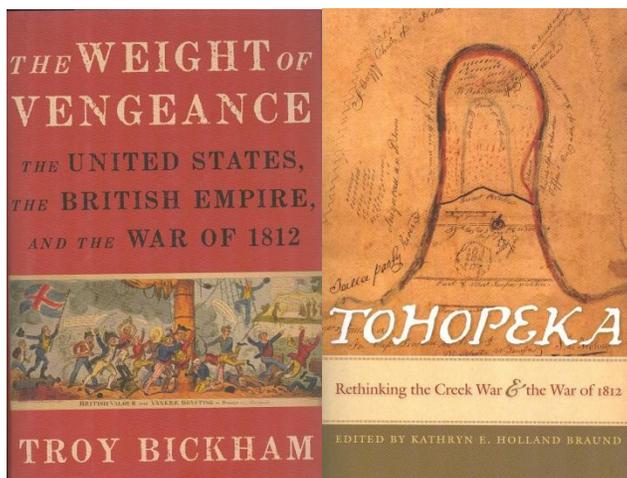


## The Publications Continue to Come Forth!

### A Host of New Titles ...

### A Review Essay

Reviews by John R. Grodzinski



### Non-Fiction

**Tony Bickham. The Weight of Vengeance: The United States, the British Empire and the War of 1812. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 325 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 US (cloth).**

A full review of this work will appear in the next issue of the War of 1812 Magazine.

**Kathryn E. Holland Braund, ed. Tohopeka: Rethinking the Creek War and the War of 1812. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012. 312 pages, maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 US (paper).**

This book is a collection of 12 essays that were presented at a 2009 symposium on the Creek War and War of 1812. Beginning in 1813 as a civil war between the Upper and Lower Creeks in Alabama and Georgia, the Creek War expanded into a brutal and merciless affair that was joined by American and British forces, and concluded with the ruination of the Creeks and their ceding much of their territory to the United States.

The essays offer a variety of perspectives on military, heritage, archaeological and cultural and religious practices. Two of these essays will be described below.

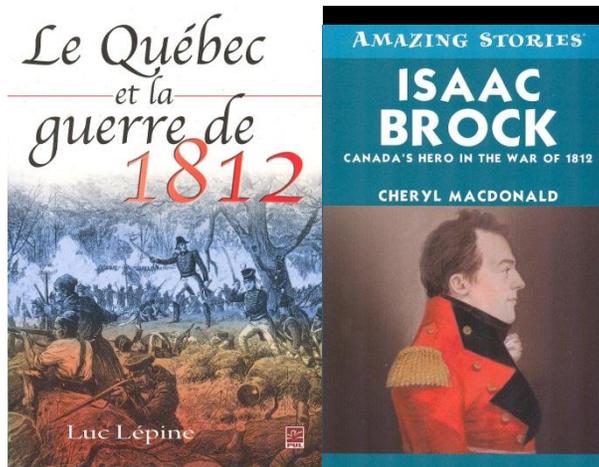
Tom Kanon presents an interesting assessment of American Major-General Andrew Jackson, who, as a commander, “often drove his men as hard as he fought Indians” (p. 118) Jackson is often depicted as a “glory seeker,” however, according to Kanon, his motivations

were “much more complex than that” (all p. 118). Personal drive, distrust of natives, hatred of the British and Spanish, a desire to destroy all opposition, and the violent nature of the frontier are but a few of the factors that motivated Jackson’s actions. Afterwards, his experience in commanding a polyglot army of regulars, militia and volunteers and the challenges of frontier logistics taught Jackson many lessons he would later apply at New Orleans.

The complexities of campaigning on the Gulf Coast, where American, British, Spanish and native interests collided, are examined by David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler. The authors consider the origins of the New Orleans campaign, the interests of the parties involved, and the subsequent events. On 12 February 1815, in the aftermath of their defeat at New Orleans, British forces took the American outpost at Fort Bowyer, on the Mississippi. The authors vindicate the actions of Lieutenant-Colonel William Lawrence, the commander of the post, who despite holding an indefensible position, Jackson chose to blame for the defeat. News that the Treaty of Ghent had been signed arrived the day following the surrender, and proved a remarkable instance of good fortune for the United States and for Andrew Jackson, for, as the authors speculate, had the British exploited their success and gained the interior, “there was nothing to stop then from reaching Baton Rouge and from there overwhelming even the most stalwart defence of New Orleans” (p. 196).

A series of appendices list the preservation status of Creek and War of 1812 sites in Alabama, and known and potential archaeological sites.

This book is a compilation of extraordinary essays, offering the fruits of the most recent research, by scholars from a variety of disciplines, on the Creek War and the War of 1812.



Luc Lépine. Le Québec et la guerre de 1812. Québec : Presses de l’Université de Laval, 2012. 134 pages, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 Canadian (paper).

Study of the War of 1812 is not a popular topic in the Province of Québec, however, 2012 has witnessed the publication of three new French-language studies, one of which is the subject of this review.

Luc Lépine is a student of the military history of Québec. His previous work, Lower Canada's Militia Officers, 1812-1815 (Montréal: Société Généalogique Canadienne-Française, 1996), an examination of 2,695 officers—presented in both English and French—that served in provincial, embodied and militia units in Lower Canada.

In this book, Lépine explores the militia heritage of New France and how that system evolved following the Seven Years' War. He then considers the state of the militia throughout the course of the War of 1812. Here we learn of the mixed support the populace exhibited towards the war and towards military service. However, militia service was not universally popular and in 1812 riots occurred at Lachine and Pointe-Lévy. Desertions between April 1812 and February 1812, amounted to 1,620 personnel from a total of 10,000 volunteers and conscripts serving in the *Volunteers* and five battalions of select embodied militia. This is loss rate of approximately 16%. We have no idea how many of these men may have been repeat offenders, however, the figures presented appear to be on par or perhaps even lower than rates experienced in Upper Canada. Not all was bad, though, as Charles de Salaberry, an experienced officer who had served in the British Army since 1792, was a central figure in raising what proved to be the most effective Canadian unit of the war, the Provincial Corps of Light Infantry (*Volunteers Canadiens*).

Le Québec et la guerre de 1812 is a welcome study of a little known topic and one hopes that it will find wider readership in the War of 1812 community.

**Cheryl Macdonald. Isaac Brock: Canada's Hero in the War of 1812. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2012. 128 pages, illustrated, index. \$9.95 Canadian (paper). Also available as an e-Book.**

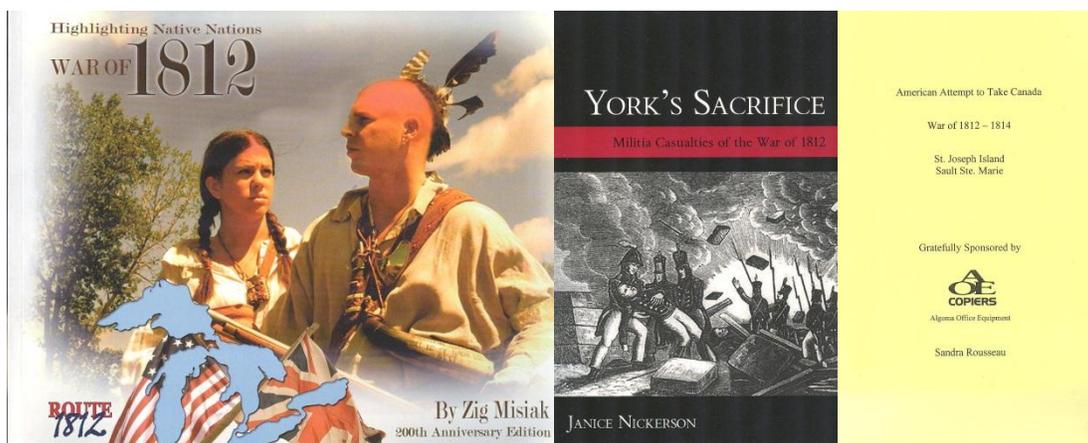
For an officer whose career lingered in the backwoods of North America for a decade, and whose role in the War of 1812 was limited to the early months of the conflict, Major-General Isaac Brock has emerged as the best known and celebrated figure of the war. Interest in him is so great, that in the last two years have seen two new biographies of Brock, while the province of Ontario had decreed the anniversary of the battle of Queenston Heights, October 13th, in which Brock died, as an annual day of commemoration.

This book, which appears to be designed for younger adults, perpetuates the mythological story of Brock as “the hero of Upper Canada.” It was his bold actions, against desperate odds, that vanquished the foe and “led directly to the formation of distinct Canadian identity” (p. 121). The author explains that Brock's significance comes from his “extensive and conscientious

preparations for the defence of the Canadas” (p. 120) before the war, and “something much more significant” (p. 120): his efforts to unify Upper Canadians, whatever stripe of loyalist or racial or ethnic origin, into a group that would “stand and fight together” (p. 121). This is an interesting assertion that would likely crumble with close scrutiny. For example, the only evidence of the “extensive preparations” Brock made while in Lower Canada, was the establishment of an eight gun battery at Quebec—hardly enough to withstand a determined attack; preparations in Canada commenced in September 1811, when Brock was confirmed in his post in Upper Canada, and Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost assumed the helm as Governor-in-Chief and Captain General of British North America. Prevost achieved more in the last nine months of peace than in the year that Brock did while he was acting commander-in-chief.

Despite his legendary status, the author questions whether Brock would have enjoyed continued success had he survived at Queenston. She wonders, in light of the relative easy victory at Detroit, how his “minimal combat experience” and “bold impatience” (p. 120) would have measured up against a much improved American army in 1813. Perhaps, as the Macdonald concludes, his death conveniently cast these doubts aside.

Isaac Brock: Canada’s Hero in the War of 1812 goes little beyond rehashing the established mythology of its subject. It would serve as an introduction to younger readers on the topic, in conjunction with more recent biographies of Brock.



**Zig Misiak. Highlighting Native Nations: War of 1812. Privately Published, 2012. 119 pages, heavily illustrated. \$29.95 Canadian (paper).**

Zig Misiak is well-known for his engaging presentations of native history and culture in schools across Ontario, and for promoting the native perspective in the War of 1812. A consultant, re-enactor, and heritage activist, Misiak prepared Highlighting Native Nations: War of 1812 as a photo journal to assist educators and students with First Nations studies.

As described in the preface, the author's intent was to create an easy-to-read general overview for the "casual consumer of history" (p. 13). Misiak photographed 29 historic locations between Detroit to the Niagara Frontier, and then added commentaries, maps and drawings for each site, to create a beautifully illustrated work, that is useful in a number of ways. Teachers and students will find it an excellent source for use in the classroom, while general readers will enjoy exploring these locales from the comfort of their homes; however, everyone will recognize this book as a wonderful guide for visiting these historic sites—travels that are assisted by the "Route 1812 Map," and the GPS coordinates that are provided for each historic location.

Highlighting Native Nations: War of 1812 is a well-presented and useful publication that offers an excellent introduction to the history of the First Nations in the War of 1812.

**Janice Nickerson. York's Sacrifice: Militia Casualties of the War of 1812. Toronto: Dundurn, 2012. 221 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.99. £12.99. Both paper.**

This book is the product of a project the author undertook for the City of Toronto's Museum Services' commemorations of the bicentenary of the War of 1812. The goal was to create an exhibit centred on a book or remembrance listings the casualties from the Battle of York and for the York militia who died elsewhere. York's Sacrifice is a biographical account of the 39 members of the York militia who died while serving during the War of 1812.

In the spring of 1812, the British sought to augment their manpower by tapping into the local militia. Improvements to discipline, training and equipment of the sedentary militia—comprising all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60—succeeded in making elements of that force more suitable for field operations. These steps were taken alongside the raising of other units in British North America, including fencible and provincial regiments.

Each province administered its militia, which was organized by county, and called out as needed. The Home District, which included the provincial capital of York, had three regiments, known as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd York Militia. Individually, or together, these regiments participated in five actions: in 1812 at Fort Mackinac, Fort Detroit and Queenston Heights; 1813 at the battle of York, and on 25 July 1814 at Lundy's Lane.

Beginning with a history of the York militia, the author then describes the challenges in compiling the profiles of the 39 soldiers presented in the book. Difficulties arose as confirmation of all their names annotated on the annual rolls as "dead" could be confirmed, since evidence of their deaths having occurred during active service was non-existent, incomplete, or contradictory. As a result, as the author states, the "compilation is very likely incomplete" (p. 21).

Nonetheless, the profiles of the confirmed dead offer several interesting insights: most died of disease, most were married, and the majority of them were privates. Over half of the casualties occurred in 1813 (during the battle of York), while 30% took place in 1812 and another 14% in 1814. One was free-Black resident of York, and another, a prosperous clerk of the House of Assembly. The stories of their families are also interesting: one woman, whose first husband had been killed in the Irish Rebellion of 1798, lost her second husband, at the end of 1812, while he was serving with the 3rd York Militia. She eventually re-married and was able to establish a good home for her family.

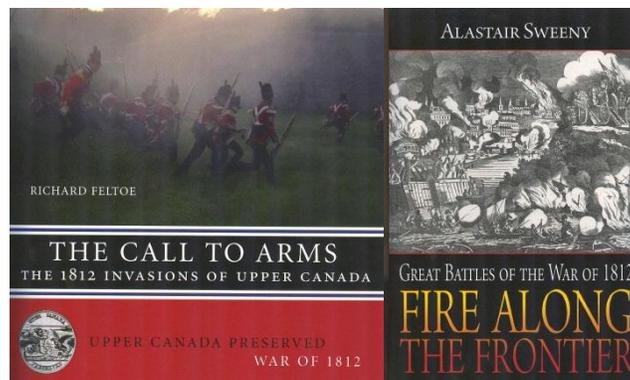
The book concludes with a nominal roll of the flank companies of the three York regiments during the war, an excellent bibliography and an index.

Studies about units of the militia of Upper Canada are rare, making York's Sacrifice an important and interesting addition to the literature on this topic.

**Sandra Rousseau. American Attempt to Take Canada: War of 1812-1814. Privately Published, 2012. 100 pages, notes, bibliography, index. \$10.00 Canadian (paper).**

In Canada, much of the attention of the bicentenary of the War of 1812 is limited to a few regions, most notably, the Niagara Peninsula. It is often forgotten that the North West encompassed a vast area that witnessed a number of important actions; the American Attempt to Take Canada examines, in general terms, the wartime events at St. Joseph's Island, Mackinac Island, Sault Ste. Marie and naval events in Georgian Bay.

By no means a scholarly study, this photocopied and comb bound booklet, is a fine example of local history, and provides a good introduction to the war in area around Sault Ste. Marie.



**Richard Feltoe. The Call to Arms: The 1812 Invasions of Upper Canada. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2012. 158 pages, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography. \$19.99 £12.99**

The Call to Arms is the first of a projected six-volume series “Upper Canada Preserved” that explores the War of 1812 in Upper Canada. This volume gives an overview of the first six months of the conflict.

Richard Feltoe is a well-known living history re-enactor, portraying a soldier from the War of 1812. He is perhaps best known for his Red Coated Ploughboys: The Volunteer Battalion of Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada, an outstanding regimental history, which appeared last year.

Feltoe creates a fresh perspective on the war through his reliance on published primary source material, and by his personal study of the terrain where battles were fought, rather than rehashing familiar and well-worn narratives from many secondary works. The reputation the author established as a cartographer in Redcoated Ploughboy’s continues with this book. Feltoe has done the study of the War of 1812 a valuable service by redrawing period maps and adding icons showing the relative positions and movements of the forces involved. These maps are among the best to appear in many years.

The Call to Arms is an excellent popular study of the opening events of the conflict in Upper Canada and one looks forward to the subsequent volumes with anticipation.

**Alastair Sweeny. Fire Along the Frontier: Great Battles of the War of 1812. Toronto: Dundurn, 2012. 271 pages, illustrations, bibliography. \$24.95. £16.99 (paper).**

While the jacket description from Great Battles of the War of 1812 promises new insights and perspectives on the war, it does nothing of the sort. Rather than being a sober, academic study of the war, this book abandons any requirement for evidence, and relies instead on sensationalism, on a level par with the major tabloids, to deliver wild accusations on the origins and course of the war. Among the claims, is the willful participation by American politicians and British generals in conspiracies that served to undermine their national war efforts.

In a review of the author’s 1976 biography of George Etienne Cartier, W.H. Brooks, of the University of Manitoba, described Sweeny’s approach to history as “bankrupt” and his book as “breathless, breezy and anecdotal,” lacking “any underlying theme or underpinning of ideas.” A similar approach is evident in the Great Battles of the War of 1812, where the use of evidence is of little concern; few of the 60 endnotes cite any source other than on-line biographical dictionaries or published collections of documents, and, most surprisingly, there is no bibliography—at least in the book; this information has been made available on the author’s website, however, why was this information considered unnecessary for the print publication?

The author has selected Sir George Prevost, the Captain General and Governor-in-Chief of British North America between 1811 and 1815, as a particular target—Sweeny presents him as an “inept narcissistic desk officer” who worked towards “protecting the American cause” (p. 231). Sweeny claims that since Prevost’s loyalty is suspect for the following reasons: he was born in New York (actually New Jersey)—when it was a British colony—that his father-in-law had helped finance the American rebels (which is true, but which had little influence upon George Prevost), and that the widow of his Uncle James (actually it was Jean Marc, also known as Marcus) married former American vice-president Aaron Burr (true again, however, this branch of the family has not influence upon George, who was raised and educated in England and France). Nor is this information new, as these facts that have appeared previously; they are not startling new revelations. Why, instead, was there no discussion of Prevost’s professional military education in England or France, or his campaign service in the West Indies?

When he arrived in Quebec to take up his new duties as captain general and governor-in-chief of British North America in September 1811, Lieutenant-General Sir George Prevost had, in 32 years of commissioned service, amassed considerable experience in military operations and colonial administration. He had served in the West Indies almost continuously between 1790 and 1805, where he commanded a battalion and later a brigade before being appointed to senior command and lieutenant-governorship of St. Vincent, St. Lucia and Dominica. During 1805, he received a baronetcy for having defeated the French invasion of Dominica; this success was followed by the lieutenant-governorship of Portsmouth (his only service in Britain between 1790 and 1815) before assuming command of the forces in the Atlantic Provinces and the lieutenant-governorship of Nova Scotia. In 1809, he returned to the West Indies, in command of the larger of two divisions that took Martinique.

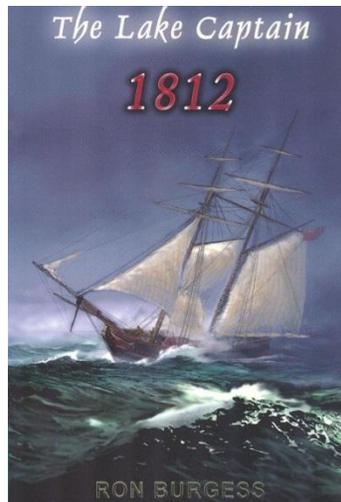
As for his wartime service in North America, it is claimed that Prevost “never went west of Kingston” (p. 230), which is false. In early 1813, Prevost conducted a detailed inspection of the defences of Upper Canada that included York, Burlington Bay, and the Niagara Frontier—all decidedly west of Kingston. He authorised the construction of new fortifications, batteries and other defensive works; he ordered the raising of embodied units of the militia, resolved difficulties between the Indian Department and the Iroquois and dealt with several problems between his subordinate commanders. He returned to Kingston in May, accompanied by newly arrived Commodore Sir James Yeo, and remained there until October 1813, establishing a forward command post at Kingston, to direct the flow of supplies and reinforcements to points further west. During the summer, Prevost again ventured into the Niagara, to examine firsthand the situation there and to coordinate military operations with his land and naval commanders. He only returned to Montreal to deal with the threat posed by Major-General Wade Hampton’s advance on that city. Prevost returned to Kingston during 1814 to demand that Yeo, who was reluctant to venture onto the lake, to deliver much needed supplies and reinforcements to the forces in the Niagara Peninsula.

This invective continues with allegations that Prevost was responsible for the loss of Lake Erie in 1813, and, in the following year, for the destruction of the naval squadron on Lake Champlain. The research supporting these discussions is superficial and overlooks Yeo's role in refusing to reinforce the Lake Erie station, or in the manning and completion of the naval squadron that would be employed at Plattsburgh. None of these events is placed within an operational or strategic context. In a wild accusation, Prevost's documented health problems, which were the result of his extensive service in the disease-ridden West Indies, are ignored, and instead, in early 1816, Prevost is said to have chosen suicide to avoid answering charges Yeo filed against him. Again, this conclusion is based on supposition and innuendo, rather than a discussion of the complex events surrounding the court martial and Prevost's death, the evidence for which is available at the National Archives, in England.

Sweeny is correct in that further study of Prevost is needed. There is no biography on the British commander-in-chief. Canadian historian J. Mackay Hitsman offered a brief reassessment of Prevost's conduct in the early 1960s, while Wesley Turner, in British Generals of the War of 1812, took a regressive step in comparing Prevost's actions with those of his subordinate commanders in Upper Canada, who duties, responsibilities and scope of authority were far different from those of the commander-in-chief of British North America.

Great Battles of the War of 1812 this execrable book that does not deliver any fresh perspectives. It is, at best, a poor rehashing of myths established over the last two centuries. Good history requires hard work, particularly in the undertaking of solid, in-depth researches to pin down the facts upon which interpretations are then built, practices that in this case, were ignored.

**Fiction**



**Ron Burgess. The Lake Captain, 1812. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 2009. 313 pages. \$19.95 Canadian (paper).**

This novel tells the story of two fur traders who worked for the North West Fur Trade Company, one of whom becomes the captain of the six-gun, eighty foot fur trading vessel Nancy, which is pressed into British service at the beginning of the War of 1812. The story follows the adventures of the heroes as they battle the Americans on Lake Erie during 1812 and 1813 and, on Lake Huron in 1814. In August, the Nancy, now the last British ship on the upper Great Lakes, is scuttled to avoid capture by the U.S. Navy. The crew then escapes to the British outpost on Mackinac Island, where after being reinforced, they proceed by canoe back to Lake Huron and in two daring actions during September, they board and take two U.S. Navy schooners, Tigress and Scorpion, thereby re-establishing British dominance on the upper Great Lakes.

During the course of the story, the reader meets a number of historical figures, including Major-General Henry Procter, fur trader and merchant Charles Ermatinger, native chief Tecumseh and a host of other Britons and Americans

The author, a former school teacher, who now runs charters and sailing safari charters in the North Channel of Lake Huron, has crafted a riveting tale, bringing historical figures to life, and recalling the excitement and action of the cinema.