

THE OTHER MICHAEL GRASS

by Bradley Grass UE

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Michael Grass of Grantham has a large group of descendants that live in the Sarnia and Windsor area and they make up a third distinct Grass family living in Canada today. (Captain Michael's descendants are centred in southern Ontario mainly in Kingston and Toronto areas, and Jacob Grass who arrived with Captain Michael in 1752 has descendants living mainly in New Brunswick.)

Michael Grass was a Private in the Butlers Rangers. The "paper trail" on him is not complete, but there is enough data to provide us with a fairly good picture of who he was. He came from the Schoharie area of New York State and much research still needs to be done by the writer in the Schoharie area. All Canadian information indicates that he was a United Empire Loyalist. He is not to be confused with Captain Michael Grass, founder of Kingston, Ontario. They may have been related because both families lived in the same area of United States and later came to Canada at approximately the same time. Both Michaels were known as United Empire Loyalists and the offspring of both were eventually granted parcels of land from the Crown because of their fathers' military service.

Our Michael Grass family came from Germany. The family name was KRESS and was changed to GRASS at some point in the early days of moving from New York State, USA to present day St. Catharines, Grantham Township, Lincoln County, Ontario. The name Kress was occasionally written as Cress or Grass depending upon the first language of the recorder. In the late 1700s the German word "kress" was used to describe wild mustard grass. It seems rather fitting that the name was changed to GRASS.

According to the records of Rev. Sommers of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Schoharie, New York, Michel Kres was born to Sebastian Kres and Maria Margaretha Schanzenbach on August 29, 1761 at Schoharie, New York. Other information given at that time indicated that the sponsors of Michael Grass' baptism were Michel Seibel and Maria Elisabet Zimmer.

Records indicate that Michael Grass married Mary Fraat or Fratz in Schoharie, New York on Jan 31, 1786. Both were from Helderberg, Albany county, New York. Mary's name was originally Maria. Her surname could be either Dutch or German. Other records indicate that they lived in the Berne-Schoharie area west of Albany County, in Rensselaerville Township, a Dutch community.

Other records belonging to Vickie Palmer of Orem, Utah, state that Michael Kress and Maria Fratz had the following children: David, christened 1787, Jurgen (George) born 1 Jan 1789, Henrich (Henry) christened 6 Feb 1791, Hieronymus (Jeremiah) born 14 Mar 1793 and Margareth (Margaret) christened 10 Mar 1800. Some of the above information can be substantiated by information provided in Ontario Archival Records and cemetery dates in the

Homer Cemetery near St. Catharines, Ontario.

Michael first moved to Grantham Township, Niagara District in the 1780s. He arrived with other United Empire Loyalists settled from the Mohawk Valley in New York State. He served as a Private soldier in the American Revolutionary War with the Butler's Rangers under Lieutenant Colonel John Butler. According to the land claim deposition of David, his eldest son, Michael returned to New York as soon as he was discharged because he needed to care for his elderly and ailing parents. He also found them to be in very indigent circumstances. Since his parents were unable to make the journey to Canada, he remained in the New York until his parents' deaths. While Michael was in New York the United Empire Loyalist List for Upper Canada was compiled and his name was not placed on it. He was eligible for a Crown Land Grant because of his service with the Butler's Rangers.

In 1801, Michael returned to Canada with his wife and six children, including son, John, and purchased property in Grantham Township in the District of Niagara. At this time he did not apply to have his name put on the United Empire Loyalist List. However, he was an enlisted Private soldier during the War of 1812.

In 1812, he contracted a disease while he was on service in a campaign and died December 17th of that year without making a will. This information was taken from the following two places and later from his childrens' land claim depositions:

- *The Niagara Spectator* printed the casualties of the War of 1812. Under "Casualties of the Lincoln Militia 1812-1814", Source-Militia Pension Agent: Grass, Michael, Pte., Regiment of Niagara, Grantham and Louth, died December 17, 1812
- *Record of Services of Canadian Regiments in the War of 1812, Part IX - The Lincoln Militia*, by Lieutenant Colonel B. Cruikshank, 44th Regiment, page 38: "Grass, Michael, Private 1st Lincoln, died 17th December 1812". It is believed that Michael was not in the battle [but] George (his son) was. Michael died of sickness that was "brought on by bad weather, unsuitable clothing and a few supplies of which had not arrived from Lower Canada in time to help them."

Mary, Michael Grass' wife, received a widow's pension and this is also confirmed in records:

- *The Niagara Spectator*, dated December 11, 1817 listed widows entitled to a pension; Mary GRASS, widow of Michael Grass, Private, 1st Lincoln, died of disease 17 December 1812, received a widow's pension from 1st January 1817 to 31st December 1817, the sum of 20 pounds
- *The Ontario Register* 1968 Volume 1 Page 224: List of pensioners 1812; Widow, Mary Grass of pvt Michael Grass 1st Lincoln Regiment, deceased because of illness on December 17, 1812. Under remarks it stated that she was struck off the list on January 1818.

It is quite probable that Mary Grass died on or before October 3, 1823. There are points that support this. A burial record, listing Mrs. Grass, can be found in Addison's records from the Chippewa Church in the Niagara Peninsula. The record indicated that Reverend R.W. Tunney was the Chaplain. We know that Mary was still living in 1822 because she provided a sworn oath on her children's Crown land claims documents, based on Michael's military service.

After Michael's death his eldest son David petitioned the Crown to have his father's name placed

on the United Empire Loyalist List on behalf of his brothers and sisters.

The writer believes that both Michael and Mary are buried in the Homer Cemetery near the City of St. Catharines, on Lot 7, Concession 7 of Grantham Township for three reasons. It was a prominent burial ground for Butler's Rangers. It was close to where their home was located. Other Grass family members including their sons David and George are buried there. However, no markers were located for Michael or Mary. It could be that the stones have eroded away with age or were not placed there in the first place. At the time of their deaths, their children may not have had the financial resources to purchase gravestones. However, it should be noted that in 1926 a fire was set to burn off the overgrowth in the cemetery and as a result many of the gravestones were damaged.