burlington Bay, (Sept. 21 to Oct. 24 of 1813) as were John Fonger (Sr. August 5 to 10, 1814) and Elia Rambo (July 04 to Aug 01, 1814).
This latest conflict continues a never ending merge of families and places as we come together again, a whole community.

The veterans of this War of 1812 continue to arrive home safely to their families in our community to resume the peace we will indeed treasure once the rumblings of the war are completely over.

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