

The War of 1812



On July 12, 1812, an army of more than 1000 Americans marched into British North America. They thought it would be a quick and easy job to push the British out of North America.

Causes of the War

By 1812, Britain and France had been at war for almost 20 years. As a result European ports were **blockaded**. This angered the Americans who held a **neutral position**. Because of the blockade they could not deliver their cargo to the European ports. A second war practice of the British angered Americans. A number of deserters from the British navy were working aboard American ships, where the pay was higher and working conditions were better. The British began to stop American merchant ships at sea and search them for deserters. When they discovered sailors whom they suspected of being deserters, they were removed and pressed back into the British navy. A number of innocent Americans who were not British deserters were taken in this way.

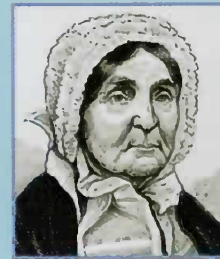
There was a group of influential men in the United States who were called War Hawks because they were pushing for war. British North America had rich farmland that would be useful to the United States. Most of the good farmland in the United States was very expensive. In British North America, particularly in Upper Canada, there was plenty of inexpensive, good farmland available. Some Americans saw the British North American colonists as possible allies for the Native peoples who were resisting westward movement by American colonists. The Native leader, Tecumseh, had already gone to British North America to see if he could enlist help for the Native cause there. If the Americans could take over British North America, there would be no more danger from the Native peoples.

Modern-day historians tend to place national honour as the major cause for the War of 1812. By 1812, the British still had not accepted the Americans as their equals. They continued to look upon the Americans as colonials (as children), not as a full **sovereign nation**. The Americans reasoned that if they were equals the British would not take sailors off American ships. One nation should not treat another nation in such an insensitive manner.

Blockade—closed off; usually done to a harbour or port in wartime to prevent supplies from reaching their destination

Sovereign nation—a country that is independent of the control of other governments

A Heroine of the War of 1812



Laura Secord (1775–1868)

Laura Secord and her husband lived in Queenston in the Niagara region. She became a heroine of the War of 1812 when she fearlessly risked her life to help the British.

James Secord was injured in the Battle of Queenston Heights in October 1812. While he was at home recovering from his wounds, Laura overheard some American soldiers discussing a surprise attack on the British. Laura decided to warn the British commander, Fitzgibbon. Because the American troops guarded the roads, she walked 23 kilometres across fields and through forests. The attack occurred as planned, but the Americans ended up surrendering to Fitzgibbon.

C-10717, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (detail).

Native Role in the War

Tecumseh (1767–1813)

Chief Tecumseh of the Shawnee was a well respected Native leader. He wanted to protect Native lands from the Americans who were pressing westward and hoped that the British would help him.

He turned out to be a powerful ally of the British forces during the War of 1812. He and his men helped General Brock capture Detroit in August of 1812. By October of 1813 the Americans were advancing well into Upper Canada while the British retreated. Tecumseh finally persuaded the British commander to take a stand at the Thames River, not far from present-day Stratford, Ontario. Forty-eight of the British were killed and the rest surrendered. The courageous Tecumseh was also killed in this battle. With him died the Native hope for their own separate territory.

Events of the War

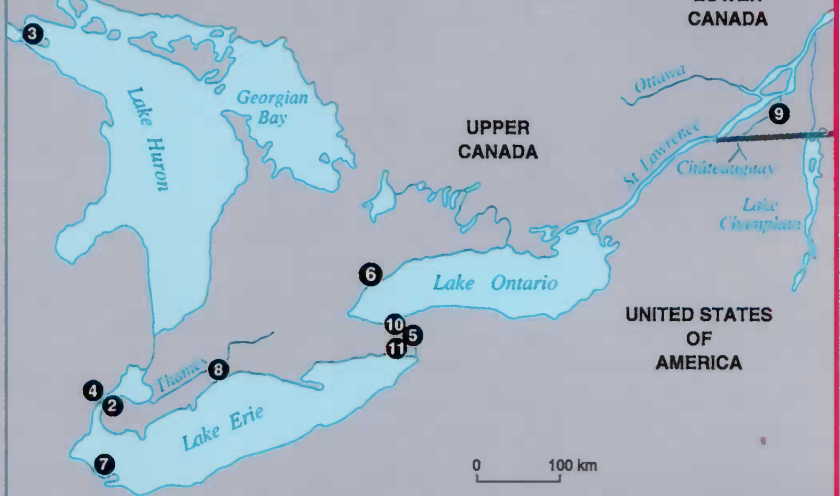
As you will see from the map timeline, both sides had victories. There was no winner. By the end of the war, Britain had possession of some American territory but they returned it in the Treaty of Ghent. The War of 1812 has been called “the war that nobody won.”



C-276. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (detail).

Major Events of the War of 1812

- 1 June 1812—U.S. declared war on Britain.
- 2 July 1812—American army enters Upper Canada.
- 3 July 1812—British captured Fort Michilimackinac.
- 4 August 1812—British commander General Brock and Native chief Tecumseh captured Detroit from American General Hull.
- 5 October 1812—Battle of Queenston Heights. Brock killed. Heights taken from Americans.
- 6 April 1813—Americans captured York, the capital of Upper Canada. Parliament buildings burned.
- 7 September 1813—Americans destroyed British naval power on Lake Erie.
- 8 October 1813—Battle of Thames River. American victory. Chief Tecumseh killed.
- 9 October 1813—American force of 4000 troops retreated from British and Canadian force of 1000.
- 10 December 1813—Americans set fire to the town of Newark.
- 11 July 1814—Battle of Lundy’s Lane. Neither side could claim a victory, but Americans retreated to Fort Erie.
- 12 Summer 1814—Washington occupied for one day by British. President’s mansion scorched by fire. Repainted white. Called “White House” ever since.
- 13 December 1814—Treaty of Ghent (peace treaty).
- 14 January 1815—Battle of New Orleans. Andrew Jackson won a victory for the Americans. He did not know that the peace treaty had already been signed.



Results of the War

Even though the War of 1812 had no winner, there were some long-term effects:

- American immigrants were discouraged from coming to British North America.
- The war stabilized the border between the United States and British North America at the 49th parallel, from the Lake of the Woods west to the Rocky Mountains. The fur country of Oregon Territory was to be jointly occupied.*

- The Rush–Bagot Agreement of 1817 demilitarized the Great Lakes.
- Britain began to respect the United States as a separate nation. There was still distrust, though, as the British built Fort Henry at Kingston for protection from possible American invasion. The Americans turned their attention away from British North America and looked southward and westward for expansion.
- A very small feeling of unity began to develop in the Canadas, especially in the colony of Lower Canada. Here the French and English had fought side by side against their common enemy, the Americans.
- The Maritime colonies became more prosperous as a result of the war.

*This arrangement lasted until 1846 when the 49th parallel was chosen for that boundary as well.