

THE
BEECHWOOD WAY
MAGAZINE



Honouring the War of 1812
at Beechwood Cemetery

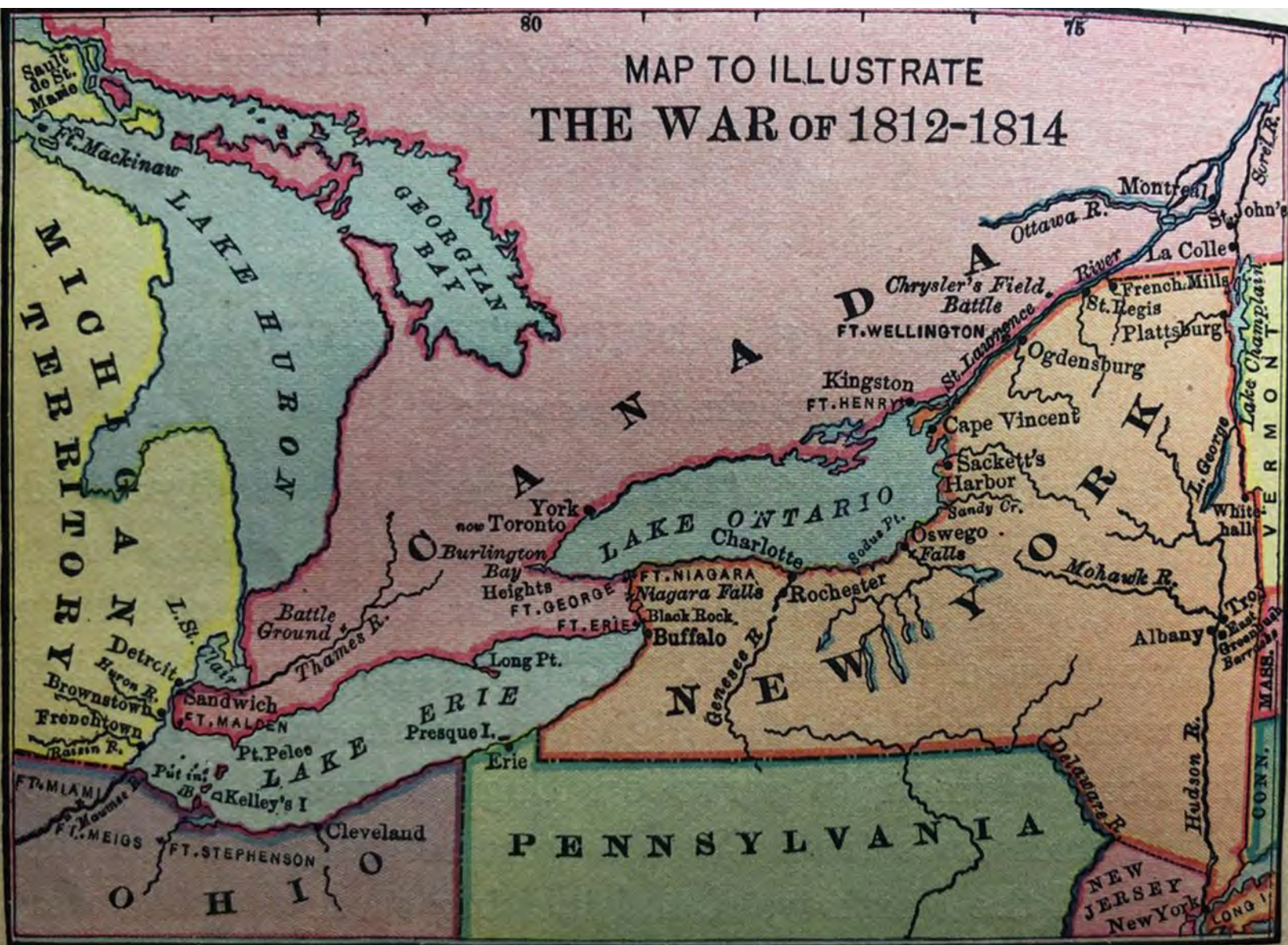
The War of 1812 A Canadian Perspective

The War of 1812 stands as a pivotal conflict in the early formation of Canadian identity. Fought between the British Empire (with its North American colonies) and the United States from 1812 to 1815, the war emerged from American frustrations over trade restrictions, the impressment of sailors, and ambitions to expand into British-held territory.

While battles were fought across the continent, it was in British North America modern-day Canada where the most profound legacy was left.

For many Canadian communities, the war was not just about territory but survival. United Empire Loyalists, Indigenous allies, British regulars, and local militias rallied to defend their homes.

The result was not only a military stalemate but a psychological victory for the colonies the successful defense of the Canadian frontier sowed the seeds of a distinct Canadian consciousness, built on loyalty to the Crown, cooperation between English- and French-speaking settlers, and strategic alliances with Indigenous nations.



Honouring the War of 1812

Beechwood is home to several individuals who either served in or were profoundly influenced by the War of 1812. Their legacies are woven into the very fabric of Canadian history.

LOUIS-THÉODORE BESSERER - Section 41, Lot 95N

The name of this soldier, politician and businessman remains significant in Ottawa, where his stately mansion still stands on 149 Daly Ave., and Besserer Street, named after this pioneer landowner, runs through the Sandy Hill residential district known for its 19th-century heritage homes.

Born in Quebec City in 1785 to a German military surgeon and a Canadian-born mother, he was a pupil at the Petit Séminaire de Québec, and then studied to become a notary. In his profession, he was described as “a man of good counsel and an alert financier, sound and rarely at fault in his judgement, who quickly won the confidence of his fellow citizens and built up a fine clientele.”

When the War of 1812 began, Louis-Théodore joined the Lower Canada militia as a lieutenant in the 2nd battalion of the Quebec City district. In 1813, he was transferred to the 6th battalion and later promoted to captain. The British regarded the Quebec City fortress guarding the St. Lawrence River as the “key to the successful defence of the colonies.” Besserer also handled special civilian missions for Governor Sir George Prévost.

Prior to the 1812 war, his older brother, René-Léonard Besserer, had been a colonial recruiter for the New Brunswick Regiment and took a commission as a lieutenant in the 104th (New Brunswick) Regiment of Foot, serving in the Niagara war zone, in particular the Siege of Fort Erie in 1814. Like many soldiers in the Crown forces, the Besserer brothers received land grants with Louis-Théodore choosing his lots in the township of Horton in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, while René-Léonard, who died in 1823, obtained 124 acres of “remote land” in the “sub-arctic lumber town” on the Ottawa River.

Louis-Théodore’s political career ran from 1833 to 1838, as a representative of the county of Quebec in the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada. He was one of the Patriotes of the Quebec region who, while supporting the Ninety-Two Resolutions drafted by Louis-Joseph Papineau to demand political reforms in the British-controlled colonies, preferred a more moderate approach. Besserer wanted to work through constitutional channels to achieve these goals, rather than stage an armed rebellion, as advocated by the Montreal Patriotes. He took a defiant stand against Papineau, but he was still branded a rebel by the British, and was forced to quit politics. The leaders of the rebellion “never forgave him his moderation.”



“Embittered by political events and distressed by the death of his first wife,” Angèle Rhéaume, Besserer retired to Bytown and the massive residential estate he had inherited from his brother in 1828, but didn’t develop it until a decade later. With shrewd land agent William Stewart, he turned the parcel into a huge subdivision of premier town lots, first called Besserer Place.

Besserer gave land to various religious denominations for construction of a church, which he believed would attract more elite buyers. “In 1845, St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Cumberland and Daly streets, became the first permanent church in Sandy Hill. (The current St. Paul’s Eastern United Church is a later structure.) Several lots were given to the Roman Catholic Church to erect a college. The church-controlled College of Bytown (later University of Ottawa) was relocated to the site in 1856.”

“With his second wife, Margaret Cameron, of Bytown, he had Besserer House constructed on a prominent site on the brow of Sandy Hill.” Besserer fathered 12 children with his two wives. He died in Ottawa on February 3, 1861.

EDWARD SANDS BRADLEY - Section 25, Lot 52N

Born in Kingsclear, New Brunswick, Edward Sands acquired a commission of ensign in 1812 in the Nova Scotia Fencibles, likely through his father’s military connections – it was commonplace for commissions to be purchased for young boys.

His name appears in the regiment’s monthly returns for 1815-1816 when they were stationed in Kingston, going on half-pay in mid-1816. He transferred in 1817 to the 99th Regiment, which had been renumbered from the 100th Regiment, until it disbanded in 1818.



When the family moved to the Bytown area, Edward Sands acquired land grants as a retired officer, and ran various mills. He also served as a captain in same Carleton County militia with his father as the lieutenant-colonel and brother Clements Bradley as a lieutenant during the late 1820s.

Bradley died Feb. 25, 1836, in Bytown and was probably buried in the pioneer Barrack Hill cemetery at Sparks and Elgin Streets and then re-interred in the Sandy Hill site before being moved to Beechwood.

A memorial tombstone at the Beechwood family plot pays tribute to father and son.

WILLIAM BROWN BRADLEY - Section 25, Lot 52N

The American Revolution and two wars shaped the life of William Brown Bradley who grew up in a family fiercely loyal to the Crown and fought in His Majesty's Forces to defend the British colonies. On his death in Bytown, Bradley was described as "not only a brave officer but a deserving settler" of Carleton County.

On Whitemarsh Island near Savannah, Georgia, his parents struggled to run their plantation during turbulent times in the 13 colonies while raising young Bradley along with his twin brother and a sister. After their father, employed by the British Army Commissariat, died during the American Revolutionary War, the family got a new father figure: Lieutenant John Jenkins, a professional soldier in the New Jersey Volunteers, who married their mother in 1781. After the eight-year continental war ended, the United States forced a mass exodus of Loyalists so Jenkins moved his adopted family to New Brunswick and started a new life as pioneers. Four more children were born on a farm and a large estate near Fredericton.

In 1793, Jenkins and Bradley joined the militia in the King's New Brunswick Regiment, as colonists worried that the American republic would invade the Maritimes, capitalizing on Britain being embroiled in the Napoleonic wars. Bradley served in two more regiments, rising from the junior rank of ensign to captain in the 104th (New Brunswick) Regiment of Foot. He served with a half-brother in the infantry unit.

Capt. Bradley was commanding a 104th company in 1812 when the United States declared war on Britain and invaded Upper Canada.

Fortunately, its armies suffered defeats in initial battles. Sir George Prevost feared in 1813 he did not have enough troops to defend Upper Canada from more American invasions so the commander-in-chief ordered a whole regiment, the 104th, to make a winter march 1,125 kilometres from Fredericton to Quebec City and on to Kingston.

Six 104th Regiment companies, including Capt. Bradley's unit, took 52 days in February and March for the incredible overland trek of 554 men and supplies through severe cold and heavy snowfalls.



While the 104th mostly did garrison duty in Kingston for the war, various detachments were sent on campaigns. A Montreal Gazette obituary attested that Capt. Bradley participated in the May 29, 1813 raid on the Lake Ontario shipbuilding base at Sackets Harbor where his company sustained casualties. He also was with the 104th detachment at the surrender of nearly 1,000 American soldiers at the battle of Beaver Dams on June 24, 1813 and at the August 15, 1814 assault on American-occupied Fort Erie where his company again suffered losses.

With the War of 1812 ended in the colonies and Napoleon's armies defeated in Europe, Britain disbanded many of its infantry regiments, including the 104th, with Capt. Bradley, aged 46, going into retirement on half-pay and living near Montreal. By the early 1820s, some of the family was on the move again migrating to the Bytown area where Bradley had additional land grants in March and Huntley Townships as well as along the Rideau River. His leadership skills were put into action as the lieutenant-colonel in the First Carleton Militia and a Justice of the Peace to administer the new judicial district of March and Huntley. Among the settlers, he was known to be "generous, good-hearted and obliging." Along with his sons, Bradley also ran a wool-carding mill and shingle mill as well as a farm with livestock.

Capt. Bradley died Oct. 2, 1850 and was buried in the Sandy Hill cemetery where his son, Edward Sands Bradley had been interred in 1836. With the closing of the Sandy Hill burying grounds, remains of eight family members were removed in 1876 to the newly-opened Beechwood Cemetery.

GRANT POWELL - Section 50, Lot 26

Grant Powell was born on September 2, 1819 in the City of York (present-day Toronto). His family was well-known, his father, Grant Powell (Senior), having served as a medical doctor with the British and Canadian troops fighting the Americans around York and Niagara in the War of 1812, and his grandfather, William Dummer Powell, was a judge in York and one of the founders of the British settlement at York.

Powell was a civil servant for Upper and Lower Canada and the Dominion of Canada, having served as Under Secretary of State (now called Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) from 1839 to around 1889. Powell died January 27, 1904 in Ottawa.

SGT ANDREW HILL - Section 37, Plot 59 & 60

Sgt. Andrew Hill was “a man of more than ordinary ability,” serving as an army leader during the War of 1812 and as one of the original administrators in the military settlement of Richmond, now part of the City of Ottawa.

Born in Fermanagh County, Ireland in 1785, he joined the army at 18 when British recruiters raised an Irish infantry unit, formally known as the 100th Prince Regent’s County of Dublin Regiment. He shipped out in mid-1805 for the British North American colonies with the 100th Regiment, which was scheduled for garrison duty at various forts and military camps throughout Upper Canada. His military acumen was demonstrated through his quick promotion from private to corporal in 1806 and sergeant in 1807.

He met Maria Woods at Fort Amherstburg on the Detroit River. They had two children: Hannah, born in 1809, and Margaret, born in 1811, the year Andrew and Maria married. Sgt. Hill also was stationed in the Niagara Peninsula at Fort George. When troops were called out to repel another American invasion, Sgt. Hill marched with the soldiers to Queenston Heights. This was Oct. 13, 1812, when Gen. Isaac Brock was killed by a gunshot, yet became immortalized as “the saviour of Upper Canada” with the defeat of the Americans. The battle became the most historically significant victory in terms of unifying the civilian population and military alliances in a national effort to defend the colonies. Both of the Hills were in the thick of the fighting on the Niagara frontier in 1813 and 1814 as the 100th Regiment moved around the battle sites such as Fort Niagara in New York state and Chippawa, near Niagara Falls in Upper Canada.

At the end of the war in 1818, the couple decided to take free land in the colony rather than return to Britain. The Hills came up the Ottawa River on the boats with 270 men, 63 women and 130 children from the former 100th Regiment, heading for the new townsite of Richmond and farming lots in Goulbourn Township.

Under the command of Capt. George Burke and Sgt. Hill, the soldier-settlers took on the formidable task of clearing 32 kilometres of new trail through dense forests to build homesteads < which were hastily-erected log shanties. Richmond Road is one of Ottawa’s oldest roadways. Sgt. Hill worked as a clerk in the commissary offices that supervised the military depot until 1822. The Hills also opened the first inn in Richmond, called the “Masonic Arms,” in recognition of Sgt. Hill’s role as a leading freemason.

The name was changed to Richmond Arms after the Duke of Richmond died of rabies on an 1819 visit to the military depot. Maria Hill laid out the duke’s corpse at the tavern in preparation for transport to Quebec City for burial.

In 1830, Sgt. Hill became gravely ill and died at the age of 45. Buried in Richmond’s St. John’s Anglican Cemetery with his wife, Maria, who died in 1881 and her second husband, Andrew Taylor, who died in 1879, the remains were moved from Richmond to Beechwood in 1887.

MARIA HILL - Section 37, Plot 59 & 60

Throughout her long life of service to king and country, Maria Hill always thought of herself as “a soldier all through.” Even at age 90, she said her only regret was that she had “no sons to wear the British uniform and, if occasion called, offer his life for England.” She was what historians call “a daughter of the regiment,” raised from infancy in military traditions and lived as an army wife who followed the regiment into the war zones.

Born in Lancashire in 1791, Maria lost both her parents when she was still a child – a father who was an army surgeon in England and a mother who was remarried to a recruiting sergeant. Maria’s stepfather brought her to Upper Canada in 1799 and to Fort Amherstburg, near Windsor, where she married Sgt. Andrew Hill, an Irish soldier in the 100th Regiment of Foot in 1811. They had two daughters. She was one of the wives whom the army permitted to travel to the forts and armed camps where the women were given accommodations and food rations in return for caring for 600 men in the regiment.

After the American invaders were defeated at the Battle of Queenston Heights on Oct. 13, 1812, Maria met Laura Secord who was searching the battlefield for her gravely-injured husband. We know that Maria, a nurse, left Fort George and went to aid injured soldiers while “her husband [was] under arms among the rest” who were sent to fight the invading enemy. Playwright Sarah Anne Curzon, in her 1887 drama about Laura Secord, identified Maria as a “brave woman” who hid “her babe ... under a wood pile” and walked among the wounded. She described Maria as “one in whom the heroic blood ran thick and strong as e’er in times gone by.”

When the U.S. army invaded again in 1813 and occupied the Niagara frontier, British generals ordered women and children to withdraw to Montreal. Legend says Maria disguised herself as a man, donning a redcoat, to follow Sgt. Hill. Her identity was revealed when she was run over by an ammunition wagon and examined by a doctor. She was partially disabled for life. Yet, as a nurse, she was allowed to stay and help the surgeons cope with overwhelming numbers of badly injured soldiers at the 1814 battles of Chippawa and the bloodiest, at Lundy’s Lane.

Once the war ended, the Hills took land in the Richmond military settlement and ran the tavern in the town. Maria died in 1881 and is buried in a family plot at Beechwood with two husbands and the only one of her children to survive – Margaret – who married Edward Malloch, an MP in early Upper Canada. A granddaughter, also named Maria, also shares the burial site. She had become Lady Grant, having married Dr. James Alexander Grant, who was knighted by Queen Victoria for medical care of our first eight governors general. Dr. Grant was also a MP in John A. Macdonald’s government. They raised seven of their 12 children in a mansion on Elgin Street, which much later became Friday’s Roast Beef House.

A Lasting Tribute to Canada's Early Defenders

The War of 1812 was not merely a series of military engagements—it was a crucible that helped forge the foundations of Canada's identity, rooted in resilience, loyalty to the Crown, and collective defence of community and land.

At Beechwood Cemetery, the lives of those connected to this defining chapter are honoured not only through stone and inscription, but through the stories they represent—of courage under fire, civic leadership, and nation-building. From seasoned officers like Capt. William Brown Bradley and Capt. Louis-Théodore Besserer, to community pillars like Sgt. Andrew Hill and Maria Hill, their contributions echo across generations.

As Canada's National Cemetery, Beechwood stands as a living memorial—connecting the past to the present, reminding us that the freedoms, institutions, and communities we enjoy today were shaped in no small part by the legacy of those who served in the War of 1812. Their stories remain a vital part of our shared history, and their memory a solemn duty to uphold.



Actors portraying Sergeant Andrew Hill and Maria Hill during the 2013 Beechwood Cemetery Foundation Annual Historical Tour.