

04.03.2013

THE WAR OF 1812 GRAVESIDE RECOGNITION PROJECT

A hornet's nest indeed, one of confusion and misleading information.

Despite my efforts, there still seems to be confusion surrounding how the War of 1812 Graveside recognition project will work, bear with me while I attempt to explain it. By the way, we are working diligently to get our website up, so there will be one central source of information, a place that will be able to answer your questions more easily.

Information from some sources describing the project and how it will work has been incorrect, so allow me to try to set the record straight.

Our initial application to the Commemorative Fund had to meet a few criteria, one was that the project had to create awareness about the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, and another was that the project had to have a legacy component.

Let me be very clear, that this project is NOT funded to provide a plaque free of charge to place at the gravesite of every known War of 1812 Veteran, that is simply not the case and information to that effect is incorrect. However, the opportunity to do just that is contained in the legacy part of the project!

The actual wording from our application to the Commemoration fund is:

"Our request for funding is to kick start the program by ordering 1000 graveside plaques..." The funding we have received is to literally kick start the project by being able to offer 1,000 plaques to be placed at the graves of veterans in return for their biographies being added to a searchable database.

Since we did not receive all the funding requested, we will likely need to slightly reduce the number of plaques that we can afford through the funds received - but we will still have a significant number to bring awareness to the Bicentennial and to this project.

Under program sustainability on our application we noted the following:

"The Graveside recognition program will be sustained through school programs, heritage committees, legions, historic societies, families and genealogists. Once the initial plaques are placed other interested parties that have done the research necessary to identify and locate a veteran will apply through the Historic Military Establishment of Upper Canada to obtain a plaque. The cost of the plaque will be the responsibility of the individual or group wishing to place the plaque. By keeping the costs of the plaques to under \$200.00 it helps encourage the continuation of the program. The cost to place a plaque is reasonable and can be achieved through moderate fund raising or paid for directly without financial hardship.

So as the project moves forward beyond the \$140,000 received from the Federal Government, we hope we have created a self sustaining model that will see the interest in the War of 1812 continue, and will also see plaques continue to be placed at the graves of the veterans.

The choice of a granite plaque, while more expensive, is simply because it is a permanent fixture at ground level at the gravesite, and will accommodate maintenance in the cemeteries and hopefully thwart vandalism. It is one design that once recognized will denote the resting place of a War of 1812 veteran. It will endure like we hope the memory of the veterans will endure, and when you see it, its simple elegance is both appropriate and appealing.

So how do we manage to get plaques on the graves of as many veterans as possible with the limited funding received?

Well, for example, I'm the chair of a Township Heritage committee and we have a number of War of 1812 veterans buried in our region, perhaps as many as thirty. My plan is to suggest to our municipal heritage committee that we budget to research and honour our veterans. We can't afford to do them all at once, but perhaps two or three a year until we have a plaque placed at each gravesite. Similarly, Legions could honour an 1812 veteran in the same way, students studying this time period could fundraise and honour a veteran. Perhaps re-enactor units would purchase a plaque through the program to honour one of their own, or funding may come through individual regiments of the Canadian Forces that trace their roots to the War of 1812. Perhaps we can convince corporate Canada to get involved in honouring the founders of our nation.

There are a myriad of ways to see the program maintain itself, we are only limited by our imagination.

This project is something that has never been attempted before and is long overdue. The process to date has been one of over two years of effort, and has seen its share of hurdles, hoops and revisions. Through it, and its imperfections, we finally have an opportunity to honour our War of 1812 veterans. It may take some extra effort, and it may take some imagination, but frankly the opportunity is one that, in my opinion, we can't afford to miss.

We will advise as soon as the website is live so you can see the program in its entirety and seek any information you may require.

Again, I thank you for your interest in the project and I welcome and look forward to your participation.

Best regards,
Lyn Downer