

War of 1812, Major John Button



Major John Button, commander
of Button's Troop 1810 to 1831.
(Markham Museum)

Around 1810, in response to unrest, John Button (of Markham Twp) organized a group of neighbours and friends into a cavalry unit which came to be called Captain John Button's Troop of Markham Dragoons (aka Button's Troop). This was the first troop of cavalry raised in Upper Canada and was attached to the North York Regiment of Militia. The Troop performed admirable service in York, Niagara, and Detroit. John's son Francis, about 18 at the time, was one of the 'despatch [sic] riders' between York and Kingston. A number of the Troop were taken prisoner in 1813 when the Fort at York fell to the American Troops.

Following the war, the troop did not disband, but was active during the 1837 Rebellion and the Fenian Raids in 1865. Tradition has it that command of the regiment was passed on to the eldest son. At some point, they became known as D Squadron of the Governor General's Body Guard which is now known as the Governor General's Horse Guards.

We first hear of John Button in a land petition dated 1798 in which he is asking for a lot in the Town of York, and 200 acres elsewhere. He says he has been in Upper Canada since 'the 6th of February last' and we know that the petition was made from Crowland Twp in Niagara County, where he says he has 'relatives that have been long settled in the Province'. He shortly had various pieces of property in Markham Township, York County, eventually acquiring 300 acres in Concession 4 lots 14 and 15, where Buttonville cemetery now is located.



Captain John Button gave a lot for a church and school to the local Methodists in 1830; he divided part of his land into 1/4 acre lots and convinced his neighbour across the road to do the same, and so in the late 1840s / early 1850s we find the beginning of the village of Buttonville come into being.

As part of the celebrations for the War of 1812, the Federal government had a program of recognition for those who saw service during the War of 1812. Judi Tomlinson, cousin of Jo Ann Tuskin, organized a ceremony at Buttonville Cemetery for the Official Unveiling of the War of 1812 Veteran Plaques for Major John Button and his son Colonel Francis Button.



Jo Ann and Patrick Tuskin with Governor
General's Horse Guards

This ceremony took place on Saturday 25 June 2016, a beautiful sunny day. The City of Markham provided tents, tables, chairs, flags and planters with red geraniums (the flower of remembrance for the 1812 War) both for the podium and for the grave sites. Remarks were given by Mayor Frank Scarpitti, City of Markham; Lorne Smith, City of Markham Historian; Ruth Burkholder, Genealogist; and Jo Ann Tuskin UE, descendant of John and Francis Button. Also participating were representatives from the Governor General's Horse Guards, including Trooper Kevin Joyce, also a descendant of John and Francis Button.

Following the unveiling ceremony, refreshments were provided during a time to socialize and review the Button family information and artifacts provided by Judi and Jo Ann.

Acknowledgements: information provided by Ruth Burkholder.

Remarks by Jo Ann Tuskin UE During the Ceremony

Mayor Scarpitti, Councillors, Guests, Friends, and most of all, Family! As a representative of the Family, I thank you for participating in this special ceremony of Honour and Remembrance for John Button and his son Francis, ancestors of many of us and the reason we are here.

The red geranium is the flower of remembrance for the War of 1812, and I thank the city for providing them here today.

You have heard from Ruth Burkholder a brief history of John Button and his contributions to Markham and Ontario – militarily, politically and socially. From this small community our family has spread across Ontario and out into the world.

What I don't tell my students when I do History presentations, is, that when I was in school, History was boring, until I started on my family tree. I had not made much progress with my Munro family until a classmate, also working on her Munro family, came in to class exclaiming that she had 'Buttons everywhere'! I knew I had Button cousins also, did some research, and we literally put our family trees together like a jigsaw puzzle and discovered that we are 3rd and 4th cousins! That's when I found that my family was involved with early Ontario History and that made it personal.

Now, we have real connections to the events of 200 years ago – it is not just pictures and stories in books. Now the names on tombstones belong to real people that are connected to me and the events of that long ago war had an impact on my/our family. Now we can come to know these ancestors of ours – we have their pictures, their letters, their signatures and their legacy of service to the community and the country. We have the town, the Troop and our family. We see what can be achieved with determination and vision; and we can carry on their legacy of service and contribution to our own local communities and organizations, and to our Country.



Jo Ann and her family



Councillor, Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti,
Jo Ann Tuskin, Councillor

Last Remembrance Day, a cousin brought a wreath of remembrance to John Button's grave marker and a note that I would like to share with you now:

"This Remembrance Day wreath is dedicated to Major John Button who was a big part of Canadian history.

I have just been reading all about you recently and I am very proud of all your accomplishments. You have provided us with a rich family history. I'm very proud to be a Canadian.

Sincerely, Theresa Ormisher"

This is our family. We will remember them.

Thank you



Jo Ann (left), City of Markham Dignitaries and Button Family descendants