

War of 1812 veteran honoured

Plaque installed at grave of Colonel James Vrooman

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Lyn Downer of the War of 1812 Veteran Graveside Recognition Project joined Wally Vrooman, incoming Regional Councillor Ted Smith, John Henderson (a family member of Mr. Vrooman's), Carol Doran-Sproule and Larry Doble for the installation of a plaque honouring Colonel James Vrooman on Saturday (Nov. 8).

(BROCK TWP.) The heroism of one of Brock Township's early settlers has been celebrated with a ceremony to formally recognize Colonel James Vrooman as a veteran of the War of 1812.

Roughly three dozen people -- including many descendants -- attended St. James United Church in Vroomanton (northwest of Sunderland) Saturday (Nov. 9) for the installation of a veterans' plaque at Col. Vrooman's grave.

"With this being the 200th anniversary of the end of the War of 1812, it's wonderful that its veterans are being recognized. Without them, Canada might be part of the United States," said Carol Doran-Sproule, a local resident and Col. Vrooman's great-granddaughter.

The efforts to recognize Col. Vrooman were initiated by Niagara region resident Wally Vrooman, another descendant.

"We wanted to recognize his efforts in the War of 1812 and his efforts in building this community," he said, noting that a plaque was also installed last month at the grave of Solomon Vrooman, the Colonel's eldest brother.

Larry Doble, president of the Sunderland and District Historical Society, opened the ceremony with a brief presentation of the Vrooman family history.

With a historic loyalty to the British Crown, Adam Vrooman, Col. Vrooman's father, fought against the Americans in the War of Independence and the family came to Canada afterwards as United Empire Loyalists, settling in the Niagara area.

Col. Vrooman was born in 1798, the second youngest of seven children.

Listening to their father's war stories growing up, Col. Vrooman and his four brothers developed a keen interest in the military.

In June of 1812 -- as the United States was declaring war on Great Britain -- Col. Vrooman, along with his brother George, joined the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles, a provincial rifle corps.

"They fought in many decisive battles," Mr. Doble said.

The unit's companies were deployed to various locations in Upper Canada in support of the local militias.

Col. Vrooman was involved several British victories that turned the tide of the war, including the capture of the American army at St. Regis, the storming of Ogdensburg, the raid of Oswego and the bloody battle Lundy's Lane that brought the war to a close.

With the declaration of peace between the two countries, each veteran of the British forces was awarded free grants of land from the Crown.

Joined by two of his brothers, Col. Vrooman eventually came to Brock Township in 1821 and it took eight years of clearing the land before he obtained a registered deed.

The following year, he married Jane Purdy of Cobourg and the couple would go on to have seven children.

Following his wife's death in 1838, Col. Vrooman married Rhoda Johnson of Manilla and would have 10 more children.

Though he spent most of his life as a farmer, Col. Vrooman was particularly interested in politics and held various public offices, including as a councillor and as the overseer of highways, beginning in 1833.

He was instrumental in promoting the development of Vroomanton as a community -- donating land to start a school and local church (St. James), establishing an active Orange Lodge and helping organize construction of a grist mill.

Col. Vrooman died on Sept. 4, 1871, at the age of 75 and is buried at St. James.

Two members of township council -- new Regional Councillor Ted Smith and incoming Ward 4 Councillor Therese Miller, whose husband is a descendant of the Vrooman family -- were on hand for the ceremony Sunday.

"This recognition is long overdue," Coun. Smith said.

Though funded through a grant from Heritage Canada, the effort to recognize War of 1812 veterans is led by a three-member volunteer committee.

"It's about as grassroots as it can get," according to Lyn Downer of the War of 1812 Veteran Graveside Recognition Project.

"It sprung to life through a conversation at my kitchen table."

The grant from the federal government will provide for the purchase of 800 graveside plaques, like the one installed in honour of Col. Vrooman, in an effort to preserve Canada's heritage.

"Canadians, as a whole, don't know who the War of 1812 were, their history or where they ended up. We've never said 'thanks' to these vets. It's nothing short of a national disgrace," Mr. Downer said, noting that more than 230 plaques have been installed to date.

"From this day forward, this will be known as the grave of a veteran from the War of 1812."

As the service concluded with an impromptu singing of the national anthem, Mr. Downer encouraged those in attendance -- and Canadians as a whole -- to keep veterans of the War of 1812 in their thoughts and close to their hearts.

"I ask that you sing it with pride and sing it with passion. I also ask that you think of this veteran and the other veterans of the War of 1812. Without their resolve and without their sacrifice, we wouldn't have our country or our anthem."

by [Scott Howard](#)

Scott Howard is former editor of the Brock Citizen.