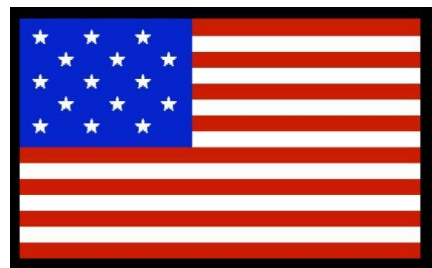


THE BATTLE OF CRANBERRY CREEK IN THE WAR OF 1812:

Fought Near Alexandria Bay, NY
July, 1813

By
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Dedication

This is the story of Battle of Cranberry Creek, which was fought just north of Alexandria Bay, New York in July of 1813 between American and British forces. This booklet is dedicated to the memories of the brave soldiers who fought and died in the battle, on American soil. May their souls rest in peace, while they are remembered forever.



The tranquility of Cranberry Creek hides the violent Battle of Cranberry Creek that occurred in July, 1813.



This watercolor painting by Barbara Haynes Richmond (1939-2011), of Virginia, was done to memorialize the Americans who lost their lives in the Battle of Cranberry Creek. The original painting was done in 2001 and given to Roger Fulton, the author of this paper.

Caveat

We tend to think of British soldiers as “Redcoats” and American soldiers as “Bluecoats”. Well it wasn’t quite that simple.

Individual units on both sides wore a variety of uniforms. Some United States Marines wore red uniforms. Some British units wore green/blue uniforms. Militiamen on both sides wore no distinct uniforms, or only parts of their country’s uniform. Soldiers, sailors, militiamen and civilian oarsmen were all involved in the Battle of Cranberry Creek saga.

And so it is in this booklet. All images are modern photos of soldiers and militia of the time. There were no photos of the 1813 battle because photography had not yet been invented. Basic information on the battle and representative depictions of the battle are our goal, not historical perfection.

So enjoy the story of this booklet, about the Battle of Cranberry Creek and the representative images we have presented. The battle occurred, men died on both sides, and this is a memorial tribute to their sacrifices.

Introduction to The War of 1812

Despite winning their freedom from British rule after the American Revolution from 1776-1783, America continued to have trouble with Britain for the next several decades.

American ships were repeatedly stopped on the high seas by British warships. Often the British would seize American seamen and force them into British service. The British would claim that these impressed sailors were actually defectors from British sailing vessels.

This, and other tensions between the two countries reached the breaking point in 1812. At that time, the St. Lawrence River was the dividing line between America and British-held Upper Canada, as it was known. The goal of the American Government was to drive the British out of all of North America. The British planned to hold Upper Canada and control the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes through their naval superiority.

As both sides hustled to build up their military forces, the Americans centered their forces at Sackets Harbor on Lake Ontario. The British centered their forces at what is now Kingston, Ontario.

After dozens of battles and skirmishes, both on land and on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, the Treaty of Ghent was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814. The War of 1812 had essentially been a draw, with an imaginary line drawn in the St. Lawrence River dividing the United States of America and the British-held Upper Canada.

However, for the thousands of participants, on both sides during this three-year war, it was a brutal confrontation that often pitted neighbor against neighbor in the 1000 Islands Region, on both sides of the border.



“In July of 1813, during the War of 1812, a small group of American soldiers from the 21st U.S. Infantry conducted a raid across the St. Lawrence River. They captured a British gunboat, 69 British prisoners and 15 Bateaux loaded with supplies, all without firing a shot. The American forces, led by Captain Dimock, took temporary refuge in the upper reaches of Cranberry Creek. They were pursued by a force of 250 British soldiers and four gunboats. A running battle ensued until the British were forced to retreat due to American cannon and musket fire after taking heavy casualties.”

A quote from the interpretive marker found at the Battle of Cranberry Creek memorial site.

Chapter I

The Plan

In July 1813, intelligence reached American forces headquarters at Sackets Harbor, New York that the British were bringing several boatloads of supplies up the St. Lawrence River. These supplies were coming from Montreal and were destined for Kingston, Ontario to be used by the British troops garrisoned there.

The shipment consisted of 15 cargo boats known as “bateau”. These 15 bateaux were loaded with 270 barrels of pork and 270 bags of hard bread known as “pilot” bread. This brigade of bateaux was escorted by only one British gunboat, the *Spitfire*. The convoy was manned by more than 70 British officers, crew, oarsmen and soldiers.

The Americans planned to surprise the British convoy and take away their supplies, diverting them for the American troops at Sackets Harbor.



Chapter II

The Capture

With a plan in place, the Americans sent a force to capture the supplies of the British convoy. The following is the account of the expedition as recounted from Hough's *"A History of Jefferson County"*, written in 1854.

"On the 14th of July, 1813, the *Neptune* and *Fox*, the former a private armed boat, under Captain Samuel Dixon, mounted with one six-pounder, and one swivel, and manned by twenty-four volunteers; and the latter a public armed boat, under Captain Dimock, with a detachment of twenty-one men from the 21st regiment of infantry, under Lieutenants Burbank and Perry, sailed from Sackets Harbor..."

"After touching at Cape Vincent and French Creek, they selected, on the morning of the 17th, a quiet nook, in a creek, among the Thousand Islands, where they landed for muster and review; and the morning being delightfully pleasant, they employed themselves in drying, and putting in complete order their arms and ammunition, and cleaning out their boats..."

"At 9 [pm] they left Cranberry Creek, and at 4 a.m. of the 18th saw a brigade of British bateaux, convoyed by his majesty's gun boat, the *Spitfire*, lying at Simmonds's Landing, preparing to sail for Kingston. Upon this, they pushed for shore, and so completely surprised them [the British], had very few of the enemy escaped".

“The fifteen bateaux and the gun boat were at once seized, without a shot being fired on either side... At 9 a.m. the fleet landed in Cranberry Creek in Alexandria, and at 11, sixty-nine prisoners were sent off to the harbor [Sackets Harbor], under guard of 15 men, of the 21st, in charge of Lieutenant Burbank”.

Captain Dimock directed that all of the boats be taken as far up Cranberry Creek as possible. He then directed his men to prepare defenses for the inevitable attack by the British. Cannons were removed from the boats and placed in strategic locations, particularly on high ground overlooking the turns of the creek bed as it wound its way through the marshland.

The stage was set for the Battle of Cranberry Creek to begin... It was just a matter of when.

Chapter III

The Battle

As soon as word of the capture of the British convoy reached British headquarters at Kingston, they dispatched the 18-gun brig *Elmira* and several other smaller gunboats to retrieve the captured supplies. A force of approximately 250 men accompanied the boats.



However, the *Elmira* was too large to enter Goose Bay and could therefore not get up into Cranberry Creek. She did, however, blockade the opening from Goose Bay to prevent the Americans' escape.



At sunrise on the morning of July 21st, the British, with four gunboats, troop transports and 250 men were discovered making their way up Cranberry Creek toward the American position. The British force was met by the main body of 30 Americans. Another 20 Americans were manned in strategic positions along the shoreline to prevent the British forces from landing.



Under heavy cannon and grapeshot fire from the American forces, the British took heavy casualties. Their own cannon had difficulty returning accurate fire due to the difficulty of maneuvering their boats in narrow confines of the creek. The Americans kept up heavy cannonade and shot fire. Some of the British boats were abandoned as the British retreated.



At 6 a.m., the British, under a white flag of truce, sent a demand for the Americans to surrender, “to save the effusion of blood”. Their demand was immediately rejected and the firing recommenced on both sides.

The British account of this battle from *Christie’s History of War*, a British work, is quoted as follows:

“A few of the soldiers who had landed on the right bank, having re-embarked in the stern-most boats, leaped into the stream and, carrying their muskets on their heads, succeeded, after wading through the water and swampy soil contiguous thereto in effecting a landing on the left bank, and led on by Lieutenant Fawcett of the 100th regiment drove the enemy in gallant style, who retreated with precipitation to their log entrenchment. This spirited advance saved the gunboats, the foremost of which (the only one which bore upon the enemy) exposed to a galling fire had been disabled”.

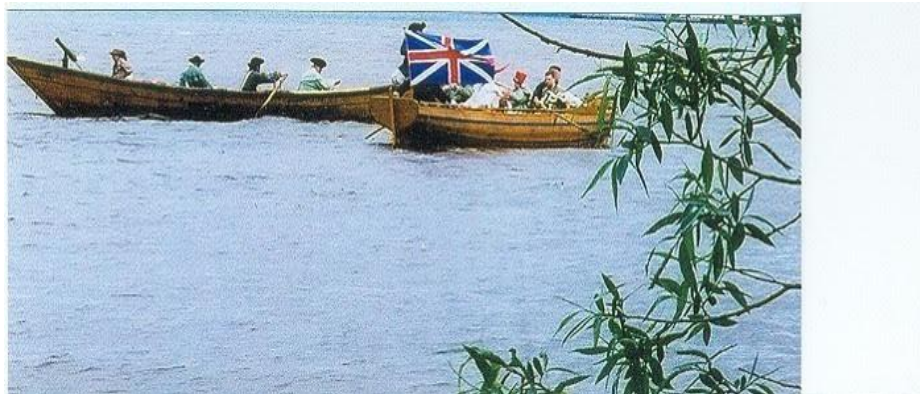


The British version continues, “Major Frennd finding the enemy strongly posted and from the impracticality of bringing the gunboats into action that a further perseverance must be attended with a greater sacrifice of lives than the nature of the enterprise seemed to justify, re-embarked the troops, and retired from the unequal contest”.

As expected, the details of the battle vary from account to account. That we even have detailed accounts of this battle from either side is fortunate, since few people could read or write in that area.



Despite the varying accounts, all parties are in agreement that the British forces, despite their numerical superiority, retreated from the contest and did not return. Fifty American soldiers had repelled the British force of 250, thereby winning the Battle of Cranberry Creek.



Chapter IV

The Casualties

Although it is not known exactly how long the Battle of Cranberry Creek continued, artifacts of ball and shot have been found on the shores of Cranberry Creek for quite a linear distance. It appears that the British came under fire from the main defending force of 30 Americans, as well as being engaged in a “running” battle with the other 20 Americans.



Left: Eight .64 caliber musket balls that were actually fired at American Soldiers by British troops during the Battle of Cranberry Creek. These were actually recovered from the site of the battle.

Right: A small cannon ball fired at American troops from the swivel deck gun of a British gunboat during the battle. It may have been superheated in a charcoal fire to set the woods on fire to drive the Americans back from their defensive positions.



These are cannonballs fired at American soldiers from British gunships during the Battle of Cranberry Creek. They were recovered from local fields near Cranberry Creek.

Hough's publication of 1854 states that, "Our loss was three killed and wounded". John A. Haddock's *Growth of a Century*, (1894) states, "In all, seven were killed of the Americans, and for

15 to 20 British". In a later paragraph in Haddock's work he states, "The British loss is placed as high as 12, and the American loss at 2".

Of the British casualties, Hough's description states, "The enemy hastily retreated carrying their dead and wounded". The British account doesn't give a number of dead, only that, "In this affair, Captain Milnes, aid-de-camp to the commander of the forces, was mortally wounded". Haddock's 1894 account mentions an American soldier, James Buchanan, who was, "...buried on the post in front of which the Canadian gun boat was sunk".

Since we know that American soldiers were killed in the Battle of Cranberry Creek, it is fitting that they have been remembered for nearly two centuries. The story of the battle, centering around a gravesite on the shore of Cranberry Creek, has been passed down through the generations. We start with this account about "The Soldiers of Cranberry Creek".

Lillie Melissa Babcock was born January 25th, 1856 at Barnes Settlement, not far from where the Battle of Cranberry Creek took place. In her memoirs in a book titled, *My Yesterdays*, she gave us this gem of history:

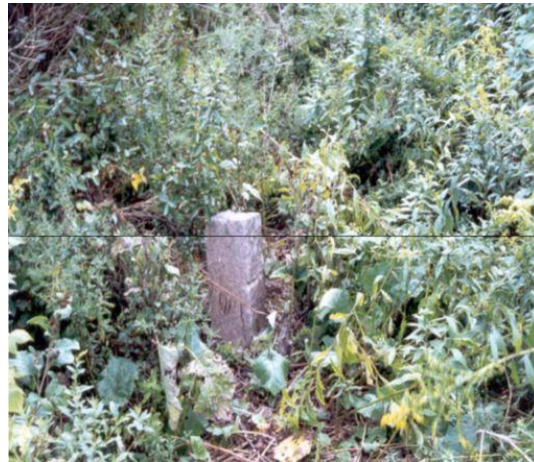
"Another point of interest for me was the burial place of three of our soldiers killed in the Battle of Cranberry Creek during the War of 1812. These graves were on the rise of ground leading to the ledge of the Charles Snell farm just before coming to the Peck Hill. This was the corner of the field and close to the road. They were on the left side of the road coming towards Barnes Settlement".

She continued, "There used to be a small plank fence to enclose them. Common fieldstones were placed at the head and foot of the graves. Many, many times I have visited those graves and placed wild flowers on them. Mother always let me stop and climb over the fence and roam among the graves".

Lillie has not been the only one to remember and honor our fallen soldiers. Generation after generation of local residents would take their children to a favorite fishing hole on Cranberry Creek, passing the gravesite on their way. The oral history about the gravesites and the stories of the Battle of Cranberry Creek may not have been entirely accurate, but these stories served to keep the memories of our brave soldiers alive for the local citizens of Alexandria Bay.

A newspaper article, printed in the *Thousand Islands Sun* on June 12, 1969, provides further evidence that our brave Soldiers of Cranberry Creek had not been forgotten. It reads, in part:

“As recently as 1955 the Sylvia de Grasse Chapter, D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution) caused stones to be laid in such a manner as to mark possible graves on the site, the work being done by the late John Monaghan”.



In 1967, the State of New York, bought up the gravesite as part of a 289-acre parcel to be a Wildlife Management Area to be administered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Unaware of the history of the site, no action was taken to preserve the site and markers.

No longer did local residents pass by the gravesites and point out the markers to their children. In fact, the D.A.R. grave markers were soon not visible at all, as wild berry bushes and undergrowth soon covered them. There was no path to them, no written plaque for them. In fact, they were only accessible by the strenuous half hour trek through high weeds, dense underbrush and over dead felled trees. Yet, they were only 200 yards off the Swan Hollow Road, on the shore of Cranberry Creek, just outside the Village of Alexandria Bay.

These soldiers who died on American soil defending against British oppression had nearly been forgotten.

Chapter V

The Escape

The conclusion of the Battle of Cranberry Creek did not end with the retreat of the British attacking force. That retreat merely left the American force, under the command of Captain

Dimock, up in the upper reaches of Cranberry Creek with 15 bateaux full of supplies and three gunboats.

The British forces had retreated out of Cranberry Creek, into Goose Bay and out into the St. Lawrence River. British gunboats blockaded the two exits out of Goose Bay, effectively trapping the Americans and their prizes.



Captain Dimock soon found that his troops could haul the bateaux through a marshy area between the mainland and Number 9 Island and out into the St. Lawrence, thereby avoiding the British blockade. The heavier and deeper draft gunboats were a different story. To salvage these valuable resources, he had to find a way to break through the British blockade.

An account of Captain Dimock's escape is cited in a section titled "Stories of the Towns" by Nathaniel W. Freeman in a book, published in 1905, titled *Speeches, Addresses and Stories of the Towns*:

"After the battle, all was quiet for a few days then Dimock dragged his boats across the marsh and sent them on to Sackets Harbor. His gunboats however were too heavy and he resolved to try and escape with them. Going down the creek in a bark canoe he got the bearings of the enemy's boats; then one foggy night he towed and hauled his gunboats up the creek and a slight breeze springing up, he set sail and steered boldly in the direction of the British boats. They did not discover him till within a pistol shot. They then ordered him to heave to. He answered he would under their stern. He went under their stern but the heaving was from 12- and six pound

guns. The enemy answered by a broadside as he moved clear. This shattered the stern of one of his boats but he got clear.”

At this point, you may think that Captain Dimock and his expedition were home free. Not so.

According to Haddock’s account, the British ship, *Elmira*, as soon as she could get around, gave the little *Fox* and *Neptune* a broadside at long range, and gave chase to the fleeing gunboats and bateaux. This forced Dimock’s fleet to take refuge in French Creek.

Hough’s history book tells the store that, “...on the 23rd they left for Sackets Harbor, where they arrived on the 27th. While passing Tibbett’s Point, they encountered the [British ship] *Earl of Moira*, were pursued and hit several times by her shot, but not captured.”

Whichever version is correct, Major Dimock’s force not only repelled the British attack, but also escaped and returned to his headquarters in Sackets Harbor with the majority of his forces intact, ready to fight another day.



Chapter VI

The British Prisoners



As you may remember, the American forces captured 69 British prisoners. These were taken, under an armed guard of fifteen men, to Sackets Harbor, the American headquarters.

First, imagine this forced march at that time. Cranberry Creek and Sackets Harbor are at least 30 miles apart. Then, consider that there was only one road into the interior. Yet, we know that the march was conducted, verified by an independent source.

The History of the Town of Theresa, 1980, quotes Hough's 1854 *History of Jefferson County* as it recounts the story of Captain John Hoover's (of the American militia) experiences around the time of the Battle of Cranberry Creek. It also provides us with a feeling of what this frontier was like in 1813, and how isolated its residents were.

"Captain John Hoover was employed... to watch over a herd of 60 cattle, 20 horses and about 450 sheep... The hazard attending the trust may be inferred from the fact that the clearing was surrounded by a dense forest, which extended to the St. Lawrence and to a great distance to the east, west and south, the nearest neighbor being at Evans Mills, 9 miles, and Friends settlement, 7 miles distant, to the former of which a blind path led through the woods. Should the enemy (the British) make an incursion in force, the only change of safety was a strongly built log house."

"On the occasion of the affair of Goose Creek [the Battle of Cranberry Creek] in July, 1813, Captain Hoover rallied his company in LeRay and took part in the action, conferred as much honor upon the American name as any that occurred in the war."

"The prisoners were marched past the little camp on their way to Sackets Harbor, and Capt. H. resumed his lonely vigil with no society but his wife, and a hired man, a few trusty guns and plenty of ammunition."

However, Captain Hoover's peace and tranquility were shattered when: "A few days later... He noticed five of the enemy cautiously approaching, who, without noticing him, crept into a barn on the premise, to spend the night. Not doubting that they had come to spy out the weaknesses of the place, he returned and securely fastened himself in his house, and at dawn crept out with his gun to watch their movements, and perhaps attempt some achievement if circumstances favored."

"... he soon perceived the five soldiers approaching, and challenged them after the manner of a sentinel, demanding who they were, to which they replied "Friend". He then ordered them to

advance and lay down their arms, upon which two approached, and the others fled. These two he assured should not be 'molested by his regiment' if they continued orderly and quiet, and having disarmed them, and mounted them upon horses, himself fully armed, riding behind on a spirited horse, he conducted them to the camp at Sackets Harbor."

Presumable, they joined their 69 fellow prisoners.

Chapter VII

The Fallen Soldiers of the Battle of Cranberry Creek

The story about the repatriation of the soldiers killed in the July, 1813 Battle of Cranberry Creek near Alexandria Bay, New York during the War of 1812 is told in the following words and pictures.

These soldiers' deeds and the memorials to their efforts were nearly lost to an overgrown woodlot and an uninformed bureaucracy.

This is their story:

Buried on the shores of Cranberry creek, the fallen Americans, who had fought a superior British force in July, 1813, were laid to rest by their fellow soldiers in 1813. Although markers were placed by the Daughters of the American Revolution to memorialize their sacrifices, their legacy nearly vanished.

By August, 1999, 200 yards of dense brush and blow downs would keep you from reaching their memorial gravesite from the Swan Hollow Road in the Town of Alexandria, a short distance from the Village of Alexandria Bay.



The winding waters of Cranberry Creek would take you along the original route of both the American and British troops. After a canoe ride of about one hour from the nearest access point from Route 12, you could gain access to the memorial site. However, it was also so obstructed with overgrowth that it was almost impossible to locate by water.



The Landowner

When professional writer Roger Fulton learned of the gravesite, and its neglect, he stated:
“If these soldiers were killed on American soil, defending this country from a British invasion, then whoever owns the land needs to take care of their gravesite and the heritage of the land they own.”

A summer’s worth of historical research of both the U.S. and British accounts of the Battle of Cranberry Creek, as well as many supporting documents and accounts, confirmed that this site was indeed the memorial gravesite of the American soldiers killed in this battle in July of 1813.

Interviews of many local people revealed that the site had been maintained for more than 150 years by the local citizenry. They also confirmed that their parents had pointed to the markers off Swan Hollow Road, and had conveyed their own accounts of the battle and the area’s contribution to the struggling nation’s sovereignty in those early days of our Republic.

In 1999, Roger Fulton began a series of articles about the Battle of Cranberry Creek and its forgotten soldiers in the *Thousand Islands Sun* newspaper. Thereafter, the State of New York’s

Department of Environmental Conservation, who managed the land, and members of the Alexandria Bay Chapter of the American Legion, met to explore the site.

The Find

In August, 1999, as the team left the Swan Hollow Road, they attempted to traverse nearly 200 yards of blowdowns, tangles and berry bushes. The terrain was increasingly hostile, and it took more than 25 minutes for the team to cover only 200 yards.

Finally, after a considerable search of the area, the old memorial markers were located. Archeologists like to find hidden treasures, and in the next photograph, ENCN archeologist Chuck Vendrei contemplates this historical find that was almost lost forever.

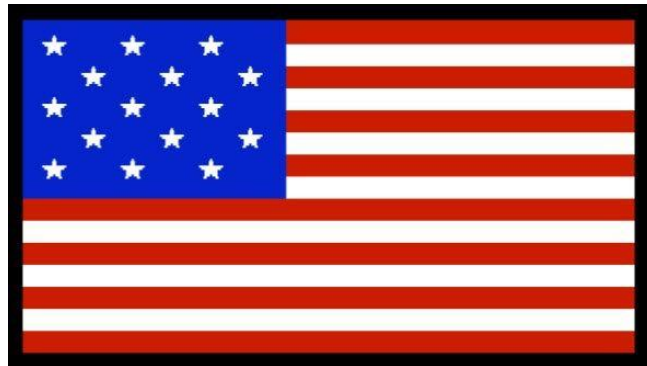


The Repatriation

In the next photo, American Legion Chaplain Jamie Brassard places an American flag with 50 stars on one of the markers for the first time.



When the soldiers died, the American flag had only 15 stars.



So close to being lost forever, these three memorial markers now fly the American flag, reclaiming their heritage.

The Agreement

Immediately upon reviewing the markers and reviewing historical research, the State of New York agreed that this was indeed a valuable historical site that needed to be preserved for future generations. Within days, they had cut an access trail from the Swan Hollow Road. Shortly thereafter, they cleared the memorial gravesite and righted the fallen markers.

Within a few months, they constructed the restraining posts and chains that you can see today. Interpretive markers are now in place to explain the circumstances that led to the Battle of Cranberry Creek during the War of 1812.

The Town of Alexandria, the American Legion, the Sons of the American Legion and Seaway Trail all assisted in the effort to assure a proper memorial site.

Resting in Peace

The soldiers of Cranberry Creek may now rest in peace, properly memorialized for their ultimate sacrifices for all future generations.



This is the scene that visitors to the memorial site will see today. When you visit the site, please try to place yourself in this setting over two hundred years ago, as small bands of brave American soldiers fought, and died, in this wilderness.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

The people of the Thousand Island Region wanted no part of the War of 1812. Many of them referred to it as “Madison’s War”, alluding to the fact that President Madison had wanted the war with Britain.

North Country and Thousand Island settlers relied on each other in those difficult times. The politics of nations took a back seat to the realities of survival on a difficult frontier. When war

was declared, many North Country settlers, on both sides of the border, left for more stable and less politically volatile surroundings.

Those Americans who stayed fought as militia in conjunction with U.S. Military Regulars. Both soldier and citizen stood side by side in what some have called “America’s Second Revolution”. That indomitable American spirit lives on today in the North Country and the Thousand Island people. They are strong, hearty and carry on the traditions of their ancestors.

The spirit of the Soldiers of Cranberry Creek lives on. May they be remembered always, and their independent spirits live on forever.



A thunderstorm over Cranberry Creek perhaps best symbolizes the storm clouds of war that gathered over this region two hundred years ago. The storm’s uncontrolled violence and the unpredictability pale when compared to war. But, our feelings and thoughts during the storm are perhaps the same thoughts that our soldiers had as they faced the violence and unpredictability of war along Cranberry Creek.

No doubt the soldiers who fought and died here all had dreams and aspirations as they faced an uncertain future. Let us never forget the sacrifices that they made in trying to achieve their dreams.

Directions to the Battle of Cranberry Creek Memorial Site

From I-81, north of Watertown, New York, take Exit 50 and travel north on Rte. 12 towards Alexandria Bay for approximately 4.5 miles. Just past the Alexandria Bay red light, turn right onto the Swan Hollow Road. Follow it for approximately .6 miles and turn left into a parking area with an American Flag.

Follow the trail about 200 yards to the memorial site and interpretive markers on the shore of Cranberry Creek.

Or, if you prefer, you can plot the following GPS coordinates to the parking area:

N 44° 19.826'

W 075° 52.895'

Pay your respects to the soldiers who died there on American soil, defending America from a foreign enemy. The Canadian border has now been peaceful since 1814, and we hope that it will remain that way, forever.

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