

## The Grasses of Grantham

My story starts out the same as many Palatine families wanting to leave the persecution of the Rhine. They were looking to move to what some religious leaders called the land of milk and honey, America. When this family left their surname was Kress. Sebastian Kress or "Bastian" emigrated from Germany to North America circa 1753. Settling in Schoharie, New York, he married Margareth Schantzenbach on Jan. 3, 1760. They had at least 4 children and my adventure of this family starts with Michael.

Michael left New York for greener pastures but not before marrying Mary Fratz and having 8 children. He served with the Butler's Rangers during the American Revolutionary War under Lieutenant Colonel John Butler. This was around 1780. He returned to New York to care for his ailing parents and returned to Canada in 1801. Before the breakout of the war of 1812 the Grasses were farmers and loyal to the crown. They did not want to go through what their father had suffered and lose what they had so Michael, his sons George, Jeremiah, and Michael Jr. joined the 1st Lincoln Militia to serve in the War of 1812. On December 17, 1812 while on campaign Michael died of disease that was brought on by bad weather, unsuitable clothing and a few supplies which had not arrived from Lower Canada in time to help them.

George, his second son, whom I portray while re-enacting 1812, was killed at Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake, May 27, 1813. There are 3 versions of what happened to George. The first was he died of a wound while sitting on a Church pew; the second was he was wounded, taken prisoner and died in New York; the third says he was killed in action at the fort when the Americans stormed the fort and burned Niagara-on-the-Lake to the ground. You may choose your version.

While the Grasses served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lincoln militia they were with the McEwans & Jones Co. as a flanking unit. The 1<sup>st</sup> Lincolns were commanded by Col. Ralfe Clench and drawn from the Louth and Grantham Twps. There were normally 3 officers and 38 men to a company. They were required to drill more often than the sedentary militia under the guidance of British military officials. They too were made up of volunteers who had to

supply their own gun (usually a Brown Bess musket) and a dark coat. Any regimental coats or military accoutrements were prioritized for a flank company. Some may have had red tunics. In 1811 by law there had to be 2 Flank Co. Only those of unquestioned loyalties were put in flank companies. This generally meant you had to be a U.E.L or offspring of one or part of the Scottish merchant circle. The 1st Lincolns fought at Fort Detroit, Queenston Heights, Fort George and Stoney Creek. They were awarded battle honours for the defence of Canada 1812 -1815. They later became the Lincoln Welland branch that we know today.

Lucky for me, two hundred years to the date I was able to take part in the re-enactment of the Battle of Fort George with the present day 2<sup>nd</sup> Lincoln re-enactors. I was there for a dedication of a plaque to the people who died at the battle, on the site where the Americans landed. George's name is on the plaque. I have never been prouder. George and his brothers and father were under the command of General Brock and I wonder if they ever met.

George left behind a pregnant wife Mary and two small children Nancy aged two, John aged one. Mary gave birth to a second son who she named George after his father.

George is buried in the Homer Cemetery, St. Catharines, Ontario. His stone reads as follows: "Erected in memory of George Grass who was killed in the Battle of Fort George May 17<sup>th</sup> 1813 AE 24 yrs 5 mo." Both his brothers survived the conflict.

Another man who left quite an impression on me was Tecumseh. With this I have added some native persona to my character .He also died in 1813 in the Battle of the Thames in London, Ontario. Again I wonder if their paths ever crossed. Not only were the natives good allies, they probably taught us the skills we needed to survive the climate in the new world. These skills would include hunting, trapping, fishing and farming. They would learn how to grow the three sisters: Corn, Beans and Squash.

I have been re-enacting for 10 years now and I have experienced severe heat and cold in wool clothing but nothing could come close to what our ancestors did. Can you imagine

traveling for 3-4 weeks on a ship that was small, dark, and not very comfortable. After arriving in a strange country and not being able speak the language. Clear bush, dig rocks, find water and probably live the first year in a tent. They were tough people. I can't imagine spending February in a tent. There would never be enough firewood for me. The farms were no bigger than 5 acres to start even if you had a land grant. It would take one horse all day just to plow it. Then you had to till it and seed it and keep your fingers crossed that your crop would grow.

Mark Bailey