The History of the Vanevery Family in the War of 1812

David Vanevery was a sergeant in the Butler’s Rangers during the American Revolution. For his service he was awarded 800 acres in East and West Flamborough. David was among the earliest settlers to enter the township.

During the years prior to the War of 1812, David had continued his association with the local militia. In 1806 he was promoted to Lieutenant in the 2nd Regiment of the York Militia. When the Americans declared war on Britain, the British Officers and their aides were quartered in the Vanevery home.

David’s father, McGregor Vanevery had a close relationship with Joseph Brant during the American Revolutionary War. It seems that David continued this connection with the natives as Tecumseh stayed with him while he (Tecumseh) recruited local braves to the British cause.

(Above detail and excerpts were taken from the Waterdown-East Flamborough’s Heritage Society-‘From West Flamborough’s storied past’.)

The insights contained in the book ‘from West Flamborough’s storied past’ lead to a totally new insight of our ancestors. With this knowledge that David Vanevery had been promoted to Lieutenant and by searching government records we have proved David’s connection with the 2nd Regiment of the York Militia. We now know that the Vanevery family were active participants in the War of 1812. This information was available at, Library and archives Canada, R1022-11-6-E, Upper Canada Militia Records, and Volume 16.

The 2nd Regiment of the York Militia was a functional fighting unit throughout the War of 1812. The were considered to be a skirmishing body of light infantry. Their main directive was to join / lead the natives in probing attacks on the American forces to outline for the main British force exactly where the American line was formed. Many battles have been won or lost by a force being able to outflank or maneuver around an enemy’s main force. The 2nd regiment had a uniform of a red jacket with green facings (trim). The British Officers referred to them as the York Volunteers to differentiate them from the other poorly motivated militia units.

The 2nd Regiment was with Isaac Brock when he captured Fort Detroit and they were also with him at Queenston Heights when he fell. In an Oct. 12, 2012 special remembrance of the battle of Queenston Heights and Brock’s death, the Toronto Star reported that when Isaac Brock recognized that the Americans were in control of the "Heights", he quickly rounded up the Light Company of the 49th foot, as well as the Fifth Lincoln and the 2nd York Militia for an uphill attack on the Americans. Brock was mortally wounded during this attack. You may have heard the legend of Brock’s final words, ‘Push on brave York Volunteers’. Some have discredited this report of Brock’s last words and his appreciation of the loyalty and tenancy 2nd Regiment of the York Militia. There is no question however that the 2nd Regiment was not with him when he died.

In June, 1812 a call was made to form ‘flank’ Companies. These troops would engage the enemy in close formation with the British ‘Regulars’ to ensure that their right and left flanks were protected from American flanking maneuvers. There were 27 men from Flamborough West who volunteered. Two of whom were Michael Vanevery and William Vanevery. After the Battle of Queenston Heights, Major Thomas Evan in his official report of the day to Sir George Prevost clearly stated that the 2nd Regiment’s Flank force under Capt. Wm.
Applegarths was present with the 49th foot at the Battle of Queenston Heights. Pay records also indicated that both Michael and William were present and paid for this pay period.

David and Andrew Vanevery, our direct ancestors were listed on Muster Rolls and pay lists as of 1812. It seems that there was a ‘coming together of the family in 1813. On the 25 April 1813 muster roll listed Andrew, Michael, Peter, William Jr and William Senior all serving in the same company lead by Captain Samuel Ryckman. This may have been a self defense tactic as the war was going against the British at this time. The battles of 1813 included: the capture of York (April), capture of Fort George (May), Battle of Stoney Creek (June), Battle of Beaver Dams (June), Battle of the Thames (Oct).

There were two Vanevery sons not with Samuel Ryckman. For some reason John Vanevery and Peter A Vanevery were in separate companies.

1813 was an unfortunate year for many but it appears that the Vaneverys all lived to see 1814. The Battles of 1814 were the most bloody of the War. Chippawa fought on July 5th, had no clear victory. Lundy’s Lane on July 25 was a night time battle where it was said that due to darkness and smoke from musket fire they were fighting in virtual zero visibility. It was reported that the main ranks of both sides at times were firing at each other at a distance of no more than 8 feet. No clear victory was the outcome.

Finally the Siege of Fort Erie started in August. An August 15 attack resulted in the death of a thousand British with the explosion of an American powder storage room. The British had climbed the walls of the fort. A canon was captured; the British reversed the canon to fire on the interior defences of the fort. The very first canon shot caused a six hundred pound gun powder magazine located under the cannon platform to explode. The British retreated and the Americans maintained control of the fort. On November 5th, 1814 the American artillery and troops withdrew to Buffalo. With the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814, hostilities finally ended. Canada once again was safe!

Our ancestors were there each time the Americans entered our land. Virtually in every battle they were out-numbered. Even when the British retreated and left them to their own defenses, they did not waver. The Canadian Officers had recognized the incompetence in the British Officer Core but remained loyal to the Crown. It may have been their Loyalist roots that many of the men carried, that drove them to protect this land at all costs.

Our ancestor David survived the war and was nominated for a promotion to the rank of Captain in May 5th, 1816. William Vanevery who volunteered for flank company duty was made a sergeant on July 4th, 1814. David’s son Andrew Vanevery, our ancestor, also survived the war.

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