

Women's Roles in the Northern Theater Of the War of 1812

Women's Roles during the War of 1812 Misses, Mistresses, and Misconceptions

Until the 20th century, war and military affairs were primarily considered male roles. Men marched to war, men fought, men died. But of course that does not mean that civilian life ceased during war, or that women had no role in warfare. What were women doing? What choices did they have? How did their participation in war affect their lives and the lives of their families?

Throughout history, women's wartime roles have been vast and varied, ever changing to meet the new demands and stresses caused by conflict. Just as in peacetime, wartime roles varied based on ethnicity, social class, and geographic location. Examining the Northern Theater of the War of 1812, we see that women played large, if somewhat behind-the-scenes, roles.

This unit, with readings and explanatory materials, is designed to explore the role women played in the War of 1812 in the Northern Theater of the war.

National History Standards

- Standard 1A – The student understands the international background and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812 and the Monroe Doctrine.
- Standard 4C – The student understands changing gender roles and the ideas and activities of women reformers.

New York State Learning Standards – New York and United States History

- Standard 1 – Social Studies – Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.
- Key Idea 2: Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connection and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives.
- Key Idea 3: Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and the United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

Domestic Responsibilities

While there were different social classes in the early 1800s, as there are today, women's responsibilities did not differ very much from class to class. The wealthy may have had more help (servants) to assist with the domestic responsibilities of running their

households but women during the 1812 era had to do all of the tasks that women do today, without the labor-saving devices we take for granted. Women were responsible for feeding and clothing their families, cleaning their houses, caring for children, and for all other tasks within the house. Well-to-do women were able to hire servants but poorer women had only themselves and their children. Laundry, in good weather, could take 2 to 3 days. Candles had to be made so that the family could see after dark. Clothing was produced without the aid of a sewing machine, although the Industrial Revolution made machine spinning and weaving common. Shirts for men, shifts and aprons for women, and children's clothing were commonly made at home.

The *Plattsburgh Republican*, in November 1812, published the following, an indication of how women contributed to the war effort: "The young ladies of Manchester, Bennington county, have presented the troops belonging to the Vermont detached Militia with one hundred pairs of socks and mittens, which will ensure them the esteem of the soldiers, and entitle them to the respect of the citizens." September, the time of the Battle of Plattsburgh, was the time when women had to begin planning for winter. Crops had to be harvested, preserved, placed in root cellars, or dried. The advancing British army threatened this process, and raised fears of a loss of the winter food supply. In 1811, months before the war, Betsey Delord of Plattsburgh wrote this letter to her husband:

Plattsburg April 1811

Dear Hub

I have been as busy as a bee. Every day I have been to our house. Our men appear all to be doing very nice. The window blinds are all up nice. Got one room lath'd and most another. They will begin today the floors. Miller came and is preparing to go to work. I exhorted him to be vigilant. I spend some time there every day and Hawkins gets some liquor of me every day. I feel quite the woman of business.

Adieu, yours ever,

B. Delord.

Questions for discussion:

Women's responsibilities did not differ very much from social class to social class. What was one main difference between well-to-do women and poorer women?

What are five (5) tasks that had to be completed around the house?

What did the women of Manchester in Bennington County, Vermont do for the militia?

According to the letter from Betsy Delord to her husband Henry, what was Betsy doing in Plattsburgh in April of 1811?

Women in Wartime Plattsburgh

Throughout the War of 1812, the Champlain Valley and Plattsburgh were points of interest for both British and American forces. In late 1811, citizens in Plattsburgh were preparing for conflict. War was declared on June 18, 1812, and patriotic fervor grew in Plattsburgh.

Women were drawn into the fight from the very beginning. As men young and old prepared for war, to defend homes and families, women dealt with the changes that war would bring to their lifestyles. The troops that garrisoned at Plattsburgh had to coexist with the local population as the soldiers waited to defend the area from future attack. Women were employed at the hospital to care for the sick, as noted by Mrs. Shaw who became ill herself while working there in the winter of 1812-1813. Others billeted soldiers in their homes as exemplified by a public notice in the *Plattsburgh Republican* published January 8, 1813.

In September 1814, war came to Plattsburgh in what would become the Battle of Plattsburgh. As local militia and regular forces rushed to meet the British approaching from Canada, the remaining families faced the choice of how to remain safe as the region became a war zone. Would they leave or stay? Where was safety?

Tales of Bravado

In Chazy, the Hubbell family chose to stay home as the British army marched past on its way to Plattsburgh. A British general and his staff quartered at the house. According to family legend, at dinner on the eve of the battle, Anna Hubbell told the British that they would get no farther than Plattsburgh and soon would be galloping back. The general replied, if that happened, he and each of his officers would throw their purses at her feet. After the U.S. victory on September 11, 1814, Anna stood while the British retreated to Canada. Suddenly, the general and his staff lined up, halted, and threw their money at her feet as promised.

A similar event was recounted years later by Gideon Rugar: “Mrs. Mollie Hamilton, grandmother of Mrs. Julius Rugar, my son’s wife, lived on Rugar Street on the northwest corner of Hammond Lane. When the British soldiers marched by singing, she stuck her head out of a dormer window and said, “You are marching to the tune of ‘God Save the King’ now; you’ll come back to the tune of ‘Yankee Doodle’.” A soldier said, “Stick your damn long neck back or I’ll shoot it off.”

The Safety of Home

The Dominy families of Beekmantown remained at home as the British army occupied the area. According to Henry Dominy, on September 3, Henry’s aunt was preparing breakfast for a local militia officer when British troops arrived at the door. She quickly assisted the militia officer’s escape through a window. Henry Dominy also recounted that Robert Bateman was nearly killed in Bateman’s home during the skirmish as the British advanced toward Plattsburgh. “His wife urged him to go down cellar or he would be killed. He turned to talk with her and just as he turned, a ball came crashing through the very window pane he had just been looking out of.”

The Culver family, also of Beekmantown, chose to stay in their home as a skirmish occurred outside, on Culver Hill on September 6. Nathaniel Culver, his grandfather, grandmother, uncle, and Olive Fisher hid in the safety of the cellar as “the balls went through and through our house.”

Questions for discussion:

What was the date Congress declared war on England?

What were two things Plattsburgh women did to help with the war effort?

Name four families that had interesting stories to tell after the Battle of Plattsburgh.

The Exodus - Fleeing Near and Far

As the British approached, families fled Plattsburgh in all directions to go to safety. Those who left Plattsburgh typically returned home a few days after the battle.

At a time when militia units from Vermont were arriving to assist the troops in Plattsburgh, residents were fleeing to Vermont. According to the writings of Mrs. Ann Hannah Gilman, she fled her family home on Cumberland Head to Middlebury. “Our family, accordingly, packed up what we would take with us and buried some of what we could not take in the swamp, set out for the Village to take passage in a sloop, as there were no steamboats. We were in trouble. The bridge had been taken up, all but the timbers. I was carried across and soon all in a bateau started for the sloop.” The family arrived safely in Middlebury where they listened to the roar of the cannon. Other residents were not as lucky as the Gilman family. Elizabeth Mallory was living on Broad Street in Plattsburgh with her husband and infant son in 1814. While her husband fought in the militia, she stayed with a Mr. McIntyre on the outskirts of town. The Lewis family of Salmon River fled after Mrs. Lewis, her mother, and three children baked bread and handed it out to the American militia as they prepared to fight. “Her house was the last and she waited until the men had gone by. Then my mother and grandmother Thompson picked out the best of their clothes and their silver and put them in pillow cases and started south.”

Fleeing south was common, since the peaceful Quaker Union lay to the south. “Although fourteen miles away, we could see the dense smoke of the battle. The houses in our vicinity were filled with people who had fled from Plattsburgh.”

Margaret Miller Davidson resided in Plattsburgh at the time of the battle. She recorded the events in *Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Margaret M. Davidson, the Mother of Lucretia Marie and Margaret M. Davidson* published in 1843. In the following excerpt, Mrs. Davidson refers to the main character (known to be herself) as Mrs. Stanley. Her narrative gives an accurate, if somewhat overly dramatic, account of the female plight as Dr. and Mrs. Stanley decided to send their children to Peru ahead of them prior to the battle.

“They had all been busy, and had accomplished a great deal. Mrs. Stanley directed Cynthia to put up a large basket of provisions, wisely concluding that food might be scarce in a little hamlet where so many hundreds were unexpectedly thrown upon the hospitality of the inhabitants. They were now ready, and Mrs. Stanley knew of no other way to send them but by procuring seats for them on one of the many loaded wagons which were constantly passing from Chazy and Cumberland Head. She had hardly resolved upon this step, when she heard the sound of wagons; on hailing one of them, to her infinite relief, she found it to be the property of a respectable Quaker, whom she had often seen, and whose reputation she knew to be good. After some little hesitation, and the offer of a liberal reward, she procured seats for Cynthia, the children, Fidele, and the basket. They were to be taken immediately to the home of Cynthia, where Dr. and Mrs. Stanley were to join them as soon as the wagons came to take their household goods. The trial of parting with her children was almost too much for Mrs. Stanley. The fortune of war might separate them for ever; the poor little things wept, and entreated to stay until their parents went, but Mrs. S. knew it was her duty to remain until she had secured their property. She had been too great a sufferer on the preceding summer, not to perceive the necessity of this decision. It was uncertain when the teams would arrive, and it was important that the children should be removed to a place of safety as soon as possible.”

After reaching the Union, Davidson described the scene from Mrs. Stanley’s window, “The street was filled with horses, wagons, and carriages of all descriptions, in readiness at a moment’s warning to fly and keep before the enemy. Foot passengers, helpless women and children of all ages and sexes, thronged the road, who, having no means of conveyance, and alarmed by the report of Indians, with a few necessaries tied in a handkerchief, had left their little all a prey to the marauding soldiery.”

Mrs. Ann Hannah Gilman fled with her family to Middlebury, Vermont.

Questions for discussion:

What was the most common direction people fled to avoid the invading British army?

Why did the refugees choose that direction?

Base your next three answers on the selection written by Margaret Miller Davidson:

Why did Dr. and Mrs. Stanley stay behind after sending their children to Quaker Union?

How did the Stanley children get to Quaker Union?

What did Mrs. Stanley see when she reached the Quaker Union?

What difficulty did Mrs. Gilman have crossing the Saranac River in Plattsburgh? How did she finally get to Middlebury?

The Quaker Union

During the War of 1812, the Quaker Union became a safe haven for the Davidson family, the Delord family and many others, but today, little is left of this early Peru settlement. In 1788, Zephaniah Platt hired Quaker brothers William and John Keese to survey a portion of his land fifteen miles south of Plattsburgh, with an option to buy lots of their choosing. William Keese took advantage of the offer and in 1790, he along with several members of his family became the first Quaker settlers in Plattsburgh (later Peru). Soon other settlers, Quaker and non-Quaker, followed.

By 1810, the Union was a farm community of forty families, a post office, two stores, a tavern, blacksmith shops, a school, and a church. Ruth Hull Keese and her daughter Elizabeth Keese Smith practiced medicine and midwifery throughout the area. According to Stephen Keese Smith, his grandmother, Ruth Hull Keese, was a skilled botanist and brought a tin distillery from Dutchess County to the Union. "My mother, Elizabeth Keese Smith, had this distillery and used it. She was the oldest daughter and practiced under her mother. When her mother could not go out, my mother went. Both of them practiced midwifery all over that part of the country as long as they were able."

The Union became a safe haven during the War of 1812 because of the Quakers. The focal point in the lives of Quakers was the Protestant religion as preached by founder George Fox. Quakers believed that God's spirit, the "inner light," is in every human being to be used for the good of humanity. Friends, as Quakers were called, believed that all men and women were equal, and that they should live without war, class distinction, and human bondage. Friends believed that they could not follow Christ's teaching and use violence. Therefore, they refused to go to war. Stephen Keese Smith was only eight when the Battle of Plattsburgh occurred. From his home in the Union he could hear "cannon shattering the First Day" and "see billowing clouds of smoke." Putting his ear to the ground he could feel the shaking from the cannon fire. There were very few new members of the Quaker settlement in Peru after 1810. The last recorded meeting of the Quaker Union in Peru was 1879.

Questions for discussion:

What were the names of the Quaker brothers hired in 1788 by Zephaniah Platt to survey land south of Plattsburgh?

What occupations were practiced by Ruth Hull Keese and her daughter Elizabeth Keese Smith?

What are three key beliefs of the Quakers?

“Following the Drum” - Life in the Army

Officers’ Wives

Officers’ wives could travel with their husbands if they wished. Life for an officer’s wife depended on her husband’s post. The greatest task was traveling, whether it was to a foreign land, city, or frontier destination. “According to one authority, British military wives fit into distinct groupings: ‘women who follow an army may be ordered (if they can be ordered) in three ranks, or rather classes. The first shall be those who are ladies, and are the wives of the general and other principal commanders of the army, who for the most part, are carried in coaches...The second class is those who ride on horseback...The third class is those who walk afoot, and are the wives of inferior officers and soldiers.’”

Enlisted Men’s Wives

Military marriages were discouraged in both the American and British armies of the period. British recruiting parties were instructed to avoid accepting married men, but since recruiting parties were paid for recruits it is unlikely that the order was followed. British army regulations of the period required that a soldier secure the permission of his commanding officer before marrying. “... every reference must be made by the Officer commanding the company to which the man belongs, as to the character of the female, with respect to her honesty, good conduct, and ability to support herself.” This process was intended to insure that the woman was not a burden on the company as marriages increased the number of dependents attached to the army. Men did marry without permission, but approved marriages allowed women to be recognized by the regiment and given accommodations and rations. British army regulations varied and appear to have been interpreted by regiments and companies on a situational basis. In 1813, regulations regarding wives stipulated, “six per company.” The wife’s entitlement of rations was half of her husband’s. The 1813 *U.S. Army Register*, regarding rations, stated “Women (in the proportion of 1 to every 17 men) a ration in kind, also to matrons and nurses allowed in hospitals.” Women could offset their rations by gardening and earning extra money.

Common employment included:

- Cleaner or servant
- Nurse
- Seamstress
- Cook
- Laundress

Women who were considered a drain on their husbands, who disgraced themselves, or who broke regulations were subject to similar punishments as the soldiers. Wives in the army also had to face the grim reality of war. Husbands could be wounded or killed in battle. A woman on campaign was often faced with the task of searching for her husband among the wounded or dead after a battle. Typically, if a woman’s husband was killed in battle, the woman would remarry quickly since her fortune was linked to that of her husband.

Camp followers

Camp followers were not married to soldiers, and thus did not draw rations. They followed the army and made their livelihood doing basic chores and foraging. As civilians, the camp followers were not in the army, but were subject to “orders, according to the rules and discipline of war.” Others became sutlers, military traders, selling goods to soldiers. “The U.S. army specified that no sutler was permitted to sell any Kind of Liquors or Victuals, or to keep their Houses or Shops open, for the Entertainment of Soldiers, after Nine at Night, or before the Bearing of Reveilles, or upon Sundays, during the Divine Service or Sermon, on the penalty of being dismissed from all future Suttling.”

At Plattsburgh

There were women with both the British and the American armies at Plattsburgh. Mary Sheldon lived in Clinton County in 1814 and she saw the invading British army as it approached Plattsburgh. “Some of the women with the British army stopped on the State Road where it turned to the Creek and did their washing. They came up to our house and borrowed an iron kettle of us, which they never returned.”

Life in the Navy

Officers’ Wives

As it was with army officers, marriage also was discouraged for naval officers. A period treatise warned officers that love was “the most dangerous of all the passions; mistrust yourself in this passion more than in any other, for it has often effected the ruin of the bravest characters.” Instead, have “a thirst for glory and renown, and you will tear yourself without much difficulty from the allurements of love.” Wives waited at home or in a home port for the return of their husbands. Their lives were characterized in peace and in war by long periods of separation and brief reunions.

Sailors’ Wives

Neither the United States nor Britain prohibited sailors from marrying during this period. British regulations did not allow women at sea “either as passengers, or as part of the crew, unless they first obtain permission from their superiors.” The Royal Navy only allowed wives of sailors on board the ship in port. US regulations stated that the commanding officer of a warship was “not to carry any women to sea without orders from the navy office, or the commander of the squadron.” Despite these orders there is evidence that women did go to sea on warships.

At Plattsburgh, Lucy Macdonough was with her husband, Thomas, during much of the War of 1812 although she did not stay with him aboard ship. Records held in the National Archives indicate that there were three women captured with the British squadron on Lake Champlain.

Questions for discussion:

How were British military wives classified?

Why did British enlisted men need permission from their commanding officer to marry?

Why was it important for women that their marriages be “approved marriages”?

How could army wives could offset their rations and earn extra money?

Why would wives of soldiers killed in battle remarry quickly?

Who were Camp Followers and how did the army regulate their activities?

Could wives be found on British and American naval vessels? Explain.

WOMEN IN UNUSUAL OCCUPATIONS

Ann Mott - Pioneer Canadian Woman Publisher

During the War of 1812, Ann Mott, from Saint John, New Brunswick, became a widow. She had worked with and learned the printing business from her husband who was authorized by his Majesty King George III to print all official documents in the Province. She wanted to remain the official printer as well as continue the newspaper she and her husband had started. No woman had ever been given this designation before. To keep this important and profitable job and continue her other publishing work, she changed the sign over the door to read “Royal Printer,” a phrase that could be interpreted to mean the business was the printer not the person doing the actual work. In January 1815 a small announcement appeared in the paper changing its name from the Royal Gazette to the New Brunswick Advertiser. Ann Mott also explained she was the sole proprietor with her son. She remained in this position for the rest of her life. (Graves 117-118)

Graves, Dianne. In the Midst of Alarms, The Untold Story of Women and the War of 1812. Cap-Saint-Ignace, Quebec, Canada: Robin Brass Studio Inc, 2007.

Sarah Smith Emery - Innkeeper and Smuggler

Before and during the War of 1812, Americans were forbidden to trade with the British. Most luxury goods, however, came from the British. Sarah Smith Emery and her husband, David, ran a popular inn in Newburyport, Massachusetts, which was on the

road from British Canada to Boston. There was lively smuggling going on between these two places.

At Sarah's tavern at Newburyport, the "accommodations were excellent," and the teamsters used it as their headquarters (Graves 108). The Emerys' prosperity began one night when Sarah and her husband, David, were awakened by a knock on their bedroom window. Outside was a local man with a stagecoach, as Sarah Emery herself recalled, "filled with merchandise, gloves, Muslins, laces, vestings, ribbons, and other articles of a like description" (275). Sarah recounted that the goods were "hastily placed in my best bedroom, from whence they were gradually taken to the stores in town" (Graves 108-109.)

The demand for these goods was very high both locally and in Boston. Why would New Englanders engage in smuggling during a war? Many New Englanders made a living by trade with the British. When that trade was forbidden both before and during the war, they lost jobs and income. Many New Englanders were against the trade embargo and against the war.

Emery, Sarah Anna, ed. *Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian*. Newburyport, MA: William H. Huse, 1879.

Graves, Dianne. *In the Midst of Alarms, the Untold Story of Women and the War of 1812*. Cap-Saint-Ignace, Quebec, Canada: Robin Brass Studio Inc., 2007.

Questions for discussion:

What was Ann Mott's "unusual occupation"?

How did she keep this position after her husband died?

Where was Sarah and David Emery's inn located?

Why did many Americans, like Sarah Smith Emery, smuggle during the War of 1812?

The Commanders' Wives

Lucy Ann Shaler Macdonough

On September 11, 1814, Lucy Ann Macdonough, eight months pregnant, waited on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain for the results of the battle between U.S. forces and British invasion forces. She had been with her husband for almost two years as the ships under his command patrolled the Lake and were readied for the anticipated invasion. One of the first letters Lt. Macdonough wrote after successfully defeating the British ships in Plattsburgh Bay was to assure Lucy Ann of the victory and his safety. Lucy Ann, along with Catherine Macomb, wife of the commander of the land forces, was fortunate to have been able to be with her husband in time of war.

Lucy Ann, or Ann as her family called her, was 16 when Thomas Macdonough was stationed in Middletown, Connecticut, the first time. It is probable that they met at church. Marriage for Ann and Thomas had to be postponed because of her age and his financial state. Navy officers did not earn much. In order to build up his fortune, Thomas received a leave of absence from the navy and captained a merchant ship to India. Then, after rejoining the navy, Thomas was stationed on Lake Champlain. Thomas and Lucy Ann were married in December 1812.

As many military wives did, Ann lived at various posts with her husband after the war. At one such post, Thomas contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and likely passed it to Ann. The progress of tuberculosis is gradual but it ultimately led to both of their deaths. From the time she was married at 22 until she died at 35, Ann gave birth to 10 children. Five of those children survived. One child, Rodney, accompanied his father on Thomas Macdonough's last voyage as captain of the U.S.S. Constitution. As Ann became weaker and weaker during her last pregnancy, her husband became less and less able to perform his duties as captain. When his ship reached the Mediterranean, Macdonough received word of the birth of a daughter and the death of his wife. He gave up his position on the Constitution and with his son started for Middletown. Macdonough died at sea and following his father's wishes, Rodney brought his father's body to be buried next to Ann. The family erected a monument to both. Ann's read,

*The richest gifts of Nature & of Grace
Adorned her mind & heart, & at her
Death Genius, Friendship & Piety
mourned their common loss.*

Questions for discussion:

Why did Lucy Ann and Thomas have to postpone their marriage until December 1812?

What ship was Macdonough's last command?

What disease did Lucy Ann and Thomas Macdonough probably die from?

Catherine Macomb

Catherine was the first wife of Alexander Macomb, army commander at the Battle of Plattsburgh. Catherine Macomb was born October 30, 1786, in Detroit, Michigan, the daughter of William Macomb and Sarah Jane Dring. Catherine married her cousin Alexander Macomb in 1803 in Detroit, Michigan; Alexander was a first lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers. Catherine died on September 19, 1822, and is interred with her husband in the Historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

The following poem was written by Catherine Macomb, first wife of Alexander Macomb and eyewitness to the Battle of Plattsburgh. The poem was read at the re-interment of the couple's remains in their restored burial vault.

Verses on the Battle of Plattsburgh

It was autumn and round me the leaves were descending
And naught but the drumming bird tapped on the tree,
While thousands their freedom and rights were defending,
The din of their arms sounded dismal to me.
For Sandy, my love, was engaged in the action,
Without him I value this world not a fraction,
His death would have ended my life in distraction
As mournful I strayed on the banks of Champlain.

Then turning to rest from the cannon's loud thunder,
My elbow I leaned on a rock near the shore,
The sound nearly parted my heart strings asunder,
I thought I should see my dear shepherd no more.
But soon an express all my sorrow suspended,
My thanks to the Father of mercies ascended,
My Sandy was safe and my country defended,
By Freedom's brave sons on the banks of Champlain.

I wiped from my eye the tear that had started,
And hastened the news to my parents to bear,
Who sighed for the loss of relations departed,
And wept at the tidings that banish care.
The cannons ceased firing, the drums were still beating,
The foes of our country far north were retreating.
The neighboring damsels each other were greeting,
With songs of delight on the shores of Champlain.

They sung of the heroes whose valor has made us,
Sole nation on earth, independent and free,
And this will remain with kind heaven to aid us,
In spite of invaders by land and by sea.
New York, the Green Mountains, Macomb and Macdonough,

The Farmer, the Soldier, the Sailor, the Gunner,
Each party united have plighted their honor,
To conquer or die on the banks of Champlain.

“Verses on the Battle of Plattsburgh” by Catherine Macomb

Discussion and Study Guide Questions

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. What is the purpose of the poem? What is the theme of the poem?
3. Why does the poet repeat “on the banks of Champlain” in the last line of the first, second and fourth stanzas? Why does she change the wording and use “on the shores of Champlain” in the third stanza?
4. What other examples of repetition occur in this poem?
5. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?
6. What literary technique is used in the phrase “Freedom’s brave sons”?
7. What other literary elements or techniques does the poet employ in this poem?
8. What do we learn about the relationship of Catherine Macomb to Alexander Macomb (Sandy)?

Enrichment Activities

1. Using this poem as a model, write a poem about an important event.
2. Change Catherine Macomb’s “Verses” into a rap song about the Battle of Plattsburgh.
3. Write about the Battle of Plattsburgh from the point of view of Alexander Macomb to his wife Catherine.

The next three articles are about key women and their role during the War of 1812. As you learn about these women, how would you answer the following questions as though you were a reporter for the local newspaper?

When writing a newspaper article reporters have 5 general guidelines. They are:

1. Who or what is the story/article about?
2. Where did the story/article take place?
3. When did the story/article take place?
4. How did the story/article unfold? What were the causes and what were the results.
5. Why is the story/article important? Why should we know about it?

Lucy Brewer

“Miss”conceptions Spies, Disguises, and Lies

Throughout the War of 1812 women served as secret messengers and spies. No matter where their loyalties lay, it was easier for women to serve as spies than it was for men. It was against the etiquette of the day to search a woman as one would a man. If women were discovered by the enemy, females usually did not meet the same fate as males: hanging. The most famous “intelligence agent” of the War of 1812 was Laura Secord.

Some women went beyond using their feminine qualities and rights to help their cause, or to follow their husbands. There are documented cases, on both sides, of women enlisting and serving as men. One case was Eliza Romley of New Hampshire, who served on Lake Champlain. She was captured by the British on June 3, 1813, and listed as prisoner 240 at Quebec. She was discharged from prison on June 25, 1813, after British authorities discovered their prisoner to be a woman.

Lucy Brewer or Louisa Baker was another case of a woman in disguise, or was she? The story of the “female marine” was made famous by the book *The Adventures of Louisa Baker* published in Boston in 1815. The farm girl, turned runaway and prostitute, supposedly enlisted in the US Marines and served successfully on board the *USS Constitution* as a man named George. The *Louisa Baker* book and later books like it became widely popular. Research has revealed that Lucy or Louisa was probably a fictitious heroine created by author Nathaniel Hill Wright.

Lucy Brewer – Fact or Fiction

First launched in 1797, the *USS Constitution* sits in Boston Harbor, still a commissioned ship in the United States Navy. The ship gained its famed nickname *Old Ironsides* during the War of 1812, after a victorious battle with the *HMS Guerriere* on August 19, 1812.

Old Ironsides is also the backdrop for the story of Lucy Brewer. According to legend, Lucy Brewer was a farm girl from Massachusetts, and the legendary first female marine. The War of 1812 was raging when Lucy arrived in Boston. She met a woman who seemed eager to take Lucy into her home. Lucy was surprised that one woman could have so many daughters, but she soon discovered that the home was a house of ill repute. Unsuitable to a life of sin, Lucy fled her benefactress, donned men's clothing, and found refuge on board the *USS Constitution* as George Baker. No one discovered she was a woman, and as a member of the *Constitution's* marine guard, she saw action in some of the bloodiest sea fights of the war. Her exploits came to light in *The Adventures of Louisa Baker*. She described her heroism in the major battles of the *Constitution* with such details as manning the fighting tops as a marksman, and taking toll of the British with musket fire. Was Lucy Brewer or Louisa Baker the famous case of a woman in disguise? The story of the farm girl, turned runaway, and prostitute, who enlisted in the US Marines and who served successfully on board the *USS Constitution* as a man – and the first female marine - was made famous by the book *The Adventures of Louisa Baker* published in Boston in 1815. The book, and later books became widely popular but none are true. Research has revealed that Lucy or Louisa was probably a fictitious heroine created by author Nathaniel Hill Wright.

Questions for discussion:

In an article about Lucy Brewer the question is, “is her story true?”

1. Who was Lucy Brewer and what was she supposed to have done?
2. Where did she serve during the War of 1812?
3. What dates are associated with her?
4. How did she do what she is supposed to have done?
Why do historians suspect that her story is fiction?
5. What is it important to know if her story is fact or fiction?

Fanny Doyle

Battle of Queenston Heights and the Bombardment of Fort Niagara

The Battle of Queenston Heights was the first major battle in the War of 1812 and resulted in a British victory. It took place on October 13, 1812, near Queenston, Ontario. It was fought between United States regulars and New York militia forces led by Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer, and British forces and Canadian militia led by Major General Isaac Brock, and Major General Roger Sheaffe who took command when Brock was killed.

The battle, the largest in the war to that point, was fought as the result of an American attempt to establish a foothold on the Canadian side of the Niagara River before

campaigning ended with the onset of winter. This battle was the result of a poorly managed American campaign, and is most historically significant for the death of the British General Brock, killed by an unknown shooter.

The Battle of Queenston Heights and the bombardment of Fort Erie were a prelude of what was to come as American and British forces vied for control of fortifications, land, and waterways.

Fanny Doyle
“fortitude equal to the maid of Orleans”

Betsy Doyle, also known as Fanny Doyle, became the heroine of Fort Niagara. During the war, her husband served as an American artilleryman, stationed at Fort Niagara. He was captured by the British during the Battle of Queenston Heights (October 13, 1812), but Fanny remained behind. The battle was followed in November by the bombardment of Fort Niagara. Fanny served with the artillery in November, taking her husband's place in the gun crew, and distinguishing herself on November 21 when British gunners at Fort George began the bombardment of Fort Niagara.

Major George McFreely, the commander of Fort Niagara, reported that during the fierce shelling, Fanny Doyle “would take the ball tongs from any of the men, run to the fire, take up a hot shot, put it in cannon, and run for another.” She kept this up “for the whole day,” serving a 6-pound gun mounted on top of the fort's stone messhouse and displaying “fortitude equal to the maid of Orleans,” Joan of Arc.

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you describe Fanny Doyle?
2. Where did Fanny Doyle's actions make her famous?
3. When did Fanny Doyle come to the notice of Major George McFreely?
4. What made Fanny Doyle a heroine? How did she act?
5. Why is Fanny Doyle's story important?
6. What historical proof do we have that Fanny Doyle's story is true?

Laura Secord

Battle of Beaver Dams

The battle of Beaver Dams, June 24, 1813, was an American defeat on the Niagara front that helped the British recover from the earlier defeat at [Fort George on May 25-27, 1813](#). The battle of Fort George had forced the British to withdraw from the line of the Niagara River to a new position at the western end of Lake Ontario. The American commander, General Dearborn, had sent an expedition west to attack this new British position at Burlington, Ontario, but instead the Americans had been surprised at [Stoney Creek on June 6](#), and the senior officers on the expedition were captured. The Americans retreated to the Niagara, with the British under General John Vincent following close behind. By late June the British had reoccupied most of their original positions on the Niagara, with the exception of Fort George itself.

General Dearborn responded by sending what was meant to be a secret expedition to attack a British detachment at Beaver Dams. The attack was to be made by 600 men under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel C. G. Boerstler. They were sent south from Fort George to Queenston, from where they were to strike inland and catch the single company of British troops at Beaver Dams by surprise.

The chance of an easy victory was lost because of the actions of Laura Secord, a Canadian housewife. American officers were billeted in her house and she overheard them discussing the planned attack. On the morning of June 22 she set off on a cross-country journey to Beaver Dams, where she was able to warn Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, the commander of the expedition, of what was coming. The Americans didn't set out until the following day, by which time the British had deployed Indian scouts on all of the likely routes from Queenston to Beaver Dams.

On the morning of June 24, the American expedition was found by Indian scouts, and was soon under attack. First 300 Caughnawaga Indians, led by Captain Dominique Ducharme of the Indian Department, attacked the American rear, and then 100 Mohawk Indians under Captain William Kerr attacked.

The Americans did not have the light infantry they needed to repulse this attack. The battle in the woods lasted for three hours, and saw the Americans suffer 100 casualties while only inflicting 50 on the attacking Indians. The battle ended when Lieutenant Fitzgibbon reached the scene at the head of fifty regulars and took the surrender of the American force (without firing a shot).

Dearborn's position as command-in-chief of the attack in Canada was already under threat before this defeat. He was known to be in poor health, and so on July 6 he was ordered to retire from his command to recover his health.

In spite of their victories at Stoney Creek and Beaver Dams, the British were still not strong enough to force the Americans out of Fort George. Instead of attacking the fort, General Vincent decided to blockade it, beginning a siege that lasted well into the autumn.

Laura Secord Canadian Heroine

The British victory at the battle of Beaver Dams (June 24, 1813) has been attributed in large part to Laura Secord, a Canadian housewife.

Laura Ingersoll Secord was born in Massachusetts in 1775. Her father fought for the colonies in the American Revolution, but, unhappy with life in the U.S. after the Revolution, he and his family moved to Ontario. Laura married loyalist James Secord in 1797; they resided in Queenston. James was wounded during the battle of Queenston Heights.

On May 27, 1813, the American army launched another attack across the Niagara River, successfully capturing Fort George and the Secord family was forced to billet American officers in their home. On June 21, Laura became aware of plans for a surprise attack on troops at Beaver Dams, which would have furthered American control in the Niagara Peninsula. While her husband was still suffering from his battle injury, Laura set out the next morning to warn the British. She walked approximately 30 kilometers, arriving at the camp of allied Native warriors who led her the rest of the way to Fitzgibbon's headquarters at the Decew house. Laura did not know that Native scouts had previously informed Fitzgibbon of the coming attack. A small British force and a larger contingent of Mohawk warriors were then readied for the American attack, resulting in an American defeat.

After her journey, Laura returned home to resume her life as wife and mother. Over the years, Laura Secord and James Fitzgibbon petitioned the government for acknowledgment of her heroism but to no avail. Finally, in 1860, when Laura was 85, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), heard her story while he was traveling in Canada. When he stopped in Chippewa near Niagara Falls, he learned of Laura's heroics and her plight as an aging widow. Later, the Prince of Wales sent an award of £100 to her. It was the only recognition that Laura Secord received in her lifetime.

Variations of Laura Secord's tale of bravery and heroism exist, but much of the story is the same. Some versions state that Laura brought a cow with her as an excuse to leave her home in case of questioning by American patrols; another version holds that she left under the guise of visiting a sick relative. It is also said that she walked barefoot and that it took her six hours to climb the Niagara Escarpment.

Whatever the truth may be, with her actions, Laura Secord secured her role in the War of 1812 and Canadian history.

Laura Secord Speech

Having the privilege accorded me this day of presenting myself before your Royal Highness I beg to assure you that I do so with the greatest gratification to my feelings. I am confident your Royal Highness will pardon the liberty I have taken when your

Royal Highness is informed of the circumstances which have led me to do so. I shall commence at the battle of Queenston, where I was at the time the cannon balls were flying around me in every direction. I left the place during the engagement. After the battle I returned to Queenston, and then found that my husband had been wounded; my house plundered and property destroyed. It was while the Americans had possession of the frontier, that I learned the plans of the American commander, and determined to put the British troops under Fitzgibbon in possession of them, and if possible, to save the British troops from capture, or, perhaps, total destruction. In doing so I found I should have great difficulty in getting through the American guards, which were out ten miles in the country. Determined to persevere, however, I left early in the morning, walked nineteen miles in the month of June, over a rough and difficult part of the country, when I came to a field belonging to a Mr. Decamp, in the neighbourhood of the Beaver Dam. By this time daylight had left me. Here I found all the Indians encamped; by moonlight the scene was terrifying, and to those accustomed to such scenes, might be considered grand. Upon advancing to the Indians they all rose, and, with some yells, said "Woman," which made me tremble. I cannot express the awful feeling it gave me; but I did not lose my presence of mind. I was determined to persevere. I went up to one of the chiefs, made him understand that I had great news for Capt. Fitzgibbon, and that he must let me pass to his camp, or that he and his party would be all taken. The chief at first objected to let me pass, but finally consented, after some hesitation, to go with me and accompany me to Fitzgibbon's station, which was at the Beaver Dam, where I had an interview with him. I then told him what I had come for, and what I had heard – that the Americans intended to make an attack upon the troops under his command, and would, from their superior numbers, capture them all. Benefiting by this information Capt. Fitzgibbon formed his plan accordingly, and captured about five hundred American infantry, about fifty mounted dragoons, and a fieldpiece or two was taken from the enemy. I returned home next day, exhausted and fatigued. I am now advanced in years, and when I look back I wonder how I could have gone through so much fatigue, with the fortitude to accomplish it. I am now a very old woman – a widow many years. A few short years even if I should so long live will see me no more upon this earth. I feel that it will be gratifying to my family and a pleasure to myself that your Royal Parent the Queen should know that the services which I performed were truly loyal and that no gain or hope of reward influenced me in doing what I did. I request that your Royal Highness will be pleased to convey to your Royal Parent Her Majesty the Queen the name of one who in the hour of trial and danger – as well as my departed husband who fought and bled on Queenston Heights in the ever memorable battle of 13th Oct. 1812 – stood ever ready and willing to defend this Country against every invasion come what might.

Questions for discussion:

1. Who is Laura Secord?
2. Where did Laura Secord's actions take place?
3. When did Laura Secord warn the British of the impending American attack?
4. Why did Laura Secord decide to warn the British?
5. How did she warn the British?

6. What was the result of her warning to the British?
7. Why is Laura Secord's story important?
8. What historical proof do we have that Laura Secord's story is true?

War is Over

As peace was restored in North America, life returned to normal. But even as people welcomed peace, evidence of the war abounded. Land had been ravaged, buildings, and businesses had been destroyed by warfare and invasion. Societies were established during and after the war to assist widows and dependents with their hardships. "In January 1814, the New York Legislature appropriated \$50,000 to relieve wartime distress and at the same time passed a law enabling the monies to be distributed by the supervisors of towns and villages such as Buffalo and Schlosser, which had suffered most." Widows of sailors and sailors on both sides of the conflict received land grants and pensions. However, if women remarried, they lost the pensions. Military wives continued to follow their husbands where duty called them. Naval wives awaited their husbands' return from voyage as they had before and during the war. Many women who had found their place in the professional world during the war, such as Ann Mott, continued in that capacity in peacetime. Other women resumed the lives they had led prior to the War of 1812, tending home, hearth, and family.

