

The day the Vrooman family helped save Canada

James and Solomon Vrooman kept firing their cannon after the death of Gen. Brock, the township's namesake

COMMUNITY Apr 16, 2018 by Larry Doble Brock Citizen



Lyn Downer of the War of 1812 Veteran Graveside Recognition Project joined Wally Vrooman, Regional Councillor Ted Smith, John Henderson (a family member of Vrooman's), Carol Doran-Sproule and Larry Doble for the installation of a plaque honouring Colonel James Vrooman in 2014. - Scott Howard - Metroland file photo

The Vrooman family, whose roots are now in Brock Township, had for many years served in the British military. They fought for the British against the French in the Seven Years War (1756-1763), and in the American Revolution of 1776 as part of Butler's Rangers and then in the War of 1812.

The Battle of Queenston Heights was the first major battle of the War of 1812 and took place on Oct. 13. Sir Isaac Brock was leader of the British forces in Upper Canada (Ontario) and he had already won a great victory in the capture of Fort Detroit.

He and Chief Tecumseh forced the American forces to surrender without a fight in August 1812.

Now at Queenston Heights, the Americans suffered heavy losses as they rowed across the Niagara River and were hit by musket and cannon fire. They did, however, manage to scale the heights and capture most of the British artillery.

When Gen. Brock arrived from Fort George, he immediately led a charge up the hill to try to recapture their artillery position. He was an easy target for an enemy sniper and was shot and killed early in the battle.

The disheartened British retreated and an American victory seemed imminent.

The only cannon still firing was a 24-pounder artillery piece located at Vrooman's Point on the property of Captain Adam Vrooman. It continued firing all day to sink the row boats of the American troops crossing the Niagara River.

Thousands of American troops refused to get in those boats because of that one cannon and thus the American forces were left with only about 1,000 men isolated on the Canadian side.

When new British reinforcements under the command of General Roger Sheaffe arrived, his troops aided by about 300 Mohawk warriors attacked and captured all of the American forces. This was a huge victory for the British forces as their losses were minimal compared to the enemy casualties.

The only negative part of the battle was the loss of heroic Gen. Brock, the namesake of our township. As part of his estate, 1,400 acres of the 12,600 acres of land were located near Blackwater on the map of Brock in 1818.

James Vrooman and his brother Solomon continued to fight during this war as members of the Glengarry Fencibles and were involved in many battles. Col. James Vrooman moved to Brock Township about 1820 and received land on the 7th Concession of Brock for his military service.

He was a born leader in the community and was a major force in the establishment of the thriving town of Vroomanton. He helped establish saw and

grist mills, schools, churches, a post office, carriage and blacksmith shops and wooden board walks on the store fronts at a time when Sunderland was a much smaller village called Jones's Corners.

Once the railroad came through Sunderland about 1868, Vroomanton declined in size as merchants move to this new transportation route.

Vrooman's Point is now a national historic site because of the significance it played in the victory at Queenston Heights and also the possible outcome of the entire War of 1812.

The grave sites of James Vrooman and his brother Solomon have plaques honouring them as two of the many soldiers who served in the War of 1812.

Larry Doble is president of the Sunderland and District Historical Society.