

“Wants and Privations”: Women and the War of 1812 in Upper Canada

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Most accounts of Canada's pre-modern conflicts present women as either heroes or victims. This preliminary investigation of the immediate impact of the War of 1812 reveals that wartime experiences were far more heterogeneous. Many Upper Canadians were inconvenienced by the fighting, primarily because militia service made pioneer farming more difficult. Hundreds of other residents suffered immensely due to the death and destruction inflicted by particular campaigns. A great number of women were affected only marginally by the fighting, however, and some actually benefited from the war. For some, the war brought increased profits from sales of goods to the military, as well as unprecedented opportunities for employment, courting, and excitement.

La plupart des documents relatant les conflits prémodernes du Canada dépeignent les femmes comme des héroïnes ou des victimes. Cette étude préliminaire de l'impact immédiat de la Guerre de 1812 brosse un portrait nettement plus hétérogène de leur vie en temps de guerre. Les combats perturbaient de nombreux Hauts-Canadiens, surtout parce que le service militaire compliquait l'agriculture au temps de la colonisation. Des centaines d'autres étaient cruellement éprouvés par la mort et les ravages causés par certaines campagnes. Mais de nombreuses femmes souffraient peu de la guerre, en bénéficiant même dans certains cas. En effet, certaines encaissaient davantage de profits grâce à la vente de marchandises aux militaires et voyaient comme jamais auparavant les possibilités d'emploi, les courtisans et les moments exaltants se bousculer à leurs portes.

ON NOVEMBER 21, 1815, Sussanah Jessup of Augusta County, Upper Canada, put the finishing touches to a letter addressed to Gordon Drummond, former administrator of the colony. Jessup explained that her husband Edward had recently died, leaving her alone to care for seven children. The family had earlier filed a claim at Prescott for about £1,500 in private property losses sustained during the war. In 1812 the British military had erected Fort Wellington on the Jessup farm, and over the course of the next

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three years the troops used nearly seven miles of fencing for firewood, dismantled a frame house and barn, damaged the family's stone house, storehouse, and large square timber building, and felled thousands of fruit and timber trees. Jessup estimated the losses at more than £1,721, a significant sum considering that an ordinary labourer or pioneer farmer would have earned about £30 a year in post-war Upper Canada. After returning the property in early 1815, Sir George Prevost ordered that £100 in compensation be given to the Jessups immediately. Although it was expected that the rest would be paid shortly, the family's "reduced and melancholy situation" actually continued for more than two decades.¹

Sussanah Jessup was one of many invisible participants in the War of 1812 in Upper Canada. While the role of women in twentieth-century conflicts remains a popular topic for research, the activities of their predecessors in earlier contests have been studied much less often.² The rare exceptions to that pattern, such as Janice Potter-McKinnon's works on eastern Ontario refugees during the revolutionary period, focus mostly on non-combatants as victims of military campaigns. Potter-McKinnon, for instance, notes that all Loyalist women "had to leave what was most dear to them — their homes, their relatives, and their friends", but these "heroic feats" were later ignored by colonial authorities and historians.³ Perhaps because of the paucity of evidence, few efforts have been made to investigate the impact of the War of 1812 on women. Most works that mention civilians, such as William Kirby's *Annals of Niagara*, are antiquarian efforts, which invariably claim that "even the women and children were filled with patriotic spirit" and all heroically resisted the invaders.⁴

1 Information on the Jessup family is derived from Colonial Office, series 42, volume 360 (hereafter CO42\360), Jessup to Prince Regent, June 20, 1816, p. 116; and National Archives, Record Group 19, E5 (a), Board of Claims for War Losses (hereafter NA, RG 19, War Losses), v. 4358, Jessup claim, 1863. Information on wage labour rates can be found in Peter Russell, *Attitudes to Social Structure and Mobility in Upper Canada, 1815-1840* (Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 9.

2 For World War I, see Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women during the Great War", in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, and Bonnie Shepard, eds., *Women at Work Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Educational Press, 1974), pp. 261-307; and Graham S. Lowe, "Women and Work", in J. M. Bumsted, ed., *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume II, Post-Confederation*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 394-420. For World War II, see various works by Ruth Roach Pierson, "They're Still Women After All: Wartime Jitters over Femininity", in Eva Isaksson, ed., *Women and the Military System* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 30-46, and "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Labour Force in World War II", in J. M. Bumsted, ed., *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume II, After Confederation* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 333-362.

3 See Janice Potter-McKinnon, "Patriarchy and Paternalism: The Case of the Eastern Ontario Loyalist Women", in A. D. Gilbert, C. M. Wallace, and R. M. Bray, eds., *Reappraisals in Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1993), p. 265, and *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

4 William Kirby, *Annals of Niagara* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1927), p. 213. In 1923 another writer announced that these "splendid pioneer mothers" had met every "danger and difficulty" with "ready devotion and courage". See Ernest Green, "Some Women of 1812-14", *Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa Transactions*, vol. 9 (1925), pp. 98, 108. Most works on the conflict ignore the role of women altogether and offer only standard "battle histories". See, for example,

This preliminary investigation focuses on the immediate effects of the conflict and suggests that the war elicited more complex responses from women in the colony. An examination of claims for property losses caused by the fighting, as well as military records, reports of public and private relief efforts, and accounts by participants, reveals that the majority of women were neither victims nor heroes. It would seem that fewer than half of all families were adversely affected by the fighting, with only about 40 per cent ever facing the inconvenience of militia service.⁵ Since Canada was the seat of war in this contest, about one in four families sustained property losses of some sort and hundreds of residents were killed. Probably fewer than 10 per cent of colonial families were deprived of all their property because of the fighting, however, and likely fewer than half that number suffered the death of a loved one.⁶ Both private and public relief measures were taken to assist those affected by the fighting, and some women even benefited from the campaigning. Many were employed as domestics in the army, and some civilians would remember the period from 1812 to 1815 as a time of increased opportunities for excitement, socializing, and the acquisition of wealth.

G. F. G. Stanley, *The War of the 1812: Land Operations* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1983); or J. MacKay Histsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965). Even a dissertation devoted to the effects of the fighting on Upper Canadian society discussed colonial women only about two dozen times. See G. C. B. Sheppard, "Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812" (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1989), pp. 5, 38–39, 46, 75, 112, 138, 153, 176, 180, 183, 188, 194, 233, 259, 341. A revised version of that dissertation has been published as *Plunder, Profit and Paroles: A Social History of the War of 1812 in Upper Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). A few books have focused on the role of Laura Secord. See Hume Blanche, *Laura Secord: The Ryerson Canadian History Readers* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928); and Ruth McKenzie, *Laura Secord: The Legend and the Lady* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971).

5 During the war the province was home to 5,455 active militiamen. See "Statement Showing the Name, Age, and Residence of Militiamen of 1812–14 ...", Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1876, p. iv. This is less than half the total number (12,801) mustered in 1811. See NA, RG5, A1, Upper Canada Sundries, v. 13, June 4, 1811 militia return, 5437.

6 With a population of about 73,000 in 1811 (see note 7 below), and assuming an average family size of six people per household, there were likely near 12,167 families in the province at the start of the war. See Douglas McCalla, "The 'Loyalist' Economy of Upper Canada, 1784–1806", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 16, no. 32 (1983), p. 285. An 1815–1816 war claims commission received 2,884 claims for property losses, accounting for about 23% of all families. See NA, RG 19, War Losses, v. 3730, file two, 1816 commission report. According to *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society* (Montreal: LPS, 1817), fewer than 1,000 families were assisted for war losses; even if all of them lost everything, that would only amount to 8.2% of the total. Pension lists published in the colonial newspapers contained the names of 157 militiamen who left dependents behind. See *Niagara Spectator*, December 11, 1817. A rough idea of total militia deaths, including single men who died on duty, can be derived by comparing a list of all Lincoln fatalities to the number who left dependents behind. The pension lists contain the names of 63 Lincoln militiamen, but it seems a total of 108 from that region may have died. See Ontario Archives (hereafter OA), Military Records Collection, 1812, p. 10, Lincoln Militia Casualty Lists 1812–14. At that ratio, instead of 157 deaths as indicated by the pension lists, there may have been as many as 269, which would have affected about 2.2% of all families.

Since no province-wide census was undertaken in antebellum Upper Canada, the nature of the colonial population remains something of a mystery. By utilizing annual militia musters, which involved all adult males between the ages of 16 and 60, and by extrapolating from the limited district census figures that do exist, we can make some informed guesses about both the size and composition of the pre-war provincial population. In 1811 Upper Canada was probably inhabited by some 73,000 people, with less than half of that total being female.⁷ If the ratios for the Home District in the pre-war period held true for the whole colony, women 16 years of age and over would have numbered about 14,000, and there may have been as many as 19,000 girls under that age. The number of boys was probably in the region of 22,000, and men aged 16 and over likely amounted to just under 18,000.⁸

Naturally, the war had an impact on the colony's population. Hundreds of recently arrived Americans fled south to their old homes, and many non-combatants escaped to Montreal, Quebec, and the Maritimes when fighting erupted. Thousands of other women and children would have accompanied the combatants, however. For example, somewhere between 2,000 and 4,500 Native women and children, many of whom were from the Ohio region, were eventually encamped around Burlington Heights by mid-1813.⁹ The regular forces also included non-combatants in their ranks even though privates were usually discouraged from marrying. Most regiments had regulations that allowed only six per cent of non-commissioned soldiers to bring along dependents. It was felt a larger proportion of women and

7 In the 1820s, when annual district returns became available, the militia muster amounted to less than one-fifth of the population. In 1821, for example, the population (113,066) was about 5.7 times the size of the militia (19,737). See NA, RG9, Upper Canada Militia, IB2, v. 1, General Annual Returns, 1808-38; RG5, B26, Upper Canada, Returns of Population and Assessment, 1821 population, p. 111. At that ratio, the civilian population in 1811 was likely near 73,000 (12,801 militiamen times 5.7 equals 72,966). See NA, RG5, A1, Upper Canada Sundries, v. 13, June 4, 1811, militia return, 5437. No complete breakdown of the provincial population exists before the war, but an 1805 return for the London, Johnstown, Home, and Western Districts shows a total of 11,685 individuals comprised of 6,250 males (53.5%) and 5,435 females (46.5%). See NA, RG 5, B26, Upper Canada, Returns of Population and Assessment, 1805, 001.

8 A census of the Home District for 1809 shows a total of 6,171 individuals, comprised of 1,501 adult males (24.3%), 1,228 adult females (19.9%), 1,852 boys under 16 (30%), and 1,590 girls under 16 (25.8%). Using those ratios for the whole province in 1811 produces 17,731 adult males, 14,520 adult females, 21,890 boys, and 18,825 girls. See Matilda Ridout Edgar, *Ten Years of Upper Canada in Peace and War, 1805-1815* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1890), p. 27.

9 For reports on people fleeing the country, see E. A. Cruikshank, "A Study of Disaffection in Upper Canada in 1812-15", in Morris Zaslow, ed., *The Defended Border: Upper Canada and the War of 1812* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1964), p. 223; and *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 229-241. Issac Wilson claimed there were 7,000 Natives encamped around the Heights (OA, Issac Wilson Diary, Issac to Jonathan, December 5, 1813), but later estimates placed the number at only 3,000. See Ernest Cruikshank, *The Battle of Lundy's Lane*, 3rd ed. (Welland: Tribune, 1893), pp. 7-8. Assuming that two-thirds of those refugees were women and children, at the very least some 1,900 Native non-combatants, and perhaps as many as 4,600, were gathered around Burlington Heights.

children would place too great a strain on rations and lodging.¹⁰ Since the regular forces in Upper Canada amounted to about 13,500 men in 1814, around 800 army wives would have been officially permitted to accompany the troops. The total number may have been much greater, if only because some commanders ignored the guidelines. For example, the provision return for one 35-man company stationed at the York garrison in June 1814 lists the names of five wives and ten children, although only two women should have accompanied their spouses.¹¹

Of the approximately 18,000 adult males residing in the colony before the war, only about 13,000 were eligible for militia service. In Upper Canada, military duty was a mandatory responsibility for all able-bodied men between 16 and 60, and in times of peace the service consisted of one day's training per year. Beginning in the spring of 1812, however, it was clear to British officials that war was on the horizon, and special groups called "flank companies", restricted to men under the age of 40, were enrolled in the province. The remaining militiamen continued in larger "sedentary battalions", to be called upon only in emergencies. Flank members, however, were to be ready for service at a moment's notice and, even in peacetime, were liable to be called upon for training up to six times a month. Because of the American threat, a number of other volunteer groups, including the Glengarry Light Infantry, provincial artillery and cavalry companies, and later the Incorporated Militia, were also organized for the defence of the province. Despite official regulations demanding near-universal service, participation in the War of 1812 varied widely from individual to individual, with the majority of Upper Canadian males actively avoiding service of any sort.¹²

Of course, hundreds of enthusiastic colonists spent weeks and months on frontline duty. For many women whose spouses were active participants in

10 For information of British army practices, see Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 30–31; Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Potters Lake: Pottersfield Press, n.d.), p. 97; and Sir Charles Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809–1814* (London: Greenhill, 1986), p. 274. For women in the U.S. forces, see OA, "Orderly Book of the Garrison Stationed at Fort Niagara, 1812–13", January 5, 1813.

11 Kingston had about 4,500 soldiers and sailors. See Stephen Mecredy, "Some Military Aspects of Kingston's Development During the War of 1812" (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1982), pp. ii, 117. Central Upper Canada supported the same number. See E. A. Cruikshank, *Documentary History of the Campaign on the Niagara Frontier* (Welland: Tribune, 1902–1908), return of right division, June 22, 1814, vol. 1, pp. 28–30. An equal number of Americans would also have been in the province in the Niagara, Western, and London Districts. See Donald Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 185; Dennis Carter-Edwards, *Fort Malden: A Structural Narrative History 1796–1976* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 105–108. Six per cent of this total number of troops (13,500) is 810. For the actual number of wives in one corps, see NA, RG9, IB7, v. 2, provision return of Captain Walker's Company, June 24, 1814.

12 George Sheppard, "Deeds Speak: Militiamen, Medals and the Invented Traditions of 1812", *Ontario History*, vol. 83 (September 1990), pp. 207–232.

the fighting, the outbreak of war changed their circumstances forever. On June 28, 1812, ten days after the official declaration of hostilities, the news of the conflict finally reached Upper Canada. One resident of the Home District noted that most people feared an imminent invasion and, "having heard something of the American preparations", the colonists "felt at a loss" about what to do.¹³ The colony's newspapers had already featured letters predicting the outbreak of fighting, and the Rev. John Strachan, for example, warned his neighbours in the pages of the *Kingston Gazette* in February 1812 that all Upper Canadians should actively resist any American encroachment. He reminded them that the British Army and Navy would come to their aid, so the war would end favourably. But the images conjured up by Strachan likely left few colonists feeling very sanguine about the immediate future. They were warned that the American invaders would be a "horrid Banditti" who would drive out most colonists and put to the sword any who remained. In order to incite male colonists to action, Strachan also observed that a special horror awaited Upper Canadian women if their relatives failed to protect them. He predicted that, during an American invasion, the "weaker sex [would be] disposed of as is usual on like occasions".¹⁴

Official recruitment campaigns also made reference to women and children in order to spur enlistment. Reluctant volunteers were told by one corps that Upper Canadian females would find them irresistible in uniform. The Glengarry regiment announced in 1812 that "great advantages", including land grants, would be made available to every veteran after the war. "In a short time he will have every Luxury of Life about him," the recruiter predicted:

He will be able to take his Wife and Family to Church or Market in his own Cariole, and if he has not a Wife, it will be the sure means of getting him a good one, for Fortune always favours the Brave, and flinty must be the heart of that Damsel, and vain her pretensions to taste, who could resist a *Light Bob of the Glengary's* when equipped in his new *Green Uniform*.¹⁵

The Rev. Strachan, who well understood the value of propaganda, also directly employed several members of the "weaker sex" to ensure that volunteers remained on duty. After the first British victory of the war at Detroit in the summer of 1812, a number of young women at York created a banner celebrating the activities of their male counterparts. Months later the flag was presented to the Third Regiment of York militia by Anne

13 OA. Eli Playter Diary, June 28, 1812 — September 15, 1812, pp. 396-399.

14 *Kingston Gazette*, February 8, 1812, p. 2.

15 McCord Museum, Glengarry poster, 1812. See also *Kingston Gazette*, December 12, 1812, p. 3. For a discussion of how women are often used to mobilize young men for combat, see Judith Hicks Stiehm, "The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War", in Isaksson, ed., *Women and the Military System*, pp. 94-96.

Powell during a well-orchestrated public ceremony. Strachan reminded the citizen-soldiers that Powell and other members of "that tender & most amiable sex ... zealously hope that we shall never abandon them but with life". A colonial reporter, writing under the pen-name "Spectator", completed a description of the event with the warning: "Let the youth who dare desert the sacred banner in the hour of danger know, and feel himself unworthy of those exquisite attachments to this world, which result from the virtuous influence of the diviner sex."¹⁶

Yet for most civilians the greatest hardships of the early part of the war were associated with relatives answering the call of duty. Since Upper Canada was a frontier region, most of the population was occupied in homesteading. The family served as the basic economic unit on a pioneer farm. Colonial women were generally responsible for the labour-intensive tasks of feeding, clothing, and caring for a large farm family. In addition, tending to the poultry and cattle, as well as vegetable and fruit growing, were the responsibilities of wives and daughters. Ploughing, planting, harvesting, and woodcutting were tasks normally performed by men. While women sometimes assisted in those activities, or even took temporary responsibility for them because of illness or accident, outside labourers would usually be hired if needed because pioneer wives and daughters already had enough to do. In order to thrive, therefore, a frontier farm required at least two adults to complete all the arduous tasks involved in homesteading.¹⁷

When young flank members were called away on duty for lengthy periods, however, the whole burden fell on their companions. Roger Hale Sheaffe noted early in the war that militiamen who stayed with their units "were exposed to wants and privations ... their homes, their farms were suffering from neglect, much of their produce was lost, and many of their families were in distress." In December 1812, the commanding officers of the Dundas and Glengarry militia regiments appealed to Sheaffe to permit their men to go home. The officers noted that the units had run short of bedding, barracks, and utensils, and the minds of the militiamen were "in many instances distressed with anxiety for their families left under the care

16 The event is mentioned in D. B. Read, *Life and Times of Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, K.B.* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1894), p. 191; George Spragge, *The John Strachan Letterbook: 1812-1834* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1946), p. 90; *Kingston Gazette*, April 20, 1813, p. 2.

17 For discussions of gender divisions and agricultural responsibilities in colonial societies, see Jan Noel, "New France: Les femmes favorisées", in Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History Volume Two* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), pp. 22-23; Leo Johnson, "The Political Economy of Ontario Women in the Nineteenth Century", in Acton et al., eds., *Women at Work Ontario*, pp. 13-31; Ruth Roach Pierson, "The History of Women and Paid Work", in *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985), pp. 20-21; Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 78; and Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 69-74.

of women". The senior militiamen noted that wives of young flank members had more than enough to do in peacetime "nursing helpless infancy & guarding heedless childhood" and it was certainly beyond their means to singlehandedly cut wood needed for winter fuel, as well as "thresh out grain & carry it to a mill". Recognizing that the war had made extra farm labour scarce, and in light of the "many domestic calls on the militia", Sheaffe dismissed the flank units on December 11.¹⁸ Nonetheless, in the spring of 1813, one observer reported that only half of the farmers had planted winter wheat and he noted "Some women are now suffering for bread, as their husbands are on the lines, and they and their children have no money nor credit, nor can they get any work to do."¹⁹

The low pay offered by the military to active members of the militia contributed to the problems faced by their relatives. Privates in the militia received only 15s. 6p. a month, or just over £9 a year, while pioneer farm families usually earned somewhere between £25 and £35 in peacetime. The money paid to active militiamen was only about half of what a pauper needed to survive in ordinary times, and the £9 would certainly not have bought the necessities for a family of five during the conflict.²⁰ Prices for most commodities skyrocketed between 1812 and 1815, and the rate of inflation over that time was estimated by one York resident to be near 300 per cent. Pioneer families would then have required wartime incomes in the range of £100 to £140 to meet peacetime standards, and the militiamen's earnings of less than £1 a month would only have contributed to the high level of indebtedness often associated with the first few years of homesteading.²¹ Low pay in the militia, along with shortages of specie that led to late payments, may help explain why sheriff sales of properties rose dramatically in early 1813.²² From June 1811 to October 1812, the *Kingston Gazette*

18 NA, RG9, IB1, Adjutant General 1812-1814, v. 2, 1812 Miscellaneous, C.O.s to Sheaffe, December 1812; CO42/352, Sheaffe to Bathurst, December 31, 1812, 176.

19 Michael Smith quoted in Dean Fink, ed., *Life in Upper Canada: An Inquiry Approach* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 75.

20 Pay scales are in OA, Duncan Clark Papers, MU572, "Muster Rolls and Pay Lists of Capt. Fraser's Company of Incorporated Militia", December 1814. Russell offers information on incomes during peacetime in *Attitudes to Social Structure*, pp. 79-80.

21 For information on inflation, see Spragge, *The John Strachan Letterbook: 1812-1834*, Strachan to Lord Bishop, September 15, 1816, p. 90. At best, pioneer farmers could only clear between four and seven acres a year. See Peter A. Russell, "Forest Into Farmland: Upper Canadian Clearing Rates, 1822-1839", in Carol Wilton, ed., *Change and Continuity: A Reader on Pre-Confederation Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1992), pp. 249-251. For that reason it often took 10 years for a farm to become profitable. The common practice of going into debt has been described as "a reasonable investment strategy" since the tools, cleared land, and buildings represented an accumulation of capital. See Douglas McCalla, "The Wheat Staple and Upper Canadian Development", in J. M. Bumsted, ed., *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume 1, Before Confederation* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 184-195.

22 Complaints about late payments, some due to the death of the paymaster, are mentioned in NA, RG 9, IB3, v. 1, Militia General Orders, 1812-16, Coffin to McDonnell, August 16, 1816, p. 84.

usually carried advertisements for two auctions in each edition. In January and February 1813, however, the average was ten each issue.²³

Hundreds of families in Upper Canada also suffered significant property losses at the hands of combatants, although by the early nineteenth century civilians were supposed to have little to fear from enemy armies. The slaughter of prisoners and of women and children had been common in Europe until the excesses of the Thirty Years' War led to changes in the accepted "rules of engagement". After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 armies were increasingly comprised of professional warriors, not mercenaries who relied on looting for payment, and they engaged in tactical battles involving lines of opposing soldiers. The development of a sense of chivalry, on and off the field, meant that soldiers usually left innocent civilians unmolested, as long as the non-combatants avoided any participation in the war. Women, children, the elderly, and the ill were theoretically immune from military operations, although in practice they sometimes were preyed upon by troops who refused to follow the generally restrained standards of nineteenth-century warfare. Private property, in the form of livestock, homes, and crops, was also supposed to be protected, but the need to feed and house thousands of soldiers often led commanders to violate this principle.²⁴

One of the first non-combatants to suffer physical harm at the hands of the Americans was Abigail Stone of Gananoque. During a raid on the village in September 1812, American soldiers attacked a blockhouse occupied by 50 Upper Canadian militiamen and then ransacked private homes. While attempting to defend her property, Stone was shot in the hip. The *York Gazette* suggested that the shooting had been accidental and that the soldiers had fired blindly into the house not knowing she was inside. The *Kingston Gazette* observed that the attackers also uttered "imprecations against her which it would be disgraceful to this paper even to report". Yet among Stone's neighbours, the incident was taken much less seriously. One local resident said that the "unmannerly ball, striking her so hard upon the tender, she is no longer able 'To trip it on the light fantastic toe'. In short ... her dancing days are over."²⁵

23 The numbers of sheriff sales fluctuated over time, but a significant increase appears to have begun in early 1813. For example, there were five notices of sheriff sales in the June 18, 1811, edition; two on December 17; none in the April 14, 1812, edition; one on June 23, 1812; and two on October 17, 1812. But there were eight on January 16, 1813; ten on January 23, 1813; and twelve in the February 6, 1813, edition.

24 For a discussion of changes to the "rules of war", see Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 26-29, 64-65; and Richard Shelly Hartigan, *The Forgotten Victim: A History of the Civilian* (Chicago: Precedent, 1982), pp. 89-98.

25 *York Gazette*, October 10, 1812, p. 3; *Kingston Gazette*, November 7, 1812, p. 3. The sarcastic comment is from J. C. Morgan, *The Emigrant's Note Book and Guide With Recollections of Upper and Lower Canada During the Late War* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1824), pp. 225-226. See also Elizabeth Morgan, "Joel Stone", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), vol. 6, pp. 738-739.

Stone's case was unusual, however, in that the assault took place in 1812, involved bodily harm, and occurred in eastern Upper Canada. In general, private property remained unmolested until late 1813 when combatants began widespread plundering, and physical assaults upon women and children seem to have remained a rarity throughout the conflict.²⁶ Most of the looting occurred in areas west of York, and nearly 3,000 colonists eventually submitted claims for compensation. The total damage was estimated at more than £400,000, and residents of the Niagara region sustained nearly half of all losses.²⁷

Fear that invaders would rob and plunder border regions in 1812 had initially led many Niagara residents to flee to safer places. At first, it seems that the constant threat of American invasion was enough to ensure that most non-combatants remained away from border areas for prolonged periods. The *Buffalo Gazette* noted on July 14, 1812, that for the previous ten days Upper Canadians had "been removing their families and effects from the river into the interior. At Newark, Queenston, and other villages on the river, there are no inhabitants."²⁸ A cavalry officer who served in that region reported that as late as December 1812 there still was "not a woman to be seen" anywhere in the vicinity.²⁹ Only once winter had arrived and the threat of imminent invasion had faded did most Niagara area women feel it was safe to return to their homes.³⁰

For non-combatants in the early nineteenth century, the greatest danger was seen to exist during the first few hours of an invasion, especially if resistance was offered. Because of the din and disorder of battle there was little likelihood that unauthorized acts of "rapine and pillage" would come to the attention of commanding officers. For that reason, women and children usually fled just before an attack was expected and most would return a few days later after order had been restored by their own troops or the army of occupation. York in April 1813 provides a perfect example of this pattern. On April 27 at four in the morning, an American squadron was spied sailing into Toronto harbour. Mary Baldwin recalled that "nothing could equal the beauty of the fleet coming in — it preserved the form of a crescent while the sails were as white as snow." Within minutes most of the women of the village were involved in "the flight of the ladies". Several wagons rode quickly out of York before any fighting erupted, and the

26 Mention of the possible murder of an Upper Canadian woman can be found in documents compiled by Ross Pier Wright, *The Burning of Dover* (Erie: n.p., 1948), p. 46. In 1826 John Beverley Robinson declared in the Assembly that enemy soldiers had "MURDERED our wives, they destroyed our families", but no details were offered. See *Colonial Advocate*, January 6, 1826, p. 2.

27 Charles Humphries noted that only 22 of 625 York residents, or less than 4%, lost property during the invasion. See Humphries, "The Capture of York", *Ontario History*, vol. 51 (1959), p. 15. For war losses, see Sheppard, "Enemies at Home", pp. 199–200, 356.

28 *Buffalo Gazette*, July 14, 1812, quoted in Edward Bernard Hein, "The Niagara Frontier and the War of 1812" (Ph.d. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1949), p. 243.

29 Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Merritt to Pendergrast, December 8, 1812, vol. 4, p. 4.

30 Mabel Burkholder, *The Story of Hamilton* (Hamilton: David Lisson, 1938), p. 68.

passengers stayed at Baron de Haines's farm four miles north on Yonge Street. A few women, including Ann Strachan, chose to remain behind, but the explosion of the blockhouse and the retreat of the British defenders led the Rev. Strachan to "send her to a Friend's a little out of town". Three days later, Mary Baldwin and Elizabeth Russell returned to York, "just in time to save the house from being ransacked by soldiers". For Ann Strachan, meanwhile, the attack spelled an end to her wartime experiences in the capital, and she and her children spent the rest of the war out of harm's way at Cornwall.³¹

Much of the plundering by combatants was prompted by logistical concerns. Both British and American forces faced severe supply difficulties, and they eventually stole or impressed thousands of pounds worth of food, forage, and fuel. Naturally, as the war dragged on, relations between combatants and civilians became increasingly strained, and American troops operating in central and western Upper Canada embarked on a deliberate policy of destructive fire-raids. Five villages — Fairfield, Newark, Dover, Long Point, and St. Davids — were put to the torch by the invaders. Women and children, who were often the only residents left in occupied areas, suffered immensely from these events.³²

The most notorious of those occurrences took place at Newark, present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake, in December 1813. In May 1813 the American army had gained possession of much of the Niagara District, but by the end of the year the invaders were intent upon leaving Fort George and embarking for their own shore. The population of neighbouring Newark had fallen from over 1,000 residents before the war to about 400, most of them women and children.³³ Isabel Hill, who was described as "a lady of cultivated understanding and agreeable manners", was one of those who remained in occupied Newark. Assured in May that she and her property were safe, Hill was "treated with some consideration by the American officers" until December. One can only imagine her horror at being informed, on the blustery day of December 10, that the village was to be destroyed by

31 Mary Baldwin, daughter of Robert Baldwin, related her experiences to her daughter Maria Brekenridge in 1859. See Brendan O'Brien, *Speedy Justice: The Tragic Last Voyage of His Majesty's Vessel Speedy* (Toronto: Osgoode Society, 1992), pp. 54–55. See also Metropolitan Library of Toronto, M. N. Brekenridge, "Some Account of the Settlement of Upper Canada of Robert Baldwin", 1859; and Edith Firth, "Elizabeth Russell", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 6, pp. 6669–6670. For other events at York, see OA, Strachan Papers, reel 1, Strachan to Brown, April 26, 1813; Spragge, *The John Strachan Letterbook: 1812–1834*, Strachan to Lord Bishop, September 15, 1816, p. 90.

32 The destruction is dealt with in Sheppard, "Enemies at Home", pp. 172–209, and in *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles*, pp. 100–132.

33 The pre-war population of Niagara or Newark is based on an average household size of six persons (McCalla, "The 'Loyalist' Economy of Upper Canada, 1784–1806", p. 285) and a contemporary description of Newark having "about two hundred neat and well-built houses". See Joseph Bouchette, *A Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada with Remarks Upon Upper Canada* (London: W. Faden, 1815), p. 612. The population in 1813 is taken from the *Kingston Gazette*, February 1, 1814, p. 2.

American forces. A resident recalled that they were "given four hours notice when in flames, no Carts horses not ten friends and those divided ... what was saved nearly Destroyed ... the Enemie pilphering the small remains."³⁴ After the Americans had fled, the residents returned and erected what shelter they could. Women and children from Niagara-on-the-Lake spent the winter of 1813–1814 living in "root houses and cellars, and under a few boards, leaning upon the chimneys still standing".³⁵

People who lost homes or breadwinners were initially forced to rely on relatives or private charity for support because the usual procedures for assisting the indigent in the colony were interrupted by the war. Although historians Rainer Baehre and Patricia Malcolmson assert that no institutional mode for outdoor relief existed in pre-war Upper Canada, county rates for the support of paupers were levied before 1812. The dislocation caused by the fighting prevented the funds from being collected for several years, however.³⁶ Unable to acquire outdoor relief in the usual manner, distressed colonists soon discovered that the original provisions made for war sufferers by the government were inadequate. In May 1812, before hostilities erupted, British Major-General Isaac Brock announced that land grants would be offered to the families of militiamen killed in combat.³⁷ But extra land was of little immediate use to those women and children whose loved ones died because of the fighting. No system for acquiring government pensions existed during the war, and the regulations dealing with payments were not published in the provincial newspapers until the end of February 1813. Widows were informed that they would require an affidavit from the commanding officer certifying the death of their husbands. Then, every June and December 24, they would have to apply for the payment testifying that they were still widows. Orphans were required to provide similar affidavits to prove that they were still under the age of 16.³⁸

Even if no spouse or child was dependent on the labour of a militiaman, parents sometimes were. Catherine McLeod and Widow McMichael of the London District, whose sons were killed in action with American marauders in 1813, were two colonial women left in reduced circumstances by the war.

34 Hill's case is given in *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, p. 241, and the description appears in Richard Merritt, Nancy Butler, and Michael Power, eds., *The Capital Years: Niagara-on-the-Lake 1792–1796* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991), p. 165.

35 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, p. 287. See also Bouchette, *A Topographical Description of the Province*, p. 612.

36 Rainer Baehre, "Paupers and Poor Relief in Upper Canada", in J. K. Johnson, ed., *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), pp. 307–316; Patricia Malcolmson, "The Poor in Kingston, 1815–1850", in Gerald Tulchinsky, ed., *To Preserve and Defend: Essays on Kingston in the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), p. 291. See *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 281, 285, and 287, for references to pre-war county rates and relief practices.

37 For pension and land grant promises, see *Kingston Gazette*, June 30, 1812, and February 23, 1813, p. 2; NA, RG 5, A1, Upper Canada Sundries, Ancas Shaw circular, May 25, 1812, v. 15, 6227.

38 *Kingston Gazette*, February 23, 1813, p. 2.

When the Devins family applied for charity in April 1813 after son Simon died of disease while on duty, it was noted that the militiaman had been "of great use to his parents in assisting to maintain them".³⁹

The lack of proper pension provisions prompted some members of the York elite to create the Loyal and Patriotic Society (LPS) in December 1812. The goals of this private organization included affording aid to families in distress because of militia duty and helping combatants who were disabled while in service.⁴⁰ The LPS left a vivid record of how war can adversely affect non-combatants. The first person assisted by the organization was Hannah Smith, a resident of the Home District, whose husband had been killed at Queenston Heights in 1812. The society noted that Smith was ill at the time of her husband's death and on February 8, 1813, it voted her £2 10s. for "necessities" to make it through the winter. Even if a husband remained alive, a family could still suffer hardship, however. The relatives of Frederick Segar of Midland, for example, were eventually given more than £37 by the LPS. The treasurer recorded that, while on duty, the militiaman had "been badly treated by some ignorant pretender to medicine who by giving him too much mercury, had ruined his constitution, and made him so infirm he was unable to put on his clothes". Segar's wife and four children were left nearly destitute as a result, and he eventually sold the last of his belongings, two cows, in order to pay for a trip to York to appeal for charity. Mrs. Bernard Frey of the Niagara District also suffered greatly because of the fighting. The treasurer of the LPS observed that Frey's husband was killed at the start of the war and then her crops were "destroyed by the troops and Indians, who were encamped on her Farm at the Cross Roads, and the fences and buildings laid waste, likewise her house in Niagara burned by the enemy; by which she has neither house nor home, nor means to subsist on."⁴¹

Some observers felt the damage extended beyond the mere physical destruction of property. One British visitor, John Howison, claimed the conflict had most "injurious consequences" on the morals and work habits of the Upper Canadian people. He said that the vast expenditures of money by the military led many to open retail stores as "the high road to wealth". Certainly some colonists, particularly merchants in the villages of Kingston and York, made large sums of money selling goods to the military. Moreover, because fighting rarely occurred in eastern Upper Canada, the newly acquired wealth was never endangered by enemy attacks. The Cartwright, Hagerman, and MacLean families built fine homes in the Kingston region after the war, while York merchants William Allan and Alexander Wood sold nearly £20,000 worth of goods to the local garrison in two years. For the wives and children of successful merchants in eastern Canada, material

39 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 267, 227.

40 See Hamilton Craig, "The Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada and Its Still-Born Child — The 'Upper Canada Preserved Medal' ", *Ontario History*, vol. 52 (1960), pp. 331-352.

41 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 227-269.

life improved markedly as vast increases in military spending led to the acquisition of small fortunes.⁴²

Thousands of other Upper Canadians also found that substantial sums of money could be made during wartime. Since less than half of eligible militiamen took part in any fighting, many families managed to avoid the inconvenience of military duty. A majority of colonial households, therefore, continued to produce farm goods, and a number made profits selling provisions which, as the war dragged on, became "very scarce, and extravagantly dear".⁴³ Thomas Vercheres certainly discovered that to be the case when he travelled with a group of redcoats through western Upper Canada in 1813. Apparently, the soldiers approached an elderly woman and asked for any extra food and promised to pay well for it.

"Yes," she said, in a sarcastic tone of voice, "that is what two soldiers said. They promised to pay me well after they had eaten my bread and drunk my milk they went off without giving me anything. No, I haven't a bite for you!"

After the soldiers explained that she would have to give it to them "willy-nilly", the Upper Canadian finally handed over a cabbage.⁴⁴ Samuel White, an American prisoner of war, found that colonists sought to profit by the war in other ways as well. In 1812 he was captured by the British at Detroit, and on the march to York the party stopped at an Upper Canadian tavern. The landlady of the inn agreed to provide the soldiers with a change of clothes, but White sarcastically noted that she furnished him with two old shirts for which he "had to pay her the *moderate* price of eight dollars".⁴⁵ Yet colonists did not always take advantage of prisoners. William Atherton, who was also captured at Detroit, remembered being well cared for by a widow who lived between York and Kingston. "She took all the prisoners into her house," he recalled, "treated them kindly, supplied them all their wants, and in every respect showed a kind and feeling heart."⁴⁶

John Howison also claimed that the American troops had exhibited a "wanton and unblushing profligacy" which was "communicated to the

42 John Howison quoted in Fink, ed., *Life in Upper Canada*, pp. 75-76. For information on the wealth left behind, see Donald Swainson, "Chronicling Kingston: An Interpretation", *Ontario History*, vol. 74 (1982), p. 305; Sheppard, "Enemies at Home", pp. 219-234; Edith Firth, "Alexander Wood, Merchant of York", *York Pioneer and Historical Society* (1958), pp. 5-28.

43 For a discussion of militia participation, see C. P. Stacey, "The War of 1812 in Canadian History", *Ontario History*, vol. 50 (1958); and Sheppard, "Deeds Speak", pp. 207-232, and *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles*, pp. 40-99. The comment on provisions is from CO42/355, Drummond to Bathurst, March 20, 1814, p. 18.

44 René Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville, "The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville", in M. M. Quaife, ed., *War on the Detroit* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1940), pp. 152-153.

45 Samuel White, *History of the American Troops, During the Late War ... together with an historical account of the Canadas* (Baltimore: B. Edes, 1829), p. 29.

46 William Atherton, *Narrative of the Suffering & Defeat of the Northwestern Army* (Frankfort: n.p., 1842), p. 116.

peasantry of Upper Canada". There is little doubt that the province was the scene of a good deal of behaviour that, in peacetime, would likely have been considered unacceptable or immoral. One Upper Canadian, Peter Wheeler, offered the lame excuse that he had only deserted his regiment because a woman of low morals, Sarah Cudney, had "enticed him to Lewiston in the State of New York and then kept him in a state of continual intoxication until after his furlough had expired".⁴⁷

Certainly, the conflict would have offered many women the opportunity to earn money from prostitution. The British army in North America during the War of 1812 earned a reputation for "brutal licentiousness", and it was claimed by one critic that redcoats would customarily "revel in lawless indulgence, and triumph uncontrolled over female innocence".⁴⁸ The military population in Upper Canada mushroomed from 1,586 British soldiers in 1812 to nearly 15,000 combatants on both sides by 1814, and fewer than 10 per cent of those individuals would have been accompanied by their wives. In the early nineteenth century British military officials made no attempt to prevent the rank and file from engaging in casual sex. Dependents were blamed for slowing the movement of the forces, and one critic dismissed military wives and children as a "mass of impedimenta and camp-followers".⁴⁹ In addition to logistical concerns, large numbers of dependents on the ration lists meant increased costs to the army. The men were therefore encouraged to visit brothels or streetwalkers, and soldiers in distant regions of the empire considered casual sex a routine ingredient of life. It was also viewed by some as a form of compensation for the intolerable conditions associated with campaigning in frontier regions. Although evidence is scanty, it does appear that some colonial women accommodated the newcomers.⁵⁰ During the winter of 1813-1814, for example, William Dunlop had moved into new quarters with three other officers in the Brockville area only to discover that the captain and the senior lieutenant were regularly "joined by a pair of complaisant women".⁵¹

Of course, prostitution represented one of the few methods that some women would have had to support themselves and their families. Soldiers' wives, in particular, were left in an unenviable position when their loved

47 John Howison quoted in Fink, ed., *Life in Upper Canada*, pp. 75-76; NA, RG 19, War Losses, v. 4358, claim 1714, testimony of Peter Wheeler.

48 James Stuart, "Refutation of Aspersions on 'Stuart's Three Years in North America'", London, 1834, p. 39.

49 For the military contingent in 1812, see NA, CO 42/369, Galt to Treasury, July 25, 1822, pp. 187-188. The military population in 1814 would have involved about 13,500 British and U.S. troops and at least 1,000 Native warriors. For criticism, see Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814*, p. 268.

50 Ronald Hyam, "Empire and Sexual Opportunity", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 14 (1986), pp. 52-53, 64-65. This author also argues that at least some nineteenth-century prostitutes deliberately chose their lifestyle and that demand, as well as survival strategies, prompted their choice (pp. 44-45).

51 W. H. Graham, *The Tiger of Canada West* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1962), pp. 22-23.

ones died on duty. They were often far from home, sometimes had little or no money, and might be forced to wait months or years for a pension. For instance, E. Haines, whose husband was a sergeant in the 41st regiment, was left a widow in late 1813. Although her husband had died in combat at the Battle of Moraviantown, Haines was not entitled to a grant from the Loyal and Patriotic Society because her spouse was a member of the regular forces. When she "delivered of twins" soon afterward, however, the organization decided to deviate from its own regulations and granted her £18 on July 22, 1813.⁵² Aside from accepting charity or working as a prostitute, one of the few options available to such women was a quick remarriage. During the War of 1812 it was not uncommon for a widow to remarry more than once if her second spouse was also killed. For those without family nearby, as historian Antony Brett-James notes, the alternative "to taking on a new man was usually to go home by ship, probably to an uncertain welcome and precarious future".⁵³

The war offered some colonial women an unparalleled opportunity to select a good match from among the pool of eligible British officers. The elder daughters of rich merchants and colonial officials, who constituted an "American Nobility", would ordinarily have had a rather limited assortment of suitable marriage candidates, but the war changed all that.⁵⁴ At York in February 1814, for example, Mary Ann Campbell, daughter of Judge William Campbell, married Capt. Robert Loring of the 104th regiment. In the same month at Kingston, Mary Cartwright, only daughter of wealthy merchant Richard Cartwright, married Alexander Dobbs, a commander in the Royal Navy. A few months later in Kingston, Anne MacLean, daughter of Allan MacLean, speaker of the House of Assembly, married William Ross, the deputy commissary general of the militia.⁵⁵

Most of these relationships would have begun at one of the many formal balls held during the war. Parties and socializing had long been an important part of frontier life, and the presence of hundreds of eligible young officers in full dress uniforms guaranteed colourful evenings.⁵⁶ Mabel Burkholder noted that the troops stationed near Burlington Heights enjoyed a constant round of balls during the winters from 1812 to 1815. In the capital of the colony, "York Assemblies" were held every two weeks, and participants

52 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, p. 239.

53 Antony Brett-James, *Life in Wellington's Army* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 279-280.

54 E. A. Talbot, *Five Years' Residence in the Canadas ... 1823*, reprint ed. (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), pp. 400-401.

55 *Kingston Gazette*, February 22, 1814; June 5, 1815.

56 For balls and parties, see *Canadian Letters: Description of a Tour Thro' ... 1792 and '93*, reprint ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1937), p. 45; and OA, Eli Playter diary, August 6, 1812, in which Playter noted that, after a militia muster, "we stayed the night and had a little danse in the evening" (p. 399). The importance of those events to courtship are discussed in Peter Ward, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 65-67.

enjoyed Teneriffe wines, madeira cakes, and music by "Lemon" the local fiddler.⁵⁷ William Hamilton Merritt noted in February 1813 that winter in the Niagara region had "been a gay one for those who chose to enjoy it. We had a splendid assembly here last night given by Col. Myers." Of course, not all Upper Canadian men were pleased by the arrival of so many competitors. Thomas Gibbs Ridout, a York resident employed by the commissariat department, spent the fall of 1813 in a shed on the Thompson family farm near Four Mile Creek in the Niagara District. On September 4, Ridout sarcastically observed that he and his companions were denied access to the "sanctum sanctorum" of the family home where the Thompson daughters resided. Meanwhile, there was "an astonishing run of white cuffed ensigns and lieutenants at the house and the carpet parlor is adorned the whole day with red".⁵⁸

The fighting itself offered non-combatants the chance to see exciting and unusual events, although not all would have enjoyed the experience. William Hamilton Merritt reported in 1813 that most of the young men of Niagara considered themselves invincible warriors. "It is quite different with the female part of the community," he observed. "After any alarm the place would be filled with women — everyone coming to see if the object of their affection was safe."⁵⁹ Occasionally, women intervened while battles raged. John Law's mother actually dragged the 11-year-old boy away from a skirmish near Ball's Farm in 1813. While running through the line of fire Mrs. Law was hit by a musket ball and she forged on, "her leg streaming with blood all the way".⁶⁰

Other civilians fulfilled more mundane roles as domestics, cooks, or seamstresses for the forces in the province. Wives of soldiers performed both paid and unpaid domestic work for the British army. Routine duties would include cooking, cleaning, and sewing for their own families, but women also took on odd jobs for pay. These could include working as nurses in the hospital, acting as cleaning women or servants for officers, or even herding the cattle and sheep that sometimes accompanied the armies on campaign.⁶¹ The most common function, however, was laundering. Expert laundresses were always in demand, and military commanders established prices for the work. For example, spouses who accompanied their husbands in the Incorporated Militia were permitted to charge two-and-a-half pence for each shirt washed for the men. At that rate, after cleaning

57 Burkholder, *The Story of Hamilton*, p. 68; C. W. Robinson, *The Life of John Beverley Robinson* (Toronto: Morang & Company, 1904), p. 411.

58 Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Merritt to Prendergrast, February 1813, vol. 5, pp. 96–97, and Ridout to Thomas Ridout, September 4, 1813, vol. 7, pp. 99–100.

59 Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Merritt to Prendergrast, February 1813, vol. 5, pp. 96–97.

60 Kirby, *Annals of Niagara*, pp. 213–214. Of course, James Secord was also rescued from the Queenston Heights battlefield by Laura. See John M. Bassett and A. R. Petrie, *Laura Secord: Celebrite Canadiennes* (Don Mills: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975), p. 24.

61 See Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, pp. 11–13; F. C. G. Page, *Following the Drum: Women in Wellington's Wars* (London: André Deutsch, 1986), pp. 3, 17.

only four shirts, a woman would have earned more than a private received in pay. No deviation from this price was permitted, however, and a notice issued in May 1814 advised that "any Woman refusing to wash for the above sum will be struck off the rations."⁶²

Women and children authorized to accompany the troops were considered to be "on the strength of the regiment" and were entitled to government provisions. Wives were permitted half-rations, and children received a one-third share.⁶³ A daily ration in the British army consisted of one-and-one-half pounds of bread or flour, one pound of beef, and one-half gill of rum.⁶⁴ Added to this might be any food foraged or purchased along the way, and the ingredients would usually be boiled into a soup, sometimes eaten with dumplings. Soldiers were expected to feed themselves when on a march, and groups of single men regularly pooled their provisions. In the garrisons, however, the task of preparing meals often fell to women, and wives skilled in the culinary arts were welcomed in all regiments.⁶⁵

Other non-combatants acted as healers or in nursing positions, although not always willingly. William Dunlop, who served as a doctor with the British forces, recorded that after the Battle of Lundy's Lane in 1814 he commandeered material from the locality for bandages and persuaded "a few reluctant women to do orderly duties". One can well understand why the residents might have preferred to be elsewhere, because the Battle of Lundy's Lane led to horrific casualties. More than 1,000 soldiers were injured and more than 200 were killed in this contest. Amputations and mortal wounds were common sights, and the rotting corpses were piled together for a mass cremation once the fighting ended.⁶⁶

Some colonists apparently were not shy about taking advantage of the British forces. Dr. Dunlop, for example, was very fond of Peggy Bruce, the widow of a Revolutionary War veteran who owned a public house in Cornwall. Yet their good relationship led Dunlop to "being dragged to the bedside of every man, woman, and child who was taken ill in or about the village". When the doctor eventually argued that he was supposed to care for soldiers, Bruce cut short his complaint: "What the devil does the King pay you for if you are not to attend to his subjects when they require your assistance."⁶⁷

Other Upper Canadian women actively assisted the British military forces. The most famous example, of course, is Laura Secord who travelled nearly 20 miles on foot on June 23, 1813, to warn James Fitzgibbon of the plans

62 Brett-James, *Life in Wellington's Army*, pp. 283-284; NA, RG 9, IB1, Adjutant-General, 1814, v. 3, Incorporated Militia, May 1814.

63 Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, p. 31; Page, *Following the Drum*, p. 23; NA, RG 8, series C, v. 117, Torrens to Prevost, March 27, 1813.

64 Brett-James, *Life in Wellington's Army*, p. 107; Sheppard, "Enemies at Home", pp. 183-184.

65 Brett-James, *Life in Wellington's Army*, pp. 113-114; Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, p. 106.

66 Graham, *The Tiger of Canada West*, p. 23; Stanley, *The War of 1812*, pp. 324-325.

67 Carl F. Klink, *William "Tiger" Dunlop: "Blackwoodian Woodsman"*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1958), pp. 5-6.

of American invaders stationed at Fort George. The next day, a British force managed to overwhelm an American detachment at the Battle of Beaver Dams.⁶⁸ Yet several less-known points about Laura Secord deserve mention. First, although Secord supporters have gone so far as to assert that her actions saved the country, the Battle of Beaver Dams was not a particularly "significant victory".⁶⁹ The approximately 500 Americans who were captured represented only about one-twelfth of the invading army, and the enemy remained in control of Fort George for another five months. Fitzgibbon, who received much of the credit for the action, did not even refer to it when he recited his military record in application for a medal. He instead rested his case on the fact that few of his soldiers had robbed Upper Canadians.⁷⁰ Secondly, Laura Secord was not a Loyalist. Her father had served in the rebel forces during the American Revolution and the family did not move north from Massachusetts until 1795, more than a dozen years after the first major Loyalist migrations had taken place. Laura had therefore reached the age of 18 before she left the United States. Technically, it could be argued that she was guilty of treason. Certainly, had the Americans caught her, the question of her nativity and nationality would not have been overlooked. Gallantry, if not diplomatic considerations, likely would have prevented her execution, however.⁷¹ As historian A. A. Hoehling notes, female spies were a "preferred risk" in the nineteenth century since captured males were usually executed.⁷²

Women other than Laura Secord played a role in helping the British forces, with some offering desperately needed provisions or crucial information to combatants. During an assault on Fort George in 1813, Dominick Henry was said to have "been very active in assisting the troops on the 27th May, giving them refreshments during the battle". For her actions she was rewarded by the LPS and was described as "quite a heroine" and a person "not to be frightened". Catherine Pool of the Western District performed similar duties and also spied on American troops. It was noted later that Pool "carried provisions to a party of Militia

68 McKenzie, *Laura Secord*, pp. 74–75; W. S. Wallace, *The Story of Laura Secord: A Study in Historical Evidence* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 9–11; Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York: Benchmark Publishing, 1970), p. 621.

69 For an antiquarian effort in that vein, see Hume, *Laura Secord: The Ryerson Canadian History Readers*. More recently, Ruth McKenzie sought to reconfirm Secord's right to the title of heroine by showing her role in this "significant victory". See "Laura Ingersoll", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, p. 406.

70 For the outcome of the battle, see Stanley, *The War of 1812*, pp. 193–197; Ruth Mackenzie, *James Fitzgibbon: Defender of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1983), p. 39; OA, Strachan Papers, Fitzgibbon testimonial.

71 During the Ancaster "Bloody Assize", for example, two Americans who had lived near Beaver Dams for ten years were arrested and tried for treason against the British government. In the end, though, John Beverley Robinson decided not to proceed with the case because their status as American citizens might have made it unwise for "political motives ... [to] strain the law to its outmost rigour". See OA, Attorney General's Correspondence, RG 4, A-1-1, Box 1, July 114; CO 42\355, Robinson to Loring, June 18, 1814, p. 106.

72 A. A. Hoehling, *Women Who Spied* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967), p. xii.

under Adjutant Nevil, stationed in her neighbourhood, and gave intelligence of the approach of the enemy".⁷³ These women had a stake in supporting the British forces since their husbands, sons, and brothers were often serving in militia companies beside redcoats or in irregular units in areas controlled by enemy troops. American General Peter Porter reported to Major-General Jacob Brown on July 16, 1814, that residents in the occupied territory between Queenston Heights and Niagara had recently captured five of his men. Porter said the Upper Canadian guerrillas had "secreted themselves in the woods on our approach and were advised of all our movements and positions by the women who were thronging around us on our march".⁷⁴

Other Upper Canadian women, against the interests of the royal side, offered a hospitable welcome on more than one occasion to American soldiers. In July 1812, for example, one resident of Dover greeted a detachment of enemy officers who were foraging for supplies. They "cheerfully accepted to have supper with her" and "a sociable evening with the invaders" apparently followed. A number of Upper Canadians, including some women, were even guilty of treason. After the disastrous Battle of Moraviantown in October 1813, for instance, an American army of 3,500 chased the retreating British forces to Chatham. Making a stand near Dolsen's Mills, a few Native warriors and redcoats fought off reconnoitring parties from well-hidden sites behind barns and fences. Their positions, however, were given away by a Canadian woman who crossed over to the American lines. One enemy soldier described her as a "guardian angel" because of the value of the descriptions she gave.⁷⁵

Relatives of militiamen killed in action during these engagements were entitled to support from the Loyal and Patriotic Society. Between 1815 and 1817 the LPS disbursed over £18,000 to more than 800 colonists, most of them widows and orphans or relatives of disabled militiamen.⁷⁶ On rare occasions, colonial confidence artists took advantage of the organization. Ruth Marks of the London District, for example, was able to acquire a tidy sum. She first appeared before the York board seeking money after the society announced it would provide £20 to widows of deceased militiamen. Marks received her initial payment on May 25, 1815, but she returned for a second handout on December 7. At that time the organization noted in its records that an applicant by the name of Ruth "Murks" had applied and the "Society not recollecting that she had already received twenty pounds, voted her that sum, by which she obtained double what the widows got." The next spring, Marks and a companion journeyed from the London District to York to apply for widows' pensions from the government. The treasurer of the LPS observed on April 30, 1816, that they did not receive

73 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 298-299; 253. See also Green, "Some Women of 1812-14", p. 100.

74 Cruikshank, *Documentary History*, Porter to Brown, July 16, 1814, vol. 1, p. 69.

75 Fred Coyne Hamil, *The Valley of the Lower Thames 1640 to 1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), pp. 80, 85.

76 Craig, "The Loyal and Patriotic Society", p. 32.

the funds immediately and "they were unable to get home [so] the society ordered them each, £10 to enable them to return." Not content with having acquired the equivalent of two years' salary for a common school teacher, Ruth Marks again availed herself of the society's bounty the next month. A regional representative of the organization, Henry Bostwick, was unaware of her past actions and provided the widow with a one-eighth share of a £72 grant. The treasurer, while admitting that Marks had been in distress, could still only conclude that she had "imposed on the Society".⁷⁷

Government annuities were finally provided to war survivors in 1817. Pension lists published in the colony's newspapers contained the names of 106 widows, while 51 other militiamen left families orphaned. A further 116 residents were considered eligible for pensions because they were "disabled from Hard Labour or by Wounds received in Action".⁷⁸ While the money offered was too limited to support a family without other sources of income, it was not insignificant. Most pensions for the widows and children of privates killed on duty amounted to £20 in 1817, or about 80 per cent of what a family would have needed for subsistence. Historian Leo Johnson argues that social pressures forced unmarried Upper Canadian females to search "for a man — any man" because the only "acceptable status available to women in the toiler society [was] that of wife-mother-producer". But this does not seem to have been true for every widow from the War of 1812. Under British law, brides lost ownership of all their property after remarriage, and widows would have had to give up their pensions as well. Perhaps because the annuities allowed an unusual measure of independence, the number of women receiving stipends fell by only about half, from 106 to 51, by 1825.⁷⁹

Clearly, the experiences of women during the War of 1812 varied widely. A few civilians performed heroic feats; many others suffered immense losses. Several hundred homes were destroyed by the fighting, some colonists lost loved ones to war-related diseases or injuries, and a number of households felt the impact of the campaigning for more than a generation. Sussanah Jessup, for example, was left in reduced circumstances until 1837, when the imperial and provincial governments finally offered £533 as restitution for the destruction caused by the creation of Fort Wellington.⁸⁰ At the same time, it seems that many residents were only marginally affected by the fighting. The most common inconvenience, shared by perhaps 40 per cent of families, was a lack of labour produced by militia calls. Not all suffered "wants and privations", however. Some colonists even enjoyed increased opportunities for employment and courting, larger incomes, and more luxuries because of the conflict.

77 *The Report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society*, pp. 244–245, 248–249, 256–259.

78 *Niagara Spectator*, December 11, 1817.

79 Russell, *Attitude to Social Structure*, p. 9; Johnson, "The Political Economy of Ontario Women", p. 16; Upper Canada, Journals of the House of Assembly, 2nd session, 9th Parliament, appendix 14.

80 NA, RG 19, War Losses, v. 4358, Jessup claim, 1863.

