**The Battle of Chippawa**

The Battle of Chippawa was fought on July 5th, 1814 for 3 hours involving 4000 infantry, American, British, Canadian and native warriors. This battle is nearly forgotten in Canada, no doubt because it was a British defeat and it was overshadowed by the successful Battle of Lundy’s Lane. Donald Graves states that, “…Canadian soldiers and their native allies played a far greater part at Chippawa (and suffered heavier losses) than in most battles of the War of 1812.” (Donald E. Graves, Red Coats and Grey Jackets, 1994)

**Grey Jackets**

Following Graves description let me contrast the two sides. First the Grey Jackets: the American forces were ill-prepared in 1812 and 1813 and incapable of defeating the British as they found out at Crysler’s Farm. But by July 1814 the American army was better trained and ready for battle. Under the command of the 39 year old Major General Jacob Brown, who referred to his army as the “Left Division,” and through the leadership of Brigadier General Winfield Scott, who was 28 years old and 6 foot, five inches, and a disciplinarian, the American army was put through 10 hour days of intensive training over a period of 10 weeks. Scott was concerned that his men were poorly dressed and he ordered a shipment of new uniforms. But when they arrived, instead of the regulation dark blue (apparently there was a shortage of the blue wool) the men received grey woolen jackets. And to this day the cadets at West Point wear “grey.” The Left Division comprised 2,300 infantry, a battalion of 327 in the artillery, with different sizes of guns, 70 light dragoons and a brigade of militia of 750 along with 500 native warriors, mainly Seneca led by their chief, Red Jacket. They all gathered on the east side of the Niagara River at Black Rock, just north of Buffalo, preparing for a landing into Canada.

**Red Coats**

On the other side of the river were the “Red Coats,” or the “Right Division.” Under the command of Major General Phineas Riall, 39 years old and a short, stout man, and a seasoned veteran as were most of the British regulars. In July of 1814 the British forces of about 2,700 were spread out along the Niagara frontier, with detachments at Fort George, Queenston, Chippawa and Fort Erie. The Right Division consisted of 1560 infantry, 500 Royal Scots, 400 King’s Regiment, 70 Royal Artillery, 70 Cavalry and 300 Native Warriors led by Capt. John Norton. Riall did not have much confidence in the militia, which consisted of 416 men in 10 companies, with only 95 muskets, but they were indispensable in providing supplies, making repairs, and helping with communication.

**Saturday, July 2**

On the evening of July 2 General Brown gave the orders to invade Canada. Their plan was to land at a number of points below and above Fort Erie. Around midnight they set out in boats and because of the darkness, rain and mist visibility was poor. General Scott was in the lead boat and wanting to inspire his men he decided to take the initiative. He tested the water with his sword and discovering that it was knee deep he jumped in. He was about to give the command, “Follow me!” when he sank up to his neck and was only able to blurt out, “too deep!” Weighed down by his cloak and swimming for his life he was rescued by his men and no doubt there were a few smirks. The American army successfully landed above and below Fort Erie.

**Sunday, July 3**

When the commander of the fort saw that his 137 officers and men were no match for the huge army surrounding the fort he surrendered, and they marched out of the fort to the tune of “Yankee Doodle” played by the American fifes and drums, and away to captivity on the American side of the river.

The alarm sounded throughout the Canadian side of the Niagara River. General Riall received word and 8:00 am and ordered 5 companies of the 1st Foot to move from Fort George to Chippawa, and the local militias and native warriors were alerted. The news spread quickly and because it was Sunday many of the Loyalist pioneers were in church. My ancestor Andrew Miller and his family probably did not make it to church. The Anglicans worshipped at Benjamin Hardison’s Mill (near the present Peace Bridge), which was south of the ferry dock where the Americans landed. Later in 1821 this piece of property was sold to a group of tustees, including Andrew Miller, who bought the land in order to build St. Paul’s Anglican Church (and the stone to build the church was taken from the old Fort Erie). A Methodist lay preacher was preaching at a chapel in Stamford (Niagara Falls). He was in the midst of his sermon, when there was quite an excitement among the people (this is the report of a private in the 100th Foot Brigade). Someone called aloud for mercy. A militia officer in the congregation had received word that an American army had crossed the river at Black Rock. “This threw the Congregation into confusion—the people ran to secure their effects—one running here and another there. I felt calm and tranquil, and my trust was in the Lord Jehovah.” He didn’t say if the preacher had finished his sermon—probably not.

I find it curious that it was the 1st and 2nd Lincoln Regiments that were called up, and not the 3d. Farmers in the 1st and 2nd were from the area north of Chippawa. The 3d from Willoughby and Bertie Townships (which included Andrew Miller who was an Ensign and his oldest son John Burch Miller) was not called up, presumably because the Americans were already there. The farming families along the river could only watch and wait in fear.

Captain John Norton and a group of native warriors, along with Lt. Col. Thomas Pearson went down to a place near the ferry dock north of Fort Erie to check out on the enemy troops. Rumours were rampant. Local farmers told Norton that a separate group had landed at Port Abino on Lake Erie and were taking a back road to the Niagara frontier, and another force was coming across via Grand Island. Norton pulled back to Chippawa, leaving sentries behind.

Chippawa provided a good defensive position for Riall and the British forces. Chippawa, on the north side of the Chippawa River, had been a military post since 1791. (Lady Simcoe mentions visiting this post in her diary) Someone described Chippawa in an unflattering way as “a **mean** village of twenty houses, three stores, two taverns, a windmill and a distillery,” (he was probably thrown out of one of the taverns!) Riall unaware that Fort Erie had surrendered decided to hunker down at Chippawa and wait for reinforcements.

**Monday, July 4**

The morning of the 4th of July was bright and sunny. A general salute was fired in honour of their national holiday, but there would be no July 4th dinner and celebration. General Brown ordered Scott to take his brigade and two companies of artillery and a troop of light dragoons north to Chippawa Creek. It was late that day that Brown managed to get all of his supplies and armaments, including 430 horses across the Niagara River. Scott moved his forces up River Road without a problem until he reached Frenchman’s Creek where a British force was in position on the other side of the creek.

Pearson had been ordered by Riall to assemble a select group and try to delay the American advance. The rain had caused the creek to swell, so they tore up the floor boards on the bridge and two guns were set up and the dragoons patrolled the creek further down. When Scott arrived at the creek they greeted the British with a volley from one of their 24-pounders and Pearson responded in kind, and then the British disappeared up the river road. Scott was fortunate that the British had not burned the bridge down, but they were delayed as they had to repair the bridge. After they crossed it and marched on they came to Winterhoot’s Creek (now Miller’s Creek) and again they found Pearson and the British on the other side with the bridge torn up. My ancestor’s homestead was beside the bridge on the south side of the creek. Andrew Miller had received his 200 acres as a Loyalist and by 1814 he and his wife, Elizabeth Everitt, the daughter of a Loyalist, had 11 children. The oldest, John Burch Miller served in the 3d Lincoln Militia with his father, Andrew who was an Ensign. Where was the family, when the Americans arrived? They probably had retreated inland, back from the river. Later when the Americans reached Samuel Street’s farm at Street’s Creek, the family was gone. His daughter had already taken their cattle across the bridge into Chippawa but left their pigs and 2 dairy cows behind which disappeared into servicing the American army. So it is likely that the Miller family did not stay around to watch the American army march by. Or perhaps since Andrew Miller operated a tavern/inn, the Americans paused and helped themselves to his stash of rum. This same scenario of being delayed by the British and having to repair the bridges happened again and again at Halfway Creek and Black Creek and finally Street’s Creek.

As Scott’s column approached Chippawa, the British were able to get their troops and guns across the bridge into Chippawa, and then dropped the centre section of the bridge into the creek. The British burned most of the Chippawa buildings on the south side of the creek afraid that the Americans would use them for cover, and then when Scott arrived they opened fire from the north side of the creek. It was evening and Scott’s troops were tired, so he pulled back to the open farm area at Street’s Creek. And Major General Brown and Ripley’s Second Brigade arrived strengthening the American position.

**Tuesday, July 5**

The open fields of Samuel Street’s farm was an ideal place to fight a battle. Samuel Street was born in Connecticut in 1753 and emigrated to Canada as a Loyalist in 1778. He settled near Fort Niagara and became a successful merchant supplying both the garrison and the natives with provisions. He entered into a partnership with Andrew Butler, son of John Butler and opened a trading post near Fort Niagara and built a sawmill at Fifteen Mile Creek. He became a judge and a member of the Legislature. He purchased 4000 acres of land just south of Chippawa Creek and it became known as the “Grove Farm.” In July, 1814 the farm possessed a herd of dairy and beef cattle, five hogs, fifteen shoats (piglets), tons of hay in the barn, and the fields were ripe with oats and peas. His daughter and her husband John Ussher were living in the house closest to the Niagara River. When the American army arrived everyone was gone and his daughter had taken most of the cattle across the Chippawa bridge to safety.

During the morning of the 5th, Riall sent various groups to cause problems for the Americans, with Indian warriors shooting from the woods and others from a barn near the creek. Riall couldn’t decide whether to advance toward the Americans or hold the line at Chippawa. By noon Riall liked what he saw and ordered his forces to cross the creek as soon as the bridge was repaired. The 2nd Lincoln Regiment of the militia showed up at Chippawa, and they were not in a great mood. Under the command of Capt. John Rowe, who had been a Sgt. in Butler’s Rangers, the 2nd Lincoln was comprised of many Loyalists. Most of them lived in farm-houses not far away but they were told on Monday to march to Queenston and on Tuesday they marched the ten miles back to Chippawa just to please some “Britisher” officer. They frequently grumbled about what the British generals were doing. They all were neighbours and busy with being farmers and merchants and they were not enthusiastic about leaving their homes. Rowe’s lieutenant was Christopher Buchner, who had come from New Jersey soon after the Revolution and settled on a farm at the corner of the Portage Road and Lundy’s Lane. He married Sarah, the daughter of James Forsyth, another Loyalist, who farmed and owned a tavern. His son, James jr. was a private in the 2nd Lincoln militia. One of their neighbours was Stephen Peer who lived with his wife, Lydia in a neat white frame house just below the escarpment beside the falls. Stephen Peer left his wife behind who was 8 months pregnant.

In the meantime, General Peter Porter’s American militia Brigade and native warriors arrived at Street’s Creek, although many of the native warriors refused to cross an international border to fight. At about 3 pm Porter’s 200 militia and 300 native warriors went into the woods. The Indians disappeared into the trees and the militia formed a line, and receiving fire from the British they rushed forward “with savage yells.” The British scouting parties retreated as quickly as possible but many were caught and there were quote, “scenes of indescribably horror” as vicious fighting took place with muskets, tomahawks and scalping knives.

Riall and his troops crossed the repaired bridge at Chippawa shortly after 3 pm and began marching along the river road. Norton and his 200 warriors and the militia moved through the woods and intercepted the Americans. Some came running back shouting, “Yankee too strong! Too many!” There were heavy casualties in the woods, especially for the Canadian militia and the native warriors. Many of the Lincoln Regiment officers and men went down. Stephen Peer would never see his son who was born 26 days later. James Forsyth, jr. was also killed. However, the British rallied and drove Porter’s militia brigade back. It was a quote “confused and bloody business,” in the dense woods with various groups of frightened men running into each other and many were shot by their own men.

In the meantime the infantry of both sides moved closer toward each other in the open fields of Samuel Street’s farm. Scott moved the First Brigade north on the river road and as they neared Street’s Creek bridge, General Brown rode up shouting, “You will have a battle.” And at that moment British artillery started to land south of the creek. The artillery battle by both sides continued, but it didn’t prevent the infantry on both sides to form their lines in the field.

The British formed their lines with the 1st and 100th Foot in front and the 8th behind. Rumours spread among the soldiers that the Americans were a desperate bunch, untrained, escaped prisoners, and cowards. But the American lines formed by the 9th/22nd, 11th and 25th infantry consisted of experienced soldiers. Many had fought previously at Sacket’s Harbour and Cryzler’s Farm. When Gen. Riall saw the grey uniforms of the American troops he thought they were the militia, but as the American lines were organized in a disciplined fashion, Riall is said to have exclaimed, “Why, these are regulars!”

At about 4:30 pm the British line moved forward. General Scott rode back and forth behind the lines and he noticed that the British lines were moving apart and he thought he could outflank them on the west side. When the British line was about 150 to 200 feet away, he ordered his infantry to open fire. Shrouded in thick clouds of smoke the opposing lines continued to fire at each other. The American artillery tore into the British 100th Foot with devastating results and Scott’s Brigade made inroads on the British right flank. The British suffered more casualties. A private in the 100th Foot said, “The slaughter was great; they fell on my right and my left.” The dead and wounded were dragged to the rear but both sides fired and loaded again and again. Finally, the British line began to edge back and the center did not hold and Riall ordered a withdrawal. The vicious firefight between the lines had lasted 25 minutes. The withdrawal happened quickly as the British troops retreated across the bridge into Chippawa, and then dropping the centre section into the creek. John Norton and his native warriors were still in the woods when they heard the bugle call to retreat, but by the time they reached the bridge it was already demolished. He managed to get his men across on logs floating in the creek. The Americans moved forward, but were halted by artillery fire and because it was getting late, Gen. Brown decided to retire to camp at about 6:30 and the battle was over.

In three and a half hours over 700 men were killed or wounded. The British side lost 148 killed, 321 wounded, 46 missing. The American side: 58 dead, 241 wounded, 19 missing. The Lincoln militia lost 12 dead, 16 wounded and 15 missing. 50 to 100 native warriors were lost on both sides. Most of the dead were buried in shallow graves close to where they fell—and the graves are still there to this day.

Many later accused Gen. Riall of miscalculation, but given the information that he had his decision was understandable. He thought that Fort Erie was still holding out and that most of the American army was still there besieging the fort. He didn’t know that it had surrendered. Riall was also very confident given previous experience that his troops were far superior to the American forces. They lost this battle because for the first time they encountered “troops who were their equal in training, motivation and leadership.”

**The Aftermath**

For three days the Americans and British just stared at each other across the Chippawa. Then the Americans tried to bridge the Chippawa further upstream and Riall decided to withdraw all the way back to Fort George. The American army moved along the Portage Road and at Niagara Falls they paused in front of Mrs. Wilson’s Tavern near Table Rock and they asked her in what direction the British had gone, and she told the truth, “They went that way!” During the War of 1812 Wilson’s Tavern is mentioned in many dispatches, letters and journals. Mrs. Wilson (her husband had died in 1812) provided refreshments and lodging to both British and American officers who stopped at her inn. Taverns were important along the Niagara frontier. Both sides had their rules about rations. The liquor ration was 4 oz. of whiskey, rum or brandy although the sutler would sell more at exorbitant prices. The daily ration of liquor for British regulars was one gill of rum per soldier per diem, that’s 4 oz. the same as the Americans.

Well, the rest of the action includes the Battle of Lundy’s Lane, a much bigger battle in which the British lost 878 men and the Americans 860 men. In that battle General Brown and General Scott were wounded, and General Riall was wounded and captured. The Americans finally retreated back to Fort Erie on July 26th and as they marched they destroyed just about everything.

John Burch had built a grist mill next to Niagara Falls. He had come from England and settled near Albany and also had extensive farms along the east branch of the Delaware River. An entrepreneur Burch sold his cattle to Butler’s Rangers. When American patriots found out they burned his house to the ground. Burch escaped through a window and walked all the way to Fort Niagara where he became the fort sutler in 1779. It was here that he recognized the 12 year old Andrew Miller and he redeemed him from a group of Iroquois in exchange for corn. John Burch married Martha Ramsey from the Mohawk Valley and Andrew lived his teen age years in the Burch home next to Fort Niagara. In 1783 the Burch’s built a home next to Niagara Falls and John Burch built a grist mill just above the falls. This mill was later bought by Samuel Street. Other mills were built further upstream from the falls beside what is today known as Dufferin Islands. The community in this area became known as Bridgewater Mills. A newspaper report was printed in the Buffalo Gazette of Aug. 2, 1814 which read, “On the morning of the 26th (of July) our forces under Generals Ripley and Porter reconnoitered the enemy near the battle ground (==Lundy’s Lane), returned and burnt Bridgewater Mills and all the enemy’s barracks and the bridge at Chippawa and passed up the river to Fort Erie.”

James Macklem arrived in Chippawa in 1791. Born in Ireland, settling first in Pennsylvania, petitioned Gov. Simcoe to establish a lumber yard in Chippawa. He opened Macklem’s Tavern in 1800, as well as a General Store, and an extensive milling and distilling business. He was a Captain in the 2nd Regiment of the Lincoln Militia which fought in the Battle of Chippawa. The American army during its retreat burned all of Macklem’s buildings in Chippawa. But he rebuilt, establishing the Chippawa Steam Foundry which produced steam boilers for ships on the Great Lakes, as well as cooking ranges and hot air furnaces and his foundry produced the first plough shears in Canada.

Thomas Cummings owned most of the buildings in Chippawa on the south side of the creek. He came from Scotland, settled in Albany, N.Y. before settling in Chippawa in 1783. He served as a Lieutenant in Butler’s Rangers. He had been John Burch’s farm manager in the Mohawk Valley. Burch and Cummings settled across from each other on the banks of the Chippawa. Later Thomas Cummings served as a Major in the 3d Regiment of the Lincoln Militia in 1812. During the retreat of the Americans after the Battle of Lundy’s Lane all the buildings of Chippawa that were left standing were burned to the ground. About 20 buildings had already been destroyed by the British under Gen. Riall. The America army destroyed the remaining structures. All of this was reported by Cummings in an affidavit claim for War losses.

The American army destroyed all of the remaining buildings on Samuel Street’s “Grove Farm.” The farm was quickly rebuilt by Samuel Street’s daughter Mary and her husband John Ussher and they had 6 children. A tragedy occurred on the morning of November 6, 1838. Their son, Edgeworth Ussher answered the door at two o’clock in the morning and he was instantly shot. Benjamin Lett, a rebel sympathizer during the 1837 Rebellion, shot Ussher probably because he was a supporter of the British and an officer in the Lincoln Militia. Lett is believed to also have been responsible for burning Trinity Anglican Church in Chippawa in 1838 and also for blowing up the first Brock Monument in 1842.

Most of the farm homes, and barns along the River Road were destroyed by the retreating Americans. Donald Graves concludes that it was a cruel irony of the war that one of the most beautiful, scenic regions, the Niagara frontier suffered the war’s worst depredations. He writes, “On the Canadian side, Newark, St. David’s, and Bridgewater Mills were charred remnants while Queenston and Chippawa were only slightly more intact. On the American side, Youngstown, Lewiston, and Black Rock were largely destroyed while Buffalo, once a thriving village, was now a collection of quickly-built frame shacks surrounded by ruins. Both sides of the river presented a desolate landscape of burned-out and abandoned farms, torn-down fences, tampled crops, missing bridges, and hastily dug graves. It took a decade of hard work to undo the physical damage of the war—it took much longer to erase is memory in the minds of the survivors.”

Andrew Miller’s farm and his tavern/inn survived the war. And there is a copy of an affidavit in the National Archives in Ottawa, dated 1821 which certifies that Andrew Miller “retained his Loyalty to His Majesty’s Government during the Late War.” It is signed by Henry Trout, Captain, of the 3d Regiment of the Lincoln Militia. This certificate was attached to Andrew Miller’s claim for war damages to his property, not the destruction of his tavern but the destruction of his split log fences. The tavern that Gen. Brock visited in 1812 and that supplied rum to probably both sides during the war survived and for me it is a testimony of the resilience of the Loyalists.