The Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield

Battlefield Dispatch

Volume: 13 Issue: 1 Fall 2025

History and Myths

RONALD L DOERING, UE, BA, LLB, MA, LLD

It is not easy for history buffs like us to admit that we may be fighting a losing battle. Most Canadians are historically illiterate and, not surprisingly, the problem is getting worse. In Ontario high schools, only one history course is required for graduation and newcomers to Ontario from other countries have, generally, little knowledge of Canadian history. Revisionist interpretations have captured much of academia and mainstream media so that many Canadians are actually moving from ill-informed to mis-informed.

We saw this in spades during the War of 1812 bicentennial. Polls at the time revealed that most Canadians had never heard of the war and of those that did, only 37% believed that Canada won. When Prime Minister Harper, himself an avid Canadian history buff, set aside $11.5 million dollars to support local commemorations, many journalists and academics who should know better, criticized the initiative and perpetuated many of the old myths and misconceptions. The journalist Andrew Cohen, for example, has denied any role for Canada in the war because "Canada did not yet exist." Journalist Barbara Yaffe said that the war took place " 55 years before Canada became Canada". The Huffington Post emphasized the "fact that Canada did not exist until the signing of Confederation in 1867". "Canadians weren't yet Canadians", asserted the journalist John Allemang. Moreover, Jeffrey Simpson asserted, "There was no sense of being Canadian at the time". Of course, all of this is utter nonsense.

In fact, there were two legal jurisdictions established by the Canada Act of 1791, Upper Canada and Lower Canada. The War was the first imperial invasion undertaken by the United States, its primary purpose to take what they called "Canada". In an effort to minimize the resistance of the local Canadians, the American general Hull on July 12, 1812, addressed his Proclamation to " the inhabitants of Canada". The many hundreds of residents of Canada that fought in the war saw themselves as Canadians, the vast majority of them born and raised in Canada, the only country they knew.The most popular song of the war begins " Come all ye bold Canadians, enlisted in the cause, to defend your country…". The many militia units were created by the Canadian provincial legislatures and so was the famous Canadian Voltigeurs. The Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry fought with distinction throughout the war. All the local farm families who harassed the Americans as they travelled down the St Lawrence in November 1813 were Canadians who were defending their homes from Yankees, many of them for the second time. The American offer to "liberate" the local Canadians if they wouldn't resist the invasion was soundly rejected. Another myth perpetuated at the time of the bicentennial was that the role of Canadians in several battles was not significant. Like the deep biases of professional military historians such as Stacey, Granatstein, Stanley and even Graves, if you weren't a trained British redcoat, you weren't really a soldier, only regular troops did all the "real" fighting. Robert Henderson has done a thorough job of showing how "badly wrong" is this myth: "Canadians did play a significant role in deciding the outcome of the War of !812"" and Henderson provides the numbers. He shows that as many as 70% of soldiers involved in battles in 1812 were Canadians. In 1813, the 528 Canadians at the Battle of Ogdensburg made up 77% of the men under arms. At the Battle of York 73% were Canadians, at the Battle of Sackett's Harbour 61%, at the Battle of Beaver Dams 59% and, of course, at the Battle of the Chateauguay 100% of the force was Canadian. At our own Battle of Crysler's Farm, the single biggest offensive of the war, at least 28% of the 1199 at the battle were Canadian. Crysler's Farm is one of the most important battles in Canadian history, in a war that "helped define who we are today, what side of the border we live on, and which flag we salute.'

Another myth is that we didn't win the war. Cohen wrote that " no one won the war, which ended in a stalemate". Cohen doesn't seem to realize that a war is not a draw if a massive invasion by one party is completely repulsed by the other. Thousands of Upper and Lower Canadians, New Brunswickers, Nova Scotians and Newfoundlanders volunteered in 1812 to defend their homesteads from a military invasion and prevailed. Canada's survival as a separate entity required that the American invasion be fully stopped, and that is exactly what happened.

One of the reasons I wrote my book, *Defending Our Home: Loyalist Families of*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

History and Myths

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Dundas County and the Battle of Crysler's Farm (Borealis Press 2012) was to counter these vicious myths in an accessible way. The book demonstrates the important role of the local residents and, in particular, the Dundas militia. There were 128 men in the two Flank Companies of the Dundas Militia that fought at the Battle of Crysler's Farm. Every single one of them was a proud Canadian. They certainly knew that we won when the Yankees fled from the field, anxious to go home.

In his latest book *The Fight For History*, the wonderful Tim Cook, an historian at the Canadian War Museum, reminds us that " All nations reconstruct meaning around their wars: telling battlefield stories, creating symbols, and, over time, situating those wars within the country's social memory". He explains that for several reasons we Canadians have not been good at telling our military stories and, of course, "if we do not tell our own stories, no one else will". So, besides having to counter myths perpetuated by our own chattering class, we have a particularly difficult challenge as we face the pervasive American narrative that describes a war that we hardly recognize. The latest American history of the war hardly mentions the St. Lawrence invasion of 1813, the largest and most important in the war, and devotes one paragraph to the Battle of Crysler's Farm in a 450 page book. Our mission has never been more challenging and more important.

Photo: DE Graves

Cornwall Armed Forces Day 2025

KIM MCINNIS
Secretary, Friends Of Crysler's Farm Battlefield

On the 31st of May 2002 Prime Minister Jean Chrétien designated the first Sunday in June as Canadian Armed Forces Day. This is a day to reflect on and celebrate the many contributions made by the Canadian Armed Forces over the course of our nation's history.

On June 8th the FCFB had the honour of attending this event at Lamoureux Park in Cornwall at the invitation of the administration of the Canadian Forces School of Aerospace Control Operations. This important facility trains some 200 students a year in the areas of air battle management and air traffic control. After graduation, the students move on to Canadian Air Defence Sectors in North Bay, part of the North American Aerospace Defence Sector.

The Friends were invited to bring our promotional booth, and organizers were interested in having some sort of period military display. A prolonged skirmish with Cornwall City By-law ensued in regards to displaying the 6lb cannon. (In possible contravention of the very sensible by-law of no firearms or cross bows in the park coming into play. Though two uncapped 24 lb cannons sit facing it across the street.) Umm... let alone firing it. SD&G Highlander Adjutant Marc Latoureille attempted to convince the powers that be that the cannon just made noise and smoke. Adding to the frustration the City of Cornwall apparently has never heard of the Battle of Crysler's Farm formally commemorated since 1895 with the unveiling of the monument that towers over the St. Lawrence which is visible from the road... half an hour outside of Cornwall. City Hall threw the matter in the direction of the police and requested that a letter be submitted to

Left to right is canon member, Gilbert Giroux and Glengarry Light Infantry Fencible, Brett McDonald

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

President's Message

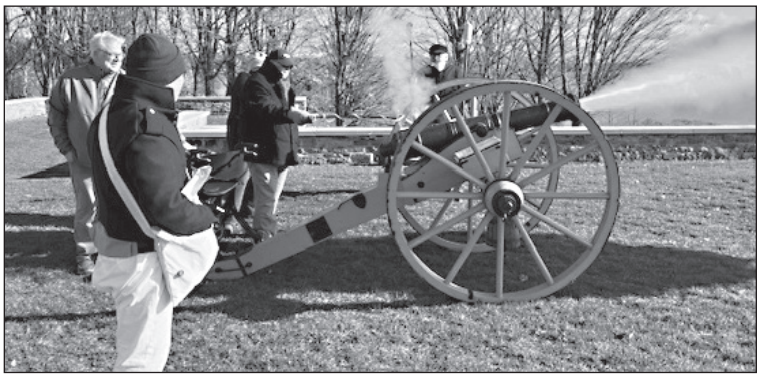
2025 turned out to be a very special year. We did our usual terrific job of attending local events with our education booth and raising awareness of our group and the battle of Crysler's Farm. This year we attended the Cornwall Heritage Fair, the Iroquois fly-in breakfast and for the first time, the Armed Forces Day in Cornwall ,which went very well. The biggest and most notable event this year was the completion of the Crysler's Farm memorial upgrades at the top of the hill. A beautiful job was done to improve the stonework, fix up the walkways and cannons and make the overall experience at the memorial both positive and inspiring, worthy of a special place. All the improvements and upgrades reflect the importance and reverence that the memorial sight deserves. Also, as part of the upgrades, a project is in the works to create a self-guided walking tour of the site that will tell the story of the battle and all the people involved. This is something that the Friends have been working towards for a long time. We are inviting all to come out to the reenactment this summer (2026) and to see all the amazing improvements.

I would like to say a special 'Thank you' to the Parks of the St.Lawrence and Hollee for all their work, dedication and leadership on getting this very important work done.

Lastly, on a somber note, we want to recognize the passing of Donald Graves in November 2025. DE Graves was well connected with the FCFB and the history of the battle. Along with authoring the best known book on the Battle of Crysler's Farm (Field of Glory), DE Graves was also one of the founding members of the Friends group. His knowledge and passion of the battle will be missed.

Dave Conners

Co-President - The Friends of Cryslers Farm Battlefield



Bob Irvine fires canon during restoration ceremony.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the Cornwall police chief for review. A four page letter quilled by yours truly was submitted in which the missive underscored important information such as the FCFB being a legitimate group and have been for the last 25 years and that the FCFB cannon crew have training in safety protocols. Having gained the blessing of the chief of police it was finally decided that every thing was probably okay, in that we apparently posed no serious public threat, and so were given the green light to bring the 6 lb cannon into the park... and could fire it.

When we pulled in after loading up the cannon at Upper Canada Village with the help of FCFB member Sperry Lee and his work mate, we were overwhelmed by military personnel eager to help unload the Napoleonic era replica artillery piece from the trailer. The crew moved into position facing the river, its muzzle overlooking the bicycle path...and yes blocked prior to firing. Though one spandex Tour de France hopeful of course ignored the blockade and rode straight through.

Cannon crew for the day consisted of FCFB Lester McInnis backed by the very capable and experienced 1st Lincolns cannon crew of Gilbert Giroux and Lorne Ross of Martintown. The presence of the FCFB having been well publicized as part of the 1:00pm opening and closing ceremonies the crew fired 3 shots for each to a very appreciative crowd. This was accompanied by facts, history, and questions fielded by Lester. Interest was keen as was demonstrated by the stampede that followed the announcement of the firing from the band stand to the firing stage. One young spectator after the opening ceremony firing, informed his parents that now that the cannon firing was over he wanted to go home.

The day included promotional tents by various representatives of the Armed Forces, a children's play area as well as entertainment from the band shell. It was a relaxing day in which military folk and their families along with the public spent the day in what could best be described as a corporate picnic.

As of print time I am happy to announce that the FCFB have been invited to attend the 2026 event and barring further red tape, will be there on the 13th of June.

Canon Crew- from left, Les McInnis and Lorne Ross.

November 11, 1813 - November 11, 2025

KIM MCINNIS
Secretary, Friends Of Crysler's Farm Battlefield

Photo by Carol Goddard

"The spirit of past ages never dies – It lives and walks abroad and cries aloud."
- Susanna Moodie, 1847

If one were a curious bystander looking out in morbid fascination at the field of battle, as has been the fashion since armies for the very first time faced off against one another on the battlefield, this year's November 11th would not have seemed much different than that of 1813.

As American forces gathered in ready of yet another invasion on Canadian soil, rain, sleet and snow overnight on November 10th, 1813 made an already untenable situation even more miserable. It is said that the British and Canadian forces sat staring into, or attempted apprehensive sleep beside sputtering fires. Between their legs the cold metal of their muskets protectively cradled in an attempt to keep the firing mechanisms dry, slowly seeped through their trousers. Adding to the already very chill conditions. Their woolen great coats becoming sodden and then frozen in the long November dark. Conditions that perhaps aided to the ferocity in which they would later engage themselves, almost as soon as a weak dawn broke over the river on the 11th. This against an enemy whose numbers grossly outnumber them, but were far more poorly attired and provisioned than themselves, at the end of what for them had been a miserable and futile campaign.

In comparison 2025 saw a mix of rain, sleet and finally 10cms of snow blanket the area from the 9th to the 10th. The 11th dawned with light snow, the temperature hovering below freezing was enforced by a driving windchill feeling more like -15c. Despite these inclement conditions some 60 people filed out to pay their respects and remember the sacrifices made on that day 213 years ago in what was a very quickly run half hour program. The event streamed by FCFB's Jim Mullin.

Royal Canadian Legion Branch Kemptville 212, Pipe Major Hugh

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Upper Canada Village Quilt Raffle

DAVE CONNERS
Co-President, Friends Of Crysler's Farm Battlefield

The winning draw for the 2024 quilt raffle was held on December 21, 2024 at the Upper Canada Village store. A record number of tickets were sold throughout the season for the glorious hand made quilt. Over $5000 was raised for the Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield, a record amount for any raffle held by The Friends. The funds raised will be going to a project to create a self-directed walking tour around the memorial that will tell the story of the battle, the participants and the people in the area. This has been a longtime wish of The Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield.

We would like to thank the craftsman from the village for the beautiful quilt :Sharon Shaver, Marjorie Munroe, Margaret Westervelt and Janice Toonders

The winner of the quilt raffle was Katelyn Franko from the Chesterville area.

Friends member Dave Conners with quilt raffle winner Katelyn Franko

November 11, 1813 - November 11, 2025

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Metcalfe provided piping for the morning, leading the group from the base of the mound to the monument.

The re-enactment community provided both a colour and honour guard, consisting of Canadian Fencibles of Light Infantry, Le Regiment des Voltigeurs de Quebec, Glengarry Light Infantry of Fencibles, and welcomed again this year was representation of the US 1st "Forsyth's" Rifles.

Master of Ceremonies FCFB's Omar Simonyi welcomed and thanked everyone for turning out. Omar also spoke on behalf of the re-enactment community, reflecting on the respectful theatre engaged in by the re-enactors as a means of remembrance and respect. Local historian and author Stewart Manson put faces to the conflict in his history of the battle by remembering three of the casualties that were incurred, two of the 49th Regiment "Green Tigers" and a Canadian Fencible. FCFB's Carol Thompson Goddard spoke on behalf of the descendents, making reference to the families affected from both sides of the conflict. FCFB's Gabriel Thomas delivered Reverend Daniel Hayward's "War of 1812 Prayer". A solemn two firing cannon salute by the FCFB 6pd cannon crew of Lester McInnis, Sperry Lee and Terry Warner, rang out before the moment of silence and following the piper's lament. Both echoing across a very cold and grey river.

Wreaths were laid by Dundas South Stormont MP Eric Duncan, Dundas South Stormont MPP Nolan Quinn; South Dundas Mayor Jason Broad; the SD&G Highlanders; Royal Canadian Legion Branch 48 Morrisburg Robert Houze; and by St. Lawrence Park Commission's CEO Hollee Kew. Representing the re-enactment community: The Canadian Fencibles - David Smith; Le Regiment des Voltigeurs de Quebec - Mark Poirier; 1st US Rifles - Dallas Robinson. Wreaths were laid by FCFB members on behalf of the 49th Regiment, Native Allies and War of 1812-14 Militias. The local historical groups of the area paid their respects. Two wreaths were laid by and on behalf of the Historical Society of South Dundas, and honouring the Dundas Militia; The United Empire Loyalist Association St. Lawrence Branch; the Ontario East British Home Children Family, as well as the FCFB.

The ceremony was closed with the playing of "When the Battle's Over" by Pipe Major Metcalfe.

Much appreciation is extended to ex-officio Peggy Hause and Manager Tracey Ogilvie providing transport for those attendees needing a lift to the monument and early morning set up as well as Upper Canada Village maintenance in regards to snow clearing and maintenance of the site for the morning in conditions unprecedented.

"Battle of Glengarry", Dunvegan Re-enactment Weekend

KIM MCINNIS

Perfect fall weather of crisp mornings and warm days played host to this year's Battle of Glengarry weekend September 19 – 21 hosted by the Glengarry Pioneer Museum. Friday's Education Day saw grade 7 & 8 students as well as some younger home school participants take advantage of the opportunity to learn about life in the Regency Era. The students rotated through a number of stations at which they were taught many of the aspects of military camp life c1812-14 as well as craft skills of the Georgian era.

The Friends were on hand to inform on the Battle of Crysler's Farm and offered an historical tutorial and mock hands on firing of the 6lb cannon by crew members Omar Simonyi and Lester McInnis. Participation in the drill was of immense interest. The students were treated to a lunch time firing of the cannon which proved so popular that a second firing was undertaken before the students went back to continue the rotation through the various stations for the afternoon.

Crowds were steady on Saturday and Sunday with visitors enjoying both the event and the weather. Folks wandered through the encampment, taking in the displays offered by the sutlers, a blacksmith, rope maker, daily talks/seminars, the 100th Regiment Fife's and Drums, the SD&G Highlanders Pipe Band as well as a daily re-enactment just to name a few of the many attractions. FCFB members Kim and Lester McInnis and David Conners were on hand with the Crysler's Farm promotional and education display, and were kept busy chatting with visitors all weekend. Some of the school children had returned with their parents as did some teachers. The FCFB cannon crew of Lester McInnis, Sperry Lee, Omar Simonyi and Terry Warner took to the field on both days for the re-enactment.

This last of the local events is always a great ending to the season. The hospitality offered by the Glengarry Pioneer Museum, and the bucolic setting sometimes ablaze with autumn colours contribute to a laid back atmosphere (at least for the participants), all lending themselves to a perfect if somewhat nostalgic ending to the re-enactment year.

Left to right: Sperry Lee, Kim McInnis, Les McInnis. Photo by Carol Goddard.

Heritage Fair - Cornwall 2025

GAB THOMAS

Friends member, Gab Thomas

The Friends participated again in 2025 in the popular Heritage Fair in Cornwall. Taking place at Cornwall Square on February 22, the Fair is a collaborative effort organized by Heritage-Patrimoine Cornwall to connect the local community with its unique history. Seventeen local historical and heritage-focused groups were represented. The Friends displayed maps, brochures, medals and the always popular collection of musket balls from the Battle of Crysler's Farm battlefield. The Fair provides a good opportunity to raise awareness, connect with residents and network with other organizations.

Battle of Crysler's Farm National Historic Site Restoriation

PEGGY HAUSE

The Battle of Crysler's Farm Memorial is a striking monument that can be seen from County Road 2 while passing by the entrance to Upper Canada Village. Dedicated to the Battle of Crysler's Farm, the monument has been in its current location since 1958. However, this has not always been its home.

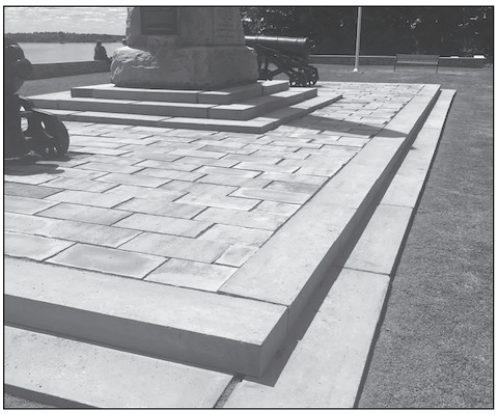
On September 25th, 1895, a 38-foot-tall stone obelisk, flanked by two 24-pounder British cannons, and surrounded by a post and chain fence was unveiled as a memorial to the Battle of Crysler's Farm. The monument stood on a 100-foot by 100-foot plot of land purchased from Abraham Van Allen on lot 1 of the first concession of Williamsburg in the County of Dundas. The memorial remained in this location for 63 years before it was endangered by the flooding of the St. Lawerence Seaway.

To preserve the memorial, it was decided that it would be moved ½ a mile north to border on the newly constructed Highway 2, and to act as a centrepiece for the new park under development by the Ontario-St. Lawrence Development Commission (later becoming the St. Lawrence Parks Commission). As part of this project, a mound was erected using soil excavated from the original battlefield. In 1958, the stone obelisk was erected and the cannons installed on either side.

More recently, the first phase of restoration work on the memorial was undertaken in 2025 to help preserve it for generations to come. This work was led by the SLPC in partnership with Tomlinson Construction Ltd. and supported by David Brown Construction Ltd. Work focused on improving structural integrity and overall guest experience to the site.

First the east and west walkways were repaved and drainage improved. Then work moved to within the stone walls on top of the mound with the SLPC's Maintenance Team hard at work. Electrical systems were upgraded allowing the monument to be lit at night, capstones were cleaned, and the stonework around the memorial was re-laid to create a smooth surface. On either side of the obelisk, cement plinths were created for the cannons. Work was also completed on the flagpole mechanisms, ensuring their continued use. Benches were then installed to encourage visitors to sit, contemplate, and enjoy the view from the top of the mound.

This work was supported along the way by the dedication and support of the Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield who have been champions of the Battle of Crysler's Farm since their conception in 2000. Members of the group attended meetings, provided guidance, and rolled up their sleeves and repainted the cannons to help ensure their preservation for years to come.



On November 6th, the completion of the first phase of restoration was recognized in a ceremony held by the St. Lawrence Parks Commission that welcomed partners, dignitaries, community members, the press, and the Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield.

Iroquois Fly In and Breakfast

LESTER MCINNIS

This event began in 1967, Canada's centennial year, and according to the Iroquois Post attracted 45 planes with the following year's event seeing 65 pilots touch down.

The FCFB have had the good fortune over a number of years of attending this event, at the invitation of the Historical Society of South Dundas. The HSSD have taken advantage of the tourist style event to invite local historical groups to display and promote what they do. Besides the breakfast and planes, the event also show cases vintage vehicles by the Golden Gears Club.

Lester and Kim McInnis volunteered to man the FCFB promotional pop up tent. The 27th of July dawned hot and humid with a drizzly morning with what was probably about the last rain the area saw for the rest of the summer, before clearing up and in aviation/ meteorological parlance to just a low cloud deck. Though area rain may have somewhat deterred the number of planes coming in for the morning, the public attendance was not affected. It was nice as always to meet folks who are new to the area, chatting with local residents, as well as those who stopped by to say hello from previous years.

Call to action

Join the 'Friends' Today

MUSTER SOME NATIONAL PRIDE!

Join the FCFB today and become a member!

For a $25 (Canadian Funds) annual membership fee payable to The Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield; you can keep abreast of all the news and events surrounding the FCFB. If you do not wish to become a member, please consider making a donation towards preserving this important event in Canada's history. (Donations over $10 are eligible for a tax receipt.)

Have a question?

1812alivedc@gmail.com

Whether you are a new member, plan to renew, or are a donor, please remember to include your full name, mailing address, e-mail, and a phone number with your remittance.
(Your contact information is for FCFB use only.)

MAIL TO:
Gabriele Thomas
48 Albert Street
PO Box 243
Chesterville, ON K0C 1H0

Name: _____

Mailing address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

OFFICERS

President - Dave Conners
Vice President - Jim Mullin
Past President - Dave Conners
Treasurer - Gabrielle Thomas
Secretary - Kim McInnis

DIRECTORS:

Philip Bury, Carol Goddard, Ashley Harper, Les McInnis, Ron Doering, Sperry Lee and Terry Warner
Ex Officio: Peggy Hause

WHO ARE WE

The Friends of Crysler's Farm Battlefield is a Not-For-Profit organization committed to the preservation and promotion of the military heritage of this battlefield site. Our goal is to aid in the maintenance and upgrading of the Battlefield Visitors Centre, the Memorial site and the surrounding grounds. We are active in supporting such efforts as hosting living history events each year. In addition to keep members abreast of activities and events at and around the site, our organization has developed a website as an adjunct to this biannual newsletter.

www.crysler farm.com

THE BATTLEFIELD DISPATCH

Is published on a need to basis. Submissions, comments, commentaries are the sole property of the contributors. Photos/submissions appearing in the Battlefield Dispatch are used with the permission from and are the sole property of the contributors and cannot be re-produced in any media form without the explicit written permission of the contributors. No portion of this publication is to be reproduced for personal profit.

Find us on: facebook

www.facebook.com/CryslerFarm

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Changes to events can be found on our website and Facebook

Battle Re-enactment week-end: July 11-12, 2026

November 11th: Memorial Ceremony

Battlefield Memorial 9AM