Ganson Family

Plans began in 1606 for the first permanent British settlements on the east coast of North America. On April 10, 1606, King James I of England granted a charter forming two joint-stock companies. Neither of these corporations was given a name by this charter, but the territories were named as the "first Colony" and "second Colony", over which they were respectively authorized to settle and to govern. Under this charter, the "first Colony" and the "second Colony" were to be ruled by a Council composed of 13 individuals in each colony. The charter provided for an additional council of 13 persons named "Council of Virginia" which had overarching responsibility for the combined enterprise.

A flotilla of ships sailed from England beginning in April 1630, sometimes known as the Winthrop Fleet. They began arriving at Salem in June and carried more than 700 colonists, Governor John Winthrop, and the colonial charter.

The ships in the fleet were:

Talbot (carried 19 cannon) Capt. Benjamin Ganson, family had long history with the Royal Navy., Sir Admiral Richard Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake. Long line of descendants.

George Bonaventure (carried 20 cannon)

Lyon's Whelp (carried 40 planters • crew • 8 cannon)

Four Sisters (carried 14 cannon)

Mayflower (carried 14 guns and was a different ship than the Pilgrim's Mayflower.

Pilgrim (small ship with 4 guns that carried supplies only)

Captian John Ganson, born c. 1745, was the grandson of Captain Benjamin Ganson. He married Molly Holton of Danvers Massachusetts and they resided in New Salem. He was a private in Captain Ebenizer Goodall's Company of Minute Men, Colonel Woodbridge Regiment which marched on the alarm of April 19, 1775. He was later wounded at the battle of Bunker Hill and lost his gun and finger June 17, 1775. He served several enlistments under Captains Richardson, Ballard, Partricks, Alden and Coburn. He was promoted 2nd Lieutenant in

Captain Seth Pierce's Co. Col. Seth Murray's regt. And 1st Lieutenant in Oliver Coney's Co. Col. Sears regt. 1781.

He was at Cherry Valley in 1778 which was the massacre of unarmed civilians that led Washington to order the equally brutal Sullivan Expedition. Seeing his forces continuously being devastated by the mighty armies of the Iroquois Confederacy of Native Americans, General Washington came up with a brutal solution:

"taking the war home to the enemy to break their morale."

Under Major General John Sullivan, Mary's father marched from Easton Pennsylvania to Western New York, carrying out a brutal scorched earth campaign that devastated the Iroquois people. Sullivan's reached a point just north of Elmira, New York where Sullivan slaughtered his exhausted horses. This place became known as Horseheads, New York. Sullivan and his men then marched home, defeated and questioning his allegiance to General Washington and the new, young America. After turning down an offer to change sides by the famed turncoat, Benedict Arnold, Sullivan quietly retired to his New Hampshire farm.

Captain John Ganson, captivated by the beauty and fertility of the country, did not return to the comfort of

home back in the colonies. Instead, he returned home for his two sons, James and John, and quickly made his way back to the remaining Iroquois village south of Rochester and on the east side of the Genesee River, he and his sons purchased land from the Seneca and made a new home for themselves.

He returned soon after for his wife and daughter but was horrified to find his wife prostrated by a serious illness which, after lingering several months, proved fatal come spring. Upon their return west, John could hardly recognize Mary's brothers among the children of the Seneca.

"Such was the outlook of the face of the country when Capt. John passed over it, and on his arrival at the Genesee river there was scarce a white settler to greet him. As he stood before the door of the Indian's wigwam, in whose charge he had left the boys, what was his surprise to witness their perfect transformation. In everything but color they were veritable Indians. In manners, dress, unkept locks, their pale face origin was barely discernable. But their greeting with their returned parent, whom they had supposed lost, from his absence, was not the less cordial." (Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee Co.)

Sometime in 1798, he constructed the first grist mill upon the river. It was made of logs, the stones of native rocks, and was mainly used in grinding corn.

In 1793 a man by the name of Charles Wilbur constructed a small log tavern west of the Genesee. The Captain sold his land to William Markham from Connecticut (that place now known as Rush) and purchased Wilbur's small tavern. It was the beginning of what would afterwards be called Ganson's Settlement which today is known as LeRoy.

"Soon after my father had come on west of the river, and opened a public house, other settlers began to come in. There was nothing on the road to Batavia, until Mr. Ellicott's surveyors made their headquarters at Safford. The Indians were frequent visitors at my fathers. I used to see them often, the chiefs, Hot Bread, Jack Berry, Red Jacket, and Little Beard. Sometimes the Indians were turbulent; they would become a terror to the new settlers. My father was a stout athletic man; had great influence over them; would quell them in their worst drunkest frolics." (Mary)

The Holland Land Company chose to make its headquarters just west of the furthest western settlement at that time which was Ganson's Settlement and the area quickly became alive with immigrants.

Ganson Tavern had to be enlarged and so the log tavern was razed to the ground, and a frame building was erected in its place.

Continued--

John had three sons, James and John IV, Benjamin, and one daughter, Mary.

James Ganson was a member of the New York Assembly in 1812-13-15-16 and 1823. He owned and managed the Eagle House on Main St. in LeRoy. He also owned the famous Ganson Tavern in Stafford, six miles east of Batavia, where during the Anti-Masonic Excitement in 1826, meetings were held alleged to be relative to the abduction of Morgan who subsequently disappeared near Niagara.

Although indicted in this matter, James was acquitted. He went to Jackson Michigan where he died in 1858.

John IV continued to operate his father's tavern. He and wife, Lucy, had children Holden (M.D. of Batavia), James (cashier of Marine Bank of Buffalo and twin of), John (graduate of

Harvard, lawyer, Representative in New York Legislature 1862, Representative in 38th Congresses serving committee of Elections, Delegate to Chicago Convention 1864).

Captain John Ganson died in 1813. His tombstone was brought from Albany by ox team and reads,

"In travelers claims he bent his weary way,
where perils prowled and wild beasts lurked for prey;
by perseverance and industrious toil
laid low the forests and made the desert smile,
till low in death he laid his weary head
beloved while living, and revered now dead."

John IV's Stone is also intriguing. It reads as follows:

"Here lies the mortal part of John Ganson Jr,
who departed this life, November 30, 1819, in the
45yh my year of his age.
read what this silent stone doth say,
and mind that you must pass away,
and have no time of trial more,
in time thereof, prepare to die,
that you may rest with Christ on high."

From The Fleet in the Forest by Carl Lane (about the war of 1812) :

"Mr. Ganson buried his rum casks in manure and locked his tavern, then sledded along the great Bend Road all the way to Newton on the Tioga. He went not only east but south as well.

Fifteen hundred frozen soldiers and a dozen barn carpenters, buildin' a damn navy between me and the British! East ain't enough, I snum, he said at New Hartford and drove on."

They got into the sleds again, drawn up in a line before Mr. Ganson's deserted tavern. Nez had led the breakin and found the rum under the manure easily. He considered Mr. Ganson's loss only just; when a man hung out a tavern sign it was his bounding duty to be around and make good on it."

John and Mary

John traveled from Buffalo to Gaines before he received word of a distant aunt who had married into the prominent Ganson family of Ganson Settlement. He found himself in the home and tavern of Captain John Ganson and there he met Miss Mary Rose Ganson who went by Polly. They were married sometime in 1800 or 1801.

John then purchased land in Dunham's Grove near Ganson's Settlement, known for its peach orchard and fine community parties, and in 1801 they had their first child, a boy named Ira (May 3, 1801 – August 7, 1802).

John Forsyth signed an article of agreement with Joseph Ellicott on February 28, 1801 to purchase a lot along the speculative Queenstown Road whenever said road should be laid out. Early settlers were attracted to the well-drained fertile soils of the glacial beach line which this road occupies. Initially the speculative Queenstown Road was an Indian trail that crossed through land that once was home to the Neutral Nation, an Iroquoian-speaking indigenous people who lived in the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but had largely been replaced by the Iroquoian Confederacy by the mid-1600s.

It became one of the earliest roads in western New York and remains a principal east-west thoroughfare in central Niagara County. It is identified as a "wagon road" on one of the first maps of the region prepared by Joseph Ellicott in 1804. The road would ultimately not be named Queenstown Road but Ridge Road instead.

It remains unclear whether or not John and Mary Forsyth were approached by Joseph Ellicott to construct a tavern in the new territory or if they chose to do so of their own design. In the early nineteenth century, the Holland Land Company was struggling to sell its lands in western New York and was looking for new ways to encourage the settlement of the region. One of the ways of accomplishing that was by establishing a series of inns and taverns on major roads that served as way-stations for arriving settlers. Given that John was the son of a pioneer Scottish family which operated a tavern at Niagara Falls, Canada, sometime prior to 1783, and that Mary's father operated a tavern in his settlement after the Revolution, it seems plausible that they would have been approached by Joseph Ellicott as potential tavern operators. Shortly after John made an agreement with Joseph Ellicott, the first purchase of land in the new territory was made by David Klink, who was also contracted to open a tavern under the direct guidance of Joseph Ellicott, suggesting that this may have also been the situation with the Forsyths. Klink's

tavern fit into the plan of providing accommodations for other prospective land buyers visiting the area.

In June 1804 John sat on the first traverse jury organized in the new court of record. In that trial Joseph Rhineberger was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years hard labor in State Prison.

On November 28, 1804, John Forsyth signed indenture papers to take ownership of a tract of land along the Ridge Road at a principal intersection between the proposed villages of Batavia and New Amsterdam (Buffalo) and the proposed village of Lewiston and Fort Niagara and just 5 miles east of the log tavern established by David Klink. Forsyth purchased 190 acres as part of lots 23 and 24 in township 14, range 7, distinguished as

"The East Parts of Lots Numbers twenty-three and twenty-four... exclusive of one acre and six tenths of one acre reserved for a road."

The pioneers of the area had a dense forest to confront them as they located along the glacial lake line. Many years earlier, beavers had constructed dams that obstructed the flow of water in its natural course, so that three swamps were within, or contiguous to its boarders. The one in the north part, called big bear swamp, encompassed hundreds of acres; the one south of Ridge Road flooded a large tract of land for most of the year, and the one on the east, located principally on the Forsyth farm, though not as large, retained water like the previous ones until the hot days of summer, when it generated malaria that caused fevers and ague (a form of malaria) that enfeebled many members of the community.

Mary was pregnant with their son Luther, born February 8, 1806, when she and John left for their new land.

With them was their son Edmund Jonas, born July 15, 1803. In an 1849 interview with Mary Forsyth, she described her and John's move and establishment of a tavern. She drove a covered wagon pulled by oxen. Tied to one side was a plow and on the other a coop with six chickens. The family cow was tied to the back of the cart. Following them was John on horseback leading three or four sheep and the same number of hogs. The trip took them five or six days. She indicated that early settlers had a difficult time co-existing with the indigenous wildlife and that livestock such as hogs had to be protected from bears and wolves. On their arrival a temporary abode was constructed. In the fall a more commodious log house was erected near the site of the current homestead. At that date their nearest neighbor east was Samuel B. Moorehouse, who kept a tavern at the place now called Hartland Corners. The intermediate space was known for many years as the unbroken woods to Forsyth's. Five miles west on the

South Ridge, Joseph Hewett had located. The first summer of John Forsyth's residence, having occasion to cut swail grass in the marshes south of the ridge, he was obligated to go to Mr. Hewett's to borrow a pair of boots to protect himself from the bite of the rattlesnakes that infested the marshy places in the warm days of July and August.

Mary's Own Words (from Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of New York)

"When we came, there were but three or four settlers between Dunham's grove and Lockport. East, there was no settler till we passed the Eleven Mile Woods. Our nearest neighbor west, was Joseph Hewett, at Howell's creek.

From James Barton's recounting of his journey from Avon to Lewiston in 1807 as told by Clarence Lewis:

Near the U.S. Arsenal (now the Batavia Fairgrounds), the road from Canandaigua branched. One road led to Buffalo where the other continued in a northwesterly direction and was called by Mr. Barton the Queenstown or Batavia Road. It was with a few deviations our present Lewiston Road.

After traveling this road for five miles he came to Dunham's farm. From there to Forsyth's he found only four log cabins. The first, after passing the Tonawanda Indian Reservation, was near the northwest corner of the present Genesee County, just short distance from the Town of Royalton's east line today.

It was a tavern kept by a man named Walworth and, like many of the early taverns, was sponsored by Joseph Ellicott of the Holland Land Company for the convenience of the new settlers coming to buy farms. In latter years it came to be called Reynolds "Half-Way House" because of its being approximately halfway between Batavia and Lockport. Stage coaches stopped there for many years.

From this place the road in 1807 passed through six miles of forest. Mr. Barton then came to a partially completed log cabin occupied by a very poor family named Waldo. They appeared to be in want of many necessities.

From there to Charles Wilber's Tavern at Cold Springs was about five miles. At Cold Springs the road turned abruptly north and passed through the "unbroken woods to Forsyth's" Here was the "Forsyth Tavern" referred to by many travelers of that day as being one of the best in Western New York. Eastward from Forsyth's, the Ridge Road had not yet been opened and except in dry weather the trail there was impassable.

"In 1808, the Ridge road was laid out by General Rhea, Elias Ransom, and Charles Hartford. I remember well the arrival of the surveyors; their delight at finding a bed to sleep

in, and something to eat that was cooked by a female. Previous to this there had been nothing by Indian path through the low grounds, west of Wright's Corners.

We brought in a few sheep with us, I think they were the only ones in the neighborhood; they became the especial object of the wolves. Coming out of the Wilson swamp nights, their howling would be terrific. Two years after we came in, I was alone with my then small children one day, when I heard the sheep bleating and running, and went out to see what the matter was. A large wolf had badly wounded a sheep. As I approached him he left the sheep and walked off snarling at me as if reluctant to quit his prey. I went for my nearest neighbor, Mr. Stoughton to get him to come and dress the sheep. It was three fourths of a mile through the woods. On my way a large grey fox crossed the road ahead of me. Returning with my neighbor, a large bear slowly crossed the road in sight of us. I could tell many stories of wild beasts in this region; but I think I never saw as much of them in any one day, before or since. We had no way to keep fowls, but to secure them well in their roosting places. The first settlers found it very difficult to keep hogs; the bears would even come out of the woods and take them by daylight."

- Polly (Mary) Forsyth

Despite these hardships, John Forsyth erected the first sign post for a tavern here in the spring of 1805 according the writings of Mary Forsyth. The tavern and residence were built by John and Mary using materials harvested on site, including native black walnut and hemlock. It was common practice in the area for settlers to occupy a rough shelter while the trees to be used in construction of a larger dwelling were killed by digging a circle around their trunks a few feet deep. After the trees died, they would need to be chopped down and left to dry, or season, before they could be carved.

Shortly after opening their tavern, family records tell of a woman stopping at the tavern on her way to reunite with her fiancē at Fort Niagara only to fall dead inside the tavern's front door. She became the first burial on the knoll a few rods south and west of the tavern. This small plot was used as the primary cemetery for the corners until the establishment of the town cemetery system.

On March 11, 1808 the town of Cambria was formed, and the first town meeting was held on April 5, 1808. The first legislation was to establish a bounty of $5.00 to be paid to anyone who could produce the skin and ears of a wolf. With no town hall established in those days, bounties such as this, as well as most shipments of goods and mail, would be first purchased by the local tavern keeper and then resold to the town or resident.

Sarah Forsyth was born April 9th 1808 and on August 12th 1809 John and Mary purchased lot 16, just northeast of their property.

In 1810, Governor DeWitt Clinton passed along the Ridge Road while surveying prospective routes for the Erie Canal. He described each of the taverns in which he spent the night at in his diary. In one he said that he could not sleep because of the numerous crawling bed fellows so he slept out on the lawn. However his description of the Forsyth's Tavern was most flattering. He remarks that "...Forsyth keeps a good house, we dined here. He lives seven miles from the Lake, fifteen from Lewiston. Forsyth gave for his land 22 shillings an acre five years ago being an intelligent man and an old settler. The road from Forsyth's is dirt and thickly settled country." In the winter months this trail east of John Forsyth's property was impassable, which led to the creation of a plank turnpike road under grant by General Dearborn beginning at the corner of John Forsyth's Tavern and connecting the Ridge Road directly to Genesee and Rochester.

Then on December 29th 1810 another girl, Eunice, was born.

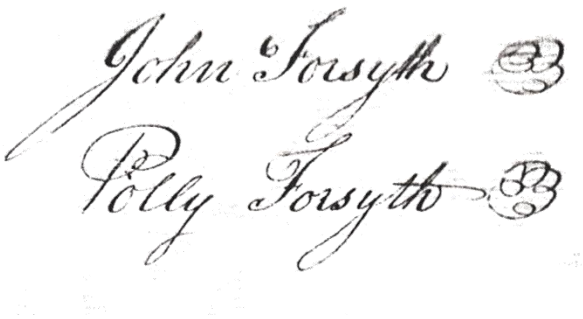
Looking back to 1810 when the first census of Niagara County was taken, we learn that the population of the area between Lake Ontario and the Cattaraugus Creek was 4,562. It is interesting to note that eight of them were slaves. The Town of Cambria which then encompassed all of what currently makes up the present Niagara County, had 248 families or approximately 1,450 people.

There were only three access routes to and through the county. Access through central Niagara County was the Ridge Road formerly an Indian trail from the east to about where the Checkered Tavern Road is now located, then branching off to the southwest, joined the Niagara Trail near Cold Spring. The reason for this changing from the Ridge was because the area

between what is now Warren's Corners was a great swamp and practically impassable except when frozen over.

When in the early war years General Dearborn, secretary of war, wanted to transfer cannon from the Gaines Arsenal to our frontier, he had a "log causeway" or corduroy road built through this swamp. The next spring many of the logs washed away. By 1816, however, a permanent road sufficiently passable for stage coaches was built.

On May 11, 1811, John and Mary Forsyth sold their land in Genesee Country, lot 14, section 8, township 12, to Russell Nobles for three-hundred and twenty-one dollars, indicating that the family intended to stay in the town of Cambria.



Mary Ganson-Forsyth and the War of 1812

In 1812, however, tragedy struck the pioneer family as John Forsyth died, reportedly of paralysis, at the young age of about 31. His was the second burial made on the property, on the knoll to the south of the tavern. By that time the family had grown by two more children, Sarah, born April 9, 1808, and Eunice, born December 29, 1810. After John's death, Mary

continued as the proprietor of the tavern. A new deed was cast for her by the Holland Land Company on July 13, 1813, granting her ownership over all of the land that she and John had purchased along the Ridge Road. Later that same year, Mary and her young family had a front row seat to one of the nation's earliest military events, as the Niagara Frontier, and the Ridge Road, became strategically important during the War of 1812.

On October 13, 1813, American troops crossed the Niagara River from the Village of Lewiston, which was at the terminus of the road on which the tavern stood, and began what would become known as the Battle of Queenstown Heights. It was the first major battle of the War of 1812 in which American troops invaded British Canada. Due to poor training and organization, the American troops were defeated on the shores of the Niagara River. December 10, 1813, American troops under direction of General McClure invaded Canada again, captured Fort George and burned the Canadian Village of Newark. This displaced about 400 women and children into the hardships of early nineteenth century winters.

The British retaliated for the burning of Newark by invading Niagara County on December 19, 1813, beginning a campaign that decimated much of the early settlement in Western New York. Under Colonel Murray, British forces attacked Fort Niagara at the northwestern tip of Niagara County. Meanwhile some one thousand British troops and a large number of Western Native Americans under the command of General Riall joined the troops at Fort Niagara. When the fort fell that same day, the British troops marched south to Lewiston. British General Drummond reported that "the Indians under intoxication had burned the great part of the houses at and near Lewiston. I thought it advisable to direct the remainder of them to be set on fire."

Many accounts and books of the residents of Lewiston tell a gruesome tale of families being slaughtered, scalped and burned in their houses in the small Village of Lewiston. The refugees fled the village and were pursued east along the Ridge Road. With no forewarning or time to consider, many families along the road joined the retreat from the frontier towards the larger settlements near the Genesee.

The frontier fugitives had such short notice of the attack that they left most of their possessions behind. In some instances, the women tied their silver and other small treasures in bags and dropped them in a well or hid them in nearby underbrush.

Orsamus Turner wrote,

"There was little warning, the Indians preceding the English soldiers swarmed out of the woods and commenced an indiscriminate shooting down of the fleeing citizens plundering and burning their log homes. Six or seven men and boys were killed and scalped."

On Ridge Road, Tuscarora Indians who were friendly with the area settlers witnessed the flight of pioneers and the pursuing army from their reservation high on the banks of the ridge and took a stand against the invading army. They did not have the numbers to take on the advancing army and so they gathered the whole nation, men women and children on the escarpment above the ascending road. The men had all guns, the women each with a round stick looking like a gun barrel from below and a horn for every boy and girl. It was a big bluff but it held up the invaders for some time.

The Tuscarora then again stepped into the line of fire closer to the Forsyth's Tavern even after their own village had been set to torch. Some men along with a few white settlers took a stand at a small arsenal of a dozen muskets and ammunition west of Howell's Creek where they were able to gain time for the women, children and the old folks to get a safe distance ahead.

When those fleeing the frontier arrived at the tavern of Mary Forsyth, she sent her two boys to her father and brother in Genesee County. Mary remained at the tavern, with five-year-old Sarah and nearly two-year-old Eunice.

The British continued onward only three miles east along the Ridge Road and upon finding both Howell's Tavern and William Molyneaux's Tavern empty, they proceeded no further. Mary's tavern was the next place east on the Ridge Road, being only four and one-half miles from Molyneaux Corners. The remainder of Niagara County was abandoned and many of its residents would never again return.

Many of those who fled the Lewiston area reached the Town of Gaines, roughly thirty miles west of the tavern, on the same day. Residents of the Town of Gaines recount that the villagers from Lewiston passed through their homes with warnings of an invading army killing and burning everything along the Ridge Road. The residents at Gains decided not to flee but to muster a militia. It is said that all of the males over 18 living along the Ridge Road were gathered and under the direction of Captain McCarthy they proceeded single file west on the road by early daylight on Friday, December 20, 1813. They paused at the home and tavern of the widow Forsyth just before nightfall where the soldiers argued about whether to make camp or continue to the arms stockpile further up the Ridge Road. They came upon the tavern of William Molyneaux (originally that of David Klink) where some British soldiers and their Native allies had burned the barn and taken residence in the log tavern. In the dark, the militia stormed the tavern. Two British soldiers and one Native American were killed in the skirmish

and the remainder were taken as prisoners. The militia later turned their prisoners over to the American army as it advanced from the south to scout the charred remains of the settlement at Lewiston. Twenty-one farms were destroyed on the Ridge Road between Lewiston and the Forsyth Tavern. The British continued to dispatch raids of approximately 15 men each throughout the Niagara Frontier to pillage and burn farms. Meanwhile an army of over 1,000 burned the village of Buffalo.

Every home between Lewiston and Warren's Corners on or near the Lewiston Trail (Ridge Road) was deserted and as far as Church Street they were looted and burned.

Settlers on the Lake Road and up to the east bank of the Eighteen Mile Creek to Van Horn's Mill suffered the same fate so that the west half of Niagara County was almost depopulated.

Sergeant Ezra Warren, a native of Vermont, and his company were stationed at the Forsyth tavern. The plank road was completed and utilized as the main transportation route for soldiers and supplies. Ezra and his company were tasked with managing and protecting these transports as they arrived at the edge of the warfront. The Forsyth Tavern was also used for a time to supply meals to the barracks at Hardscrapple (later known as Dickersonville, a hamlet roughly nine- and one-half miles west of Warren's Corners on Ridge Road).

The barracks are estimated between various military letters to have been large enough to house up to two thousand men, with storage and a hospital. 500 men were listed at station there before the camp was burned by the British.

In April 1814 an American soldier, a member of our Frontier forces defected to the English station at York (Toronto). He reported that the only sites on the American side of the Niagara River were as follows:

"The troops on that line totaled 7,000 men, the 25th Regiment of 500 men stationed at Hardscrabble, 100 men at Black Rock, and 6,500 men at Eleven Mile Creek (Ellicott Creek, about a mile south of Williamsville).

"On the Ridge Road at Hardscrabble there is an arsenal, a log building containing 500 stands of arms deposited by the militia who were all dismissed on the 11th of April 1814. There is also there a quantity of ammunition and four wagon loads of entrenching tools. There are no field pieces.

There is a depot of provisions on the Ridge Road at the Widow Forsyth's. It consists of beef, pork, whiskey and flour of all of which there is a large supply. There is a road leading from

the mouth of 18-Mile Creek on the west side. The distance is 10 miles but the road is very bad. He thinks there is at least 2,000 barrels of provisions at this depot."

July 1813, Ezra and Mary are believed to have been married. The War of 1812 was ended by the Treaty of Ghent, signed on Christmas Eve, 1814. The settlement stipulated that captured territory be returned to the status quo ante bellum, meaning that the British would remove themselves back across the Niagara River and settlers could return to their lands and reestablish the Niagara Frontier.