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WASHINGTON AND SARATOGA COUNTIES
IN THE WAR OF 1812
ON ITS NORTHERN FRONTIER
AND THE EIGHT REIDS AND ROSSES WHO FOUGHT IT

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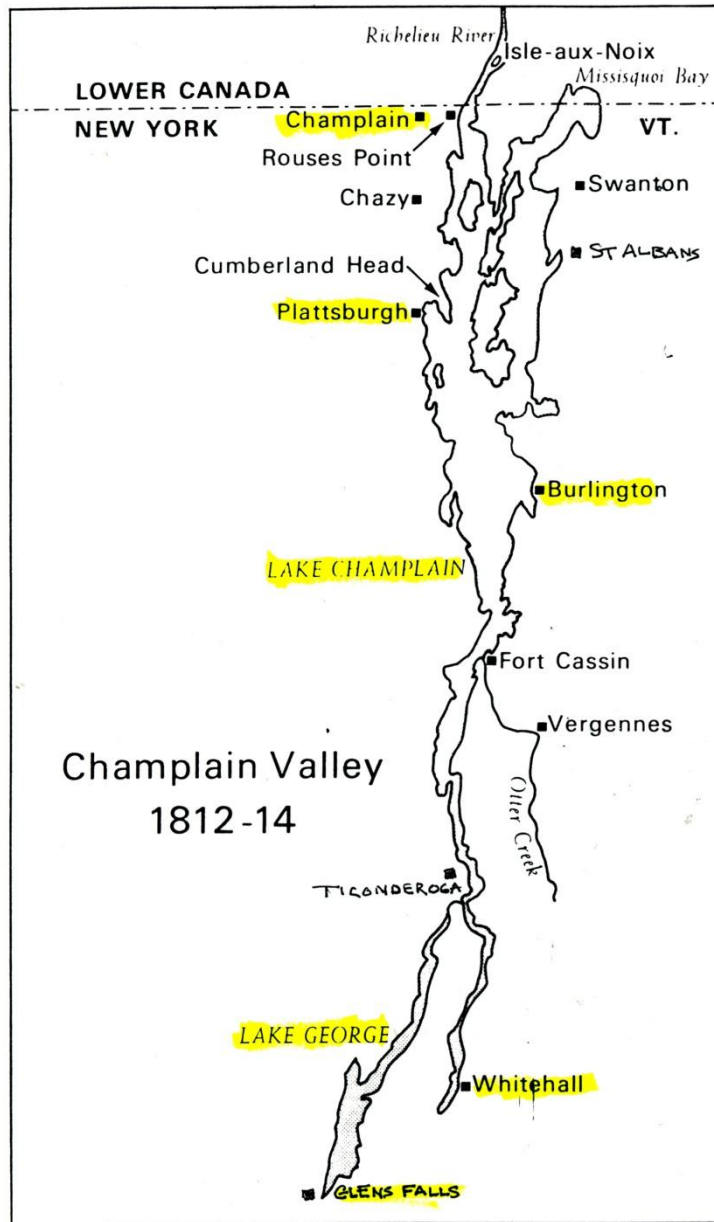
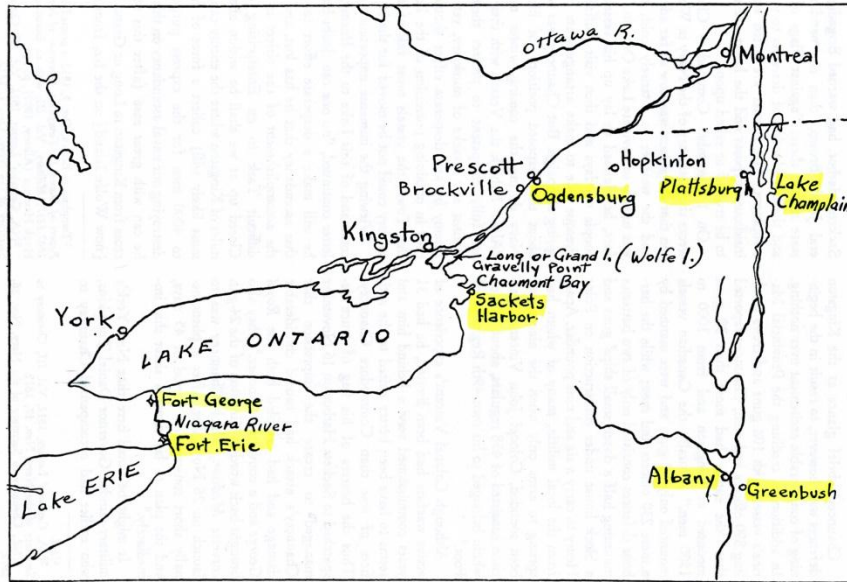
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Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown as depicted in an engraving published in 1862



1

INITIAL SUPPORT

Daniel T. Tompkins, New York's governor since 1807, and Peter B. Porter, the U.S. Congressman, first elected in 1808 to represent western New York, were leading advocates of a war of conquest against the British over Canada. Tompkins was particularly interested in recruiting and training a state militia and opening and equipping state arsenals in preparation for such a war.

Normally, militiamen were obligated only for three months of duty during the War of 1812, although if the President requested, the period could be extended to a maximum of six months. When the militia was called into service by the governor or his officers, it was paid by the state. When called by the President or an officer of the U.S. Army, it was paid by the U.S. Treasury.

In 1808, the United States Congress took the first steps toward federalizing state militias by appropriating \$200,000 – a hopelessly inadequate sum – to arm and train citizen soldiers needed to supplement the nation's tiny standing army. At that time, only small detachments of regulars – several companies each – were stationed on the frontiers of the state to “sustain the customs collectors.”

As New York governor, Tompkins gave full support to President James Madison with respect to military measures. Madison was first elected in 1808. In 1808, New York Congressman Porter was joined by seven newly elected congressmen. Collectively, they became known as the “war hawks.” They were ready to declare war on Canada – national honor demanded it.

On November 29, 1811, New York Congressman Porter, as chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, had taken the initial step that climaxed in the decision to declare war on Great Britain. That day, he released the committee's report that not only was a stinging attack on British policies, but a ringing plea for action. In his supporting speech, he urged Congress to recognize the report as a forerunner to war, with the admonition, “Do not let us raise armies . . . unless we intend to employ them.”

By 1812, Congress began to debate whether this federalized militia should be made up of volunteers who would serve for longer terms than the maximum six months, or less as required by most states. The debate finally resulted in authorizing 50,000 volunteer militiamen who would serve for new, longer terms and whose families would be awarded 160 acres of bounty land if the soldiers were killed in action. They would be placed under the authority of the federal government and paid by it. Therefore, they were detached from the state militia. At war's beginning, each state was assigned a quota of militia positions to fill and across the nation, 60,000 soon enlisted to serve for one year or more.

By war's end, another 400,000 would enlist for under six months. If they served for at least two weeks on any mission, they were eligible for a pension or bounty land or both. By July 4, fourteen regiments had been organized in Washington and Saratoga counties, across the Hudson River from each other. At least four of my Reid ancestors served in four or more federalized militia regiments. All were descendants of John Reid and his wife, Margaret Hyman, who arrived in 1739 from Islay, Scotland, to settle on a 450-acre land grant in Washington County, New York. Four Ross ancestors from Saratoga County also served in New York militia regiments. By war's end, a total of 46,469 of these militiamen were New Yorkers who served on the Canadian frontier in 1814 alone. However, the largest number ever assembled for any one

battle was 3,000 at Lundy's Lane. Many of their records were destroyed by fire in 1911 and many others were scrapped for recycling due to a WWII paper shortage.

By March 31, 1812, two and a half months before war was declared, 1,600 militia and their necessary provisions had been ordered to the New York border. When Congress declared war on Great Britain on June 23, 1812, to the extent that American strategy existed, it called for invasions into Canada along a 600-mile front of mostly trackless wilderness where twenty small outposts were more or less connected by virtually impassable roads, making it impossible to support one another. Most of the land fighting took place on this frontier. Coordination of the three separate armies organized for this purpose never materialized, particularly along New York's border with Canada. Few militia were recruited there, and most of those refused to invade Canada by crossing the international boundary.

On June 27, 1812, four days after war was declared, New York Governor Tompkins named Maj. Gen. Henry Dearborn commander-in-chief, and put him in command of the 9th District of the "Northern Frontier," the New York border and continuing southward through Lake Champlain and into the Hudson River. Dearborn, age sixty-two, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War. His headquarters were in Albany. He ordered all recruits "not otherwise disposed of to man stations on Lake Champlain to prepare for invading Canada. At least four of our Reid ancestors from Washington County made the march to the Northern Frontier with militia forces. All were descendants of John Reid and his wife, Margaret, Scottish Reformed Presbyterians who were original Argyle patentees in Washington County, having been awarded its 450 acres in Lot 70 in 1765. Two Ross ancestors also soldiered north at that time. Fourth Sgt. William Ross, descended from the first of our Ross ancestors who had arrived in the region before the American Revolution, was initially indentured to farm on the Rensselaer Plantation before moving to Saratoga County on land his father purchased. Daniel Ross, son of William, who initially enlisted in 1808 in the 63rd Regiment of Saratoga County militia as an ensign, was promoted to captain in 1811. Little else is known about him except that he died on or about May 20, 1814, while "in the service of the Army of the United States," a federalized regiment.

2

THE NIAGARA CAMPAIGN

In May, 1812, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Mooers' command of Clinton County's 3rd division of the New York detached militia, was enlarged to include Washington, Rensselaer, and Columbia counties, and in June enlarged again to include other counties west of the Hudson such as Saratoga County. Mooer, age 54, like Dearborn, was a Revolutionary War veteran. He was a brave, judicious, and prudent officer and extremely popular with his men. He was now in command of the entire 3rd division of the New York militia in the Northern Army.

By order of General Mooers, its 3rd brigade, initially known as the 17th, was commanded by Brig. Gen. Micajah Petit of Washington County. Its 7th regiment was headed by Col. James Green, also of Queensburg Argyle, Washington County, in which several of our ancestors were to serve. Two other regiments, the 8th and the 9th, constituted the brigade.

Mooers was the sole commander in Plattsburg until September. That month he and his detached troops were placed under the command of a regular army brigadier general, as regular army troops began to arrive at Plattsburg. In the fall of 1812, the 1st division of the New York

militia under the command of inexperienced Maj. Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer assembled in Lewiston. His 4th brigade was commanded by Col. Richard Dodge of Montgomery County, which included, among others, the 10th regiment commanded by Col. John Prior of Greenfield, Saratoga County, and the 16th by Col. Calvin Rich of Sharon, Schoharie County.

On October 13, some of Gen. Van Rensselaer's division crossed the Niagara River and seized the heights above the village of Queenstown, with about 1,100 of his 6,000-man army, but his New York and Pennsylvania militia refused to serve outside of their country. As a result, he lost the battle; 900 of those who crossed were forced to surrender and the Niagara Campaign ended. Ancestors of ours who lived in Saratoga County served in Colonels Prior's and Rich's regiments of Gen. Van Rensselaer's command.

Mooers' 3rd division of the New York militia included among others, regiments from Washington, Franklin, Rensselaer, Schoharie, Essex, Clinton, and later Saratoga counties. All of these regiments served in Brig. Gen. Simon DeRidder's 16th Brigade, earlier designated the 4th, when it was commanded by Brig. Gen. Richard Dodge, as well as Brig. Gen. Micajah Pettit's 17th Brigade, earlier designated as the 3rd. Together they formed the 2nd division of detached militia. DeRidder was from Union Village (Greenwich) in Washington County and Easton, and had served in the militia since 1805, initially as a lieutenant colonel. Pettit hailed from Queensburg in Washington County.

The day before Mooers received his orders from Dearborn, a large number of wagons carrying equipment left for Lake Champlain. Dearborn also instructed Mooers to notify his subordinate DeRidder to assemble his 4th brigade of 300 fully equipped volunteers at 10A.M. on July 7 at Salem Village. It was to proceed from there to Plattsburg and help protect the Champlain frontier by reinforcing the regulars (U.S. Army troops). They were to take with them 140 tents, 60 camp kettles, and 40 pails, plus muskets, cannons, and ammunition. By this time, DeRidder's 4th brigade consisted of six militia regiments, including the 50th New York, the 10th (later the 11th), 51st, 114th, 118th, 156th, and the 6th Washington Bounty artillery, in which two Daniel Reids, who were not our ancestors, served. John Reid, who served in Col. James Green's 118th, was a brother of Daniel Reid who was serving in Col. Rich's regiment when he died, as noted below. Other regiments in the brigade were the 10th (later the 11th) commanded by Col. Calvin Rich of Sharon, Schoharie County in which our ancestor, Pvt. Daniel Reid, enlisted for six months in Cambridge on August 24, 1812, to serve until February 24, 1813, in Rich's 11th detached regiment, Capt. Philip Van Steenberg's company, DeRidder's 4th brigade.

The day before Gen. Dearborn issued his orders, Lt. Col. Stephen Thorn of the 3rd (later the 6th) Washington County artillery was ordered to furnish field pieces from his 3rd regiment of detached artillery, which was at Granville. They were to be taken by riverboat to Plattsburg, if possible, to serve in DeRidder's brigade. Otherwise, they were to be taken overland. The next day, he also was ordered to have Capt. Badger's artillery company join DeRidder's brigade at Salem on July 7. Thorn had command experience. In 1805, he had served as Lieutenant Colonel of the 4th artillery.

A detachment from Gen. Pettit's brigade was also ordered to assemble at Sandy Hill (Hudson Falls) at 10:00 A.M. on July 7, and to proceed to Plattsburg as well, but on a different route. Provisions were drawn for it from government agents at both Salem and Sandy Hill, where tents, knapsacks, and other equipment was stored. Gen. Dearborn was particularly concerned about lack of protection for ammunition stored at Plattsburg.

By autumn, two militia training camps were established at Lewiston, Van Rensselaer's headquarters, and another at Greenbush, Dearborn's headquarters. Raw troops were drilled two

to four hours daily in these camps. These troops and their equipment were to be added to the Regulars already at Plattsburg. It was believed that together, they could provide adequate protection on the Champlain Frontier for the present.” Each man was entitled to two months advance pay and a \$16 clothing allowance.

Lt. Col. James Green of the 7th Regiment in Pettit’s brigade, was assigned to command the troops from these two brigades, including Washington and Saratoga County regiments. The troops were to provide their own cartridge boxes, muskets, bayonets, blankets, and knapsacks, if possible. Otherwise they would be supplied from the arsenal at Plattsburg. Pettit also was authorized to spend up to \$2,500 for necessary expenses. These men were ill-clothed, undisciplined, and unpaid. Green’s payroll records indicated they served on the field, and staff were paid from July 1, 1812, to February 10, 1813. The three regiments that constituted this detachment from Pettit’s brigade were the 7th under Lt. Col. James Green of Argyle, Washington County; the 8th under Lt. Col. Thomas Miller of Plattsburg; and the 9th under Lt. Col. Peter Vosburg of Kinderhook, Columbia County.

By September and October, regulars also began to arrive in Ballston, Saratoga County, in numbers to replace 4,000 militia. Dodge’s newly-swelled 4th brigade of militia and regulars was marched in mid-September to Sackets Harbor, the only practicable naval base on Lake Ontario. However, all the brigade’s 700 sick and convalescent militia, plus their attendants, and about 1,200 effectives, remained in Plattsburg, Cumberland Head, and Burlington – there were no barracks for Dodge’s men at Sackets Harbor, only tents which were pitched on a low, wet plain, unprotected from the cold winds blowing directly from the lake. Blankets, coats, snowshoes, shoes, and shirts were in short supply, as well as ammunition. Idleness and lack of pay took their toll on troop morale, already lowered by worries about crops at home. Dodge’s militia had arrived at Plattsburg about October 1, and was to be discharged in December and replaced by regulars.

On October 13, the Niagara invasion began under the command of Gen. Dearborn, with Plattsburg as its staging area. The militia reached the Canadian border on November 19 after a twenty-mile march north from Plattsburg. However, two-thirds of his 2,000 militia refused to cross the border and many of his regulars were ill. Despite the military setbacks that increased opposition to the war, President James Madison was re-elected in November.

Dearborn decided against a full-scale invasion, and pulled back on November 22 to Champlain, a village near the Canadian border, and then started marching back to Plattsburg the next day. His provisions and supplies were running low, his army had no tents or winter clothing, the weather was cold and wet, and it was too late in the season to start a campaign.

As noted, when the militiamen left for the border, they left 700 behind who were sick, many of whom died. During that miserable winter several hundred more died. Tradition attributes their deaths to a severe epidemic or to poisoning of their whiskey ration by a British spy. More likely, the cause was the former rather than the latter. Without adequate clothing and shelter, disease and death were inevitable during the miserable winter.

Our great-great grandfather, Daniel Reid (b.1796), lived in North Greenwich, on sixty acres of Lot 70 of the Argyle Patent in Washington County, which was part of the 450 acres that had been granted to his grandfather, John Reid, in 1765. According to family records, his son and our great grandfather, Daniel Reid – died on November 12, 1812, in Cambridge where he was living after his marriage – four days after contracting an “epidemic illness.” It was typical that death from various pneumonias occurred within one to four days. His widow, Bethiah, applied for and

received a widow's pension, claim #WC21079, and he was awarded \$18 for expenses incurred as recorded in Claim #16,689, which she presumably filed.

The six regiments, including Col. Rich's regiment in Simon DeRidder's brigade, were assembled at Salem on July 7, to begin their march to Plattsburg. This brigade was placed in the 1st division, Maj. Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer's command to help protect the Lake Champlain frontier. There were no barracks for these men, only tents, and clothing was in short supply. As the cold, rainy, winter weather set in, with hopelessly inadequate hospitals and staff, illness and suffering from exposure began to affect many. The most likely scenario is that Pvt. Daniel Reid died of pneumonia or influenza. The *Federal Republican and Commercial Gazette* reported on December 12, 1812, that in the Army of the North, of which DeRidder's brigade was a part, "from five to twelve die every day," and one day "twenty had died." On December 21, the same newspaper reported that "the militia had nearly all disbanded without a cent of pay. The sick were found in every tavern and dispersed on every road, begging their way homewards."

A Daniel Reid served in each of two regiments in DeRidder's six regiment brigade. Our Daniel Reid undoubtedly was one of them. I have records of both of these militiamen. They were (1) Daniel Reid (b.1771) who enlisted for six months at age 41, on August 24, 1812, to serve until February 24, 1813 in Col. Calvin Rich's 11th regiment of detached militia, Capt. Philip Van Steenberg's company. Col. Rich was from Sharon, Schoharie County. Rich took command of the regiment on September 7, 1812, when it was ordered to rendezvous at Salem and march north to defend the border to Plattsburg. In its muster roll, under remarks, it was noted that Pvt. Daniel Reid was "allowed 12 days to go home." The regiment was in Richard Dodge's 4th brigade (originally DeRidder's), Maj. Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer's division. Dodge was from Montgomery County. On October 6, 1812, Governor Tompkins visited Sackets Harbor where these troops, including Rich's regiment, were garrisoned on a high bluff overlooking the harbor, unprotected from the winds blowing directly from the lake. He wrote, "The troops will not be able to endure in tents for a fortnight, such wether [sic] as we now have." From Sackets Harbor they marched to Burlington to defend Plattsburg, experiencing very cold and stormy weather without tents and ill-clothed.

On October 13, as noted, the Niagara invasion began, and Rich's and the other militia regiments left for the northern border, leaving the 700 sick behind. On November 17, it was reported that the troops were "destitute of clothing and in one regiment, sixty-four were reported sick. One of the probably sick soldiers, Daniel Reid, was "allowed twelve days to go home" according to his muster roll record. If so, he could have died en route from flu or pneumonia, ill-clothed and exposed to high winds and foul weather while in camp as well as on his way home. In any event, family records indicate that our Daniel Reid had been sick of an epidemic disease, probably flu or pneumonia, for four days prior to his death on November 12, 1812, in Cambridge, where he had enlisted. I believe that this Daniel Reid is our ancestor.

The other possibility (2) is Pvt. Daniel Reid who served in Lt. Col. William Stone's 14th New York militia, Capt. Isaac Benedict's company of riflemen. This regiment was recruited in Saratoga County and was in the service of the United States. Col. Stone was from Whitestone, Oneida County. It was in Jacob Brown's 5th brigade, 1st division, also commanded by Maj. Gen. Stephen Van Rensselaer. This Private Reid's enlistment was for six months, from July 13, 1812, to January 18, 1813. Apparently, he was last paid \$7.98 for the period ending October 23, 1812. Capt. Benedict, Daniel's company commander, also enlisted for the same six-month period, but drew his last pay on October 25, 1812. Benedict's record shows he was at Ogdensburg, probably guarding and assembling stores for his detachments from July 13 to October 13, 1812, and was

paid at Fort Tompkins, Sackets Harbor, on September 12, 1812. Fort Tompkins, named after the governor, had been built by the troops, after their arrival, on the opposite side of the harbor from where they camped. In August while there, they attempted to aid the ship *Julia* while it was in the harbor. This regiment was the one singled out for praise by Gen. Rensselaer. I do not believe that this Pvt. Daniel Reid was one of our ancestors. His pension application submitted in 1871 recorded his residence as Sackets Harbor where he was married and living when he died.

3

ACTION ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN AT WHITEHALL, AND TRAINING CAMPS THERE FOR THE GREEN TROOPS

On April 18, 1814, Gen. DeRidder was warned that a British naval squadron was on Lake Champlain, on a mission to destroy the “village, and important establishments” at the head of the lake, and perhaps at Whitehall, including ships and supplies. As senior officer, he was instructed to go to Whitehall in person, acquire necessary information, and give appropriate instructions to the nearest officers in his command. ‘Gen. Pettit was given the same instructions, was also asked to identify the best places to repel an attack, and be prepared to do so. Pettit’s 9th brigade consisted of five militia regiments and one in the service of the United States (federalized) which was the 63rd New York in which Capt. William Ross served. Records of the 63rd, however, did not survive the 1914 fire in Albany. Nevertheless, as will be seen, I believe he is our ancestor, based on significant circumstantial evidence.

In early May, Maj. Gen. James Wilkinson who succeeded Henry Dearborn in command of the Northern Frontier, wrote the Secretary of War, John Armstrong, of his fears that an enemy flotilla would be in force on Lake Champlain shortly and would attempt to destroy “our flotilla” tied up docks in the harbor, and the public property at Whitehall. Commandants of the Washington, Saratoga, and Warren counties militias were alerted, and three regiments were ordered to be ready to march at a moment’s notice. In addition, Generals DeRidder and Pettit, and a Col. Adams were also alerted. Necessary ammunition and military supplies were sent to them.

British Navy Capt. Daniel Pring sailed his fleet of nineteen small ships on Lake Champlain from a port on Grand Isle, near Burlington. The Americans had mounted a battery of seven guns there, manned by a detachment of light artillerymen supported by Vermont militia. The fight opened on May 13, and the British fleet was roughly handled by the militia. This was the beginning of the Oswego-Sackets Harbor Campaign, May 5 to May 29, 1814.

William Ross died on or about May 20, 1814, “while in the service of the Army of the United States,” according to estate papers filed by his widow in the Saratoga County Court House. This phrase indicates the regiment had been “federalized,” i.e. placed under federal instead of state authority and funding. No records about his military service exist in the National Archives or in the New York State Archives. However, in 1812 there were six Saratoga County federalized militia regiments, including the 63rd New York. They were organized on February 12, 1808, as the 9th brigade of Saratoga County, and were not short-term state militia. These six were assigned to the 9th Infantry Brigade that was initially commanded by Brig. Gen. Samuel Clark, and later by Gen. Thomas Rogers, of Moreau, who was so appointed in 1814.

By 1814, the 9th brigade was in the 3rd military district, 9th division. The regiments were the 7th, 40th, 41st, 63rd, 122nd, 123rd, plus 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th artillery units. William Ross had been appointed an ensign in 1808, and promoted from lieutenant to captain in the 63rd New York regiment on February 11, 1811, when Thomas Rogers was its lieutenant colonel. However, Ross no longer appears as an officer of this regiment in 1814, according to Hugh Hastings' *Council of Appointment* records, when the 63rd was commanded by Col. John M. Berry. (It had been commanded by Thomas Rogers at the time Capt. Ross was appointed). The names of a number of officers serving in this regiment in 1812 are those of neighbors of William Ross in the early 1800's: Doty, Harris, Mott, Thompson, and Gansevoort. All but Gansevoort were still serving in 1814.

The muster roll records of the 9th brigade for July 1 showed 2,891 present for duty, plus Gen. Porter's militia contingent including 1,000 New Yorkers, 500 Pennsylvanians, and 500-600 Indians. They had been camped on Flint Hill since April, drilling under Gen. Scott. "Nothing but night or a heavy fall of snow or rain was allowed to interrupt these exercises . . . often hours a day for three months." This may be said to be the birthplace of the U.S. Regular Army.

By midsummer, Gen. Izard had about 6,000 troops of whom at least 1,000 were on the sick list and 400 in the prison stockade. Those that were in the militia, including the New York militiamen under Gen. Mooers, were as good as their officers while the regulars were better than their politically appointed officers. Militiamen had to learn how to load and shoot the "model 1775" musket, the standard weapon issued to them. It was designed for fighting Indians in the wooded frontier. By a skilled soldier, it could be loaded and fired three times a minute.

Records of Gov. Tompkins indicate that the 9th brigade had also transferred from the 3rd to the 9th division. On May 7, 1814, the 63rd New York, a Saratoga County regiment, was mobilized at Whitehall, together with Saratoga and other Washington County regiments. By then, the brigade had been transferred from Generals Pettit to DeRidder. The 63rd regiment was commanded by Col. Berry, Col. Rogers having been promoted to brigadier general. Presumably, Capt. William Ross at that time still served in the 63rd regiment. Their assignment was to be in readiness to guard against a water attack from the north by enemy flotillas at Whitehall Harbor via Lake Champlain and Lake George.

The May 25, 1814 issue of the newspaper *Independent American*, published in Ballston Spa, Saratoga, lists the officers then serving in the 63rd regiment. Capt. Ross's name was not included. As previously noted, five officers who were serving in 1812 with Ross were still in the regiment at Oswego on May 25, 1814: Doty, Harris, Mott, Thompson, and Gansevoort. All but Gansevoort were still serving during the rest of 1814.

Records of Gov. Tompkins indicate that on May 7, 1814, the 9th brigade had also been transferred from the 3rd to the 4th division, now consisting of seven infantry regiments, including the 63rd. Four artillery units were also transferred from the 3rd to the 4th division. Their assignment was to be in readiness to guard against a water attack by an enemy flotilla at Whitehall, from the north via Lake Champlain and Lake George. The 63rd was commanded by Col. John M. Berry, and Capt. William Ross, presumably was still in the regiment.

DeRidder was the senior brigadier general who would pass on the order to move troops, once he received it from higher authority. It is logical to assume that he would order his Washington County brigade in first. It consisted of Lt. Col. John McCleary's 50th regiment (Washington County); Col. Hercules Rice's 11th (Washington County); Lt. Col. Hendrick Van Schaick's 156th (Washington County); Levi Cooley's company of 3rd (6th) artillery which was part of Col.

Stephen's regiment, and the light artillery (Washington County); and Col. James Green's 118th (Washington County) in which Pvt. John Reid served.

DeRidder also was instructed to identify the best position for blockhouses and breastworks to repel any attack on the Whitehall docks; the American flotilla tied up there; and the gunpowder and supplies in storage. They were also to obtain intelligence as to the enemy plans, and if possible, to be ready to march as soon as the flotilla reached Crown Point, forty miles upstream on the Hudson. While the 63rd militia was stationed at Whitehall during May, 1814, Capt. William Ross could have been there and "died on or about May 20," as his widow stated in his estate papers, since his regiment was not moved until at least May 25, if not later, to Oswego.

The British fleet, however, did not begin to form for a movement from Quebec Harbor into Lake Champlain until the beginning of September. In June, 1814, there were a number of British troop transports in the Quebec harbor, plus a frigate under construction. Meanwhile, Gen. Izard, now in the command of the Northern Frontier was establishing training camps at Albany, Plattsburg, and Burlington, Vermont to train his green troops and inexperienced officers. Brig. Gen. Alexander Macomb, a regular army officer, was in charge of the training camp at Plattsburg. He spent the spring and summer preparing his defense against an invasion of Plattsburg.

By late June, at Plattsburg, there also was grave concern that the British navy was attempting to out-build the Americans. Massive troop movements were underway from Europe after British troops under the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. When that war ended in April, 16,000 hardened British troops were available. By mid-summer, they began arriving in Canada. It was assumed that their aim was total destruction of Sackets Harbor and our defenses on Lake Erie all the way south to Whitehall Harbor and Champlain.

By this time, Gen. George Izard's 4,500 green troops and inexperienced officers at Albany, Plattsburg, and Burlington, Vermont, were busy training. Upon completion, they were transferred to the Niagara Frontier. They also were preparing to counter the expected invasion by building block houses and breastworks. Gen. Alexander Macomb, in charge of the Plattsburg training camp, also spent the spring and summer in Plattsburg preparing his defenses against an invasion at Plattsburg by land. Additionally, Gen. Jacob Brown had a force of 4,000 regulars assembled at Buffalo.

4

THE BATTLE OF PLATTSBURG

In the spring and summer of 1814, preparations for both a sea and land battle by the British as well as the U.S. troops were being made at Plattsburg and vicinity, including the entire Canadian-New York border. On July 25, in the midst of these preparations, the Battle of Lundy's Lane, the bloodiest land engagement of the war was fought. It took place within a mile of Niagara Falls near the Canadian border. On August 3, Gen. Alexander Macomb, who was to lead the Battle of Lundy's Lane, wrote Mooers that the enemy was in sight, and the militia needed to be called out. Mooers' command headquarters were at Plattsburg, but as late as September 2, 1814, he had not called out DeRidder's or Pettit's brigades that included Washington and Saratoga counties. For this neglect, Mooers was later rebuked in a letter from Gov. Tompkins. In fact, their call to arms from Mooers was not made until September 9.

By August 27, nine regular regiments under Gen. Izard had all been moved to Sackets Harbor from Plattsburg, a total of about 4,500 men. This was happening as it was being reported that eleven of Wellington's regiments were arriving in Quebec. The British plan was to make a feint forward attacking Sackets Harbor while they actually intended to attack Plattsburg. So far, their plan was working. Only Macomb's brigade were left to defend Plattsburg. By mid-August, British troops had already arrived at Montreal, most of whom were from Europe, having just defeated Napoleon at Waterloo.

Gen. Izard apparently was convinced that Plattsburg would be attacked first, not Sackets Harbor, but could not convince Secretary of War Armstrong, and had to obey his orders. He expressed his concerns to Armstrong, nonetheless. The Secretary told him to call on the governors of New York and Vermont to send him militia regiments. Meanwhile, Secretary Armstrong also had received spy reports beginning in July that the apparent British invasion objective was indeed Plattsburg, not Sackets Harbor. He either did not believe the spy reports or ignored them. Obeying orders, on September 1, Izard left only 1,500 troops under Gen. Peter B. Porter to guard Plattsburg, 1,300 of whom were effectives. On August 31, Gen. Macomb wrote Mooers from Plattsburg that the British had appeared and the militia needed to be called out.

On September 4, the British began their move to cross the border and attack Plattsburg by land. By September 6, Mooers issued appropriate division orders and notified Gov. Tompkins that he had called out the militia of the northernmost counties. The fight would last until 3 P.M. on September 11, when the British batteries sounded retreat because the British fleet had just surrendered. Its entire 8,200 man army completed its retreat an hour before daybreak the next morning.

The only New York "minutemen" who actually participated in the battle were detached militia ordered into the service of the U.S. under the command of Mooers. They came from the three northern counties of Clinton, Essex, and Franklin. Only about 700 out of a total of 2,500 arrived in time to see action, each with his 1775 model musket, but had no cannon to back them up. The first of these militiamen were in line of battle behind earthen fortifications two days before the British crossed the border. Mooers told them that his object was "for the purpose of repelling the enemy and protecting the citizens in their person and property." There was to be "no depredations or ill-use of property." They were undisciplined, dirty, in ragged clothes, and hungry. They fought alongside about 2,500 Vermont militia and about 1,500 regulars in six regiments.

On September 9, 1814, pursuant to orders from Mooers to DeRidder, his 3rd brigade was ordered to move from Sandy Hill to Plattsburg. Because they were destitute of arms, he also sent a requisition for 1,500 stands of arms to be available to them upon arrival at Charlotte. DeRidder then asked for further orders. One of these three regiments was the 114th, commanded by Col. Hercules Rice, in which our Pvt. John Ross served.

On September 10, they rendezvoused with other troops at Ft. Miller in Washington County. Mooers also sent three field pieces of artillery and two wagons. One field piece was to be used by DeRidder's militia and the other two to be used by a detachment of 220 regulars under Maj. Wool, to annoy the enemy's right flank and rear. Mooers also wrote DeRidder that his people should also annoy the enemy's pickets, including those in his flanks and rear.

These three regiments in DeRidder's 16th brigade, the 114th under Lt. Col. Rice, the 188th under Lt. Col. James Green (Peter Reid's, and probably John Reid's regiment), and the 156th under Lt. Col. Hendrick Van Schaick, remained in Plattsburg after the battle was over on September 11. On September 9, they had been at Sandy Hill awaiting orders from Gen. Mooers

moving them to Plattsburg, even though they were destitute of arms. He did this after describing the military situation to Gov. Tompkins. On their way to Plattsburg, they stopped in Charlotte (Washington County) where DeRidder asked for further orders while awaiting the arrival of the shipment of 1,500 muskets that DeRidder had ordered to be delivered there. On September 10, Mooers ordered three field pieces of artillery to be sent to Plattsburg to “annoy the enemy,” one of which was for DeRidder’s troops.

By September 13, two days after the battle ended, DeRidder’s three regiments must have arrived in Burlington and were quartered there, presumably in college dormitories, until discharged and sent home. Lt. Col. James Green, apparently in charge of the brigade, wrote Gen. Mooers from Troy (date illegible) that he had presented Mooers’ orders to Col. Hendrick Van Schaick, authorizing Green’s detached regiment to return and prepare for a winter campaign. However, Van Schaick did not want to act until he received orders from Mooers. A 440-man Saratoga battalion under Col. David Rogers also arrived that day. Pvt. John Ross served in this battalion and died September 27, 1814. His place of death is unknown.

Col. James Green wrote Gen. Mooers from Troy that after he arrived at Burlington, he went to Albany to ask the governor for further orders, since he had received none from the general. He offered to bring his detached regiment to Plattsburg. Gen. Mooers ordered him to do so, but not until after the battle had ended.

Most of Pettit’s regiments that left Salem, Washington County, likewise departed on the 9th and arrived in Burlington, Vermont, on the 13th or later. By then the Vermonters were already returning home. Nearly every able-bodied New Yorker in the vicinity of Salem participated in the march to a battle that was already over. Roger’s 9th battalion consisted of four regiments from Saratoga County: 7th, 41st, 63rd, and 166th, and three from Washington County: 6th, 50th (now 51st), and 156th.

On September 11, when they reached Whitehall, a boat met them to inform them of the British defeat at the Battle of Plattsburg that day. The troops then boarded the boat and landed as noted on September 13 or later at Burlington, seven miles from Plattsburg. They were quartered there, presumably in college dormitories with other troops, until discharged and sent home within ten days or less, after having been mustered in.

British troops had crossed the upper fork of the Saranac River at about 10:00 A.M. on September 4th with their artillery. As they advanced, the Vermonters retreated for four miles. Another British brigade of 3,400 men crossed at another point, cut off the Vermonters’ escape, and were now behind the American line. By September 11, with the British in full control of the field, the battle was called off when a messenger arrived with an order to withdraw because the British had lost the naval battle at Cumberland Bay in Lake Champlain. In their retreat to Canada, their wounded were left behind, as well as large supplies of food and ammunition. Some 300 deserters were captured by the Vermonters and others were killed. Col. Macomb’s brigade remained in Plattsburg until at least September 21, despite the fact that on September 13, Gen. Macomb had already issued orders countermanding the march of thousands of New York militiamen who were flocking to Plattsburg, while he was disbanding thousands more who had already arrived.

5

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

The Battle of Plattsburg, also known as the Battle of Lake Champlain, September 6-11, 1814, was the turning point in the War of 1812. It effectively ended the competition for territorial acquisition by the two countries, England and France. The battle took place while the Treaty of Ghent to end the war was being negotiated. Britain had just defeated Napoleon, was war-weary, was heavily in debt, and wanted a quick and decisive victory. It now had significant available naval power and 10,000 experienced regular troops no longer needed to fight Napoleon. If the French had won the Battle of Plattsburg, their bargaining power for territorial acquisition at the peace negotiations in the Belgian city of Ghent would have been tilted to their advantage, perhaps even allowing them to dictate peace terms. After the British were repulsed in Baltimore and the news reached England in mid-October, 1814, the British peace commissioner concluded that “if we had either burnt Baltimore or held Plattsburg, I believe we could have had peace on our terms.” The Treaty of Ghent was signed on Christmas Eve 1814.

6

FORT ERIE SORTIE AND A SUMMARY OF THE RECORDS OF THE FOUR ROSSES AND FOUR REIDS

The Fort Erie Sortie, fought on September 17, only six days after the Battle of Plattsburg, was the last major battle on the Northern Frontier. It took place on the Niagara River in Canadian territory where the fort guarded the water approach to Buffalo, and was another major defeat for the British.

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After that action which was fought by Gen. Porter’s division, only minor demonstrations by his and Gen. Izard’s troops took place at Chippewa Creek, because the British were unwilling to fight another open engagement. Consequently, Fort Erie was abandoned and destroyed in November, 1814. The war on New York’s Northern Frontier was virtually over. Gen. Brown marched his troops from the Canadian side to the American side of the Niagara River and disbanded them in February 1815.

The performance of Gen. Peter Porter’s brigade of New York and Pennsylvania was astonishing. Gen. Porter was a “War Hawk” ex-congressman from Buffalo who raised and equipped the brigade at his own expense. He and Gen. Jacob Brown were the ablest militia commanders in the war. Porter could turn “raw troops into steady grenadiers.” His brigade consisted of Col. Hugh W. Dobbins and Col. James Stone’s New York regiments, Fenton’s Pennsylvanians, a small squad of New York cavalry, plus Joseph Willcock’s Canadian Volunteers, all militiamen. Porter’s was one of only three brigades that fought in this battle.

The Plattsburg and Ft. Erie battles were the most decisive battles in the War of 1812. They were to that war as important as the Battle of Saratoga was to the American Revolution, but few, if any, Washington and Saratoga county militia regiments participated in either battle.

The successful Niagara Campaign more than offset both Gen. William Hull’s ignominious surrender of Detroit early in the war, together with Gen. Solomon Van Rensselaer’s defeat in Queenstown shortly thereafter.

Much of the success at Ft Erie was due to the generalship of now Maj. Jacob Brown’s three-brigade division composed of about 5,000 troops who arrived from Plattsburg the day before the

battle. Some of his contemporary generals thought he was ignorant of military matters, but his aggressive actions in the Niagara Campaign proved them wrong.

On September 9, 1814, Gov. Tompkins ordered Col. Prior to march his 850-man detached battalion that included his 50th (now 51st) regiment of Saratoga County militia to Plattsburg and report to Gen. Mooers. On September 10 he had ordered 2,000 muskets to its defense by the New York militia. On September 24, Prior's detached battalion (now only 803 men) had finally arrived in the service and on the payroll of the U.S., but it was two days too late to even participate in the Ft. Erie sortie.

According to their military service and pension records, four of our ancestors – Peter Reid (b. 1795), William Reid (b. 1791), Daniel T. Reid (b. 1786 or 1787), and John Ross (b. 1791), were among those militiamen from the southern Washington/Saratoga County area who were ordered to respond to the “alarming situation on the northern frontier.” They arrived too late to participate. Pvt. Peter Reid's (b. 1795 or 1796) regiment of militia, the 50th New York, about 500 strong, mustered in on September 8, at West Hebron on the 10th. It arrived about September 15, to be armed at the U.S. arsenal. If so, it most likely served in the brigade of Simon DeRidder who received his orders on September 6, to rendezvous his Salem militia at Ft. Miller and proceed north. On September 10, his troops embarked by steamboat from Whitehall, but arrived after the battle was won. They landed seven miles from Burlington and were quartered there in college dormitories. DeRidder “was much censured for creeping along as such a snail's pace.” The 50th New York was also referred to as the Salem Hebron Regiment

Pvt. Peter Reid of North Greenwich enlisted on September 8, 1814, in Capt. James Hay's company of Lt. Col. John McCleary's 50th Washington County regiment, 16th brigade, United States Infantry. He served for sixteen days and was discharged at Burlington. Peter Reid's father was Alexander Reid and his mother was Eunice Campbell. They lived on Lot 70 of the Argyle Patent at Reid's Corners. On June 15, 1855, Peter was awarded 160 acres of bounty (Warrant 31667) and a monthly pension (Case #16689), and \$13.50 for clothing and transportation.

1st Sgt. William Reid (b. 1791), of Greenwich, Washington County, also enlisted in Capt. James Hay's company of Lt. Col. John McCleary's regiment for the defense of Plattsburg on September 1, 1814, in Greenwich, served eighteen days, and was discharged in Burlington. He was awarded 160 acres of bounty land (Warrant #13819), an \$18 monthly pension (Case #16689), and \$34 for clothing and transportation. He also lived on Lot 70 of the Argyle Patent and owned a store at Reid's Corners, earlier known as North Greenwich. Witnesses to his applications were Harvey L. Reid and William F. Reid, both of whom were relatives. His wife was Ann King.

Pvt. Daniel T. Reid (b. 1786 or 1787 in North Greenwich) served his first enlistment in Capt. William Badger's company, Col. Stephen Thorn's 3rd (later 6th), Washington County artillery in DeRidder's brigade. This enlistment was for six months beginning July 10, 1812. His parents were Alexander and Eunice Campbell Reid. At the expiration of his six months enlistment term, he volunteered to serve an additional four and one-half months. He enlisted a third time on September 8, 1814, for the defense of Plattsburg and served until September 16, when he was discharged at Burlington on September 22. For this period of service, he was paid \$4.30 (S.O. 7497). For his first two enlistments, he was awarded 160 acres (Warrant #81884) and \$67 plus interest (S.O. 12603).

Interestingly, a family legend holds that William Ross (b. 1797), a brother of Charles Ross, my great grandfather, fought in the War of 1812 and moved thereafter to Pittsburgh. If so, he could have moved back sometime after 1820, probably to Saratoga County; its Census of 1820

does show a William Ross as household head. He bought a farm in 1825, sold it in 1826, bought another in 1827, and died unmarried at age 30 on February 28, 1828. He is buried in the Bacon Hill Cemetery in the Ross-Collin lot. He left no will. To date, I have found no records to document his service, but if he did serve, he would be in our line of descent.

A Pvt. John Ross (b. 1791), served in Gen. DeRidder's brigade under Col. Hercules Rice of the 114th New York, Capt Henry Perine's company. His residence was in Argyle, Washington County. He enlisted in Cambridge, Washington County, on September 8, 1814, for the defense of Plattsburg "for an indefinite period." On September 10, they assembled with the other regiments at Ft. Miller. He was discharged at Burlington on September 16, having served only 8 days, was paid \$4 (Voucher #43 M), and mustered out on September 22. His discharge noted that his residence was in Jackson, Washington County, 120 miles from Burlington, and therefore he was being paid two days of travel time home. In April, 1855, he was paid an additional \$65.50 (Award #3705) for clothing, equipment, transportation from Burlington to Jackson, and other contingent expenses. Another \$2.50 was also awarded to him. At that time he was living in North Argyle.

A third Pvt. John Ross served as one of the militiamen from Col. Hugh W. Dobbin's 23rd New York detached militia. A total of 400 men served in this regiment, including those from Capt. John Fleming's company. They served from August 27 to November 8, 1814, on the Niagara Frontier, including in the Ft. Erie sortie on September 17. The regiment was in Gen. Peter Porter's brigade, Gen. Jacob Brown's left division. The only payroll record of this Pvt. John Ross that I have found is for the period August 27 to November 8, 1814, when he was paid \$19.35 for service on the Niagara Frontier. The Ft. Erie sortie was fought on the Niagara River in Canadian territory. Dobbin's regiment was part of Col. Wood's right column of 900 infantry, of which 500 were militia. It was singled out for praise by Gen. Porter for its role in helping to destroy or dismantle three enemy artillery batteries of twenty-four-pounders. He added that every one of Dobbin's men did his duty. Gen. Brown also reported that the New York militia "behaved gallantly."

On September 13, 1814, Pvt. John Ross was serving in the 11th regiment commanded by Col. David Rogers when it arrived as part of a 440-man Saratoga battalion in Plattsburg. It was one of two battalions serving under Maj. Gen. Lewis. At the time of his enlistment, he reported Argyle as his residence.

His regiment was part of the 3rd military district that embraced Washington and Saratoga counties as well as Albany, Rensselaer, and Montgomery. These state militia regiments were placed "in the service of the U.S." His death date is recorded September 27, 1814, place unknown. He is buried in the Prospect Hill near his Argyle home. As yet, I have not documented that either of these two John Rosses was one of our ancestors, but I believe the second probably is.

Not until September 9, was Lt. Col. John Prior's 50th militia ordered to Plattsburg by Gov. Tompkins. It was described as a Washington County regiment of 850 men assigned to Brig. Gen. Daniel Wright's 2nd brigade, Gen. Benjamin Mooers' division. It included Saratoga County light infantry, grenadiers, and riflemen who enlisted to serve for three months beginning August 16.

On July 29, 1814, the 50th was assigned to Gen. Nathaniel King's 3rd division. On August 24, Capt. Waterman's artillery company from Ballston was assigned to Prior's regiment. On September 12, 1814, it was ordered transferred to Gen. Izard's command and attached to a Washington County regiment. Until then, it was described as a Saratoga regiment and was transferred together with a Washington County regiment. The order was issued by Gov.

Tompkins to Gen. Mooers. Prior's detached regiment did not arrive until October 24, and was in the service of the U.S. at Plattsburg with 803 men.

I have been unable to find additional records on either of the last two privates John Ross in either the National or New York State Archives. Nevertheless, the latter of the two was from Saratoga County where our Ross ancestors were from.

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