

CORNELIUS THOMPSON BRANCH

1969 Autumn

The Cornelius Thompson Branch was formed June 14.

The official founding ceremonies took place at Sandy Bay, Penetanguishene, August 2nd. In addition to the formal ceremonies, there were several activities for all members of the families who are or will be joining the organization. The festivities included a luncheon party, a banquet, fishing competition, baseball game, golf tournament, and a cruise through part of the Thirty Thousand Islands. It is hoped to repeat the founding activities every third year in the future.

The President of the Cornelius Thompson Branch at its foundation was Donald G. E. Thompson of London and Penetanguishene, and the new President appointed August 2nd was Dr. James D. Spohn of Kitchener and Penetanguishene. The members are looking forward to a fruitful association in the new Branch and association with the other branches.

Who was Cornelius Thompson? From Loyalist Trails – 2012 November 25

LOYALISTS AND WAR OF 1812: SONS OF CORNELIUS THOMPSON

My UEL ancestor Cornelius Thompson (1756-1814) fought in the Revolutionary War with the New Jersey Volunteers, Lieutenant, 2nd Battalion. He and Rebecca then settled in Kingsclear, New Brunswick, where they raised seven children. When the sons reached early manhood in 1809, he moved the family to Ontario, never dreaming that he would be fighting in another war for the British.

The family settled in Grantham Township, Lincoln County, between St. Catharine's and Niagara on the Lake, not far from the original Welland Canal.

Few Canadian families took a more active part or suffered more during the war of 1812-14 than did the Thompsons of Grantham. Cornelius was 57 years of age when the war began. He was in very poor health and exempt from military service. All other adult males were required to go to Niagara town to take the oath of allegiance. While ineligible for combat, Cornelius did all he could to assist in preparing the country for defence in his area and supporting it during the battles.

All four sons enlisted in 1812:

William (1786-1860) was 26 and a Captain in the 2nd York Regiment, in the Company of Capt. James FitzGibbon.

Augustus (1788-?) was 24 and in Capt. John McEwan's flank in the 1st Lincoln, and later served in the 49th Regiment.

Frederick (1790-1822) was 22 and was in Capt. James Crooks flank in the 1st Lincoln.

Oliver (1797-1813) was 15 and in the Company of Capt. Andrew Heron of the 1st Lincoln.

Both flank Companies were engaged in the action of 13 of October, 1812, at Queenston Heights. Augustus Thompson was present as a volunteer attached to the 49th and with his fellow volunteers, Shaw and Jarvis, won Mention in Dispatches in their first action. Major-General Sheaffe, in his dispatch to Governor Prevost, said; "Volunteers Shaw, Thompson, and Jarvis, attached to the flank companies of the 49th Regiment, conducted themselves with great spirit, the first having been wounded and the last having been taken prisoner. I beg to recommend these young men to your Excellency's notice." Their names appear in the General Orders on October 21st.

The campaign of 1812 closed without scathe to any of the four Thompsons, while their military experience and standing had advanced. Their sisters were not less interested in the war--and warriors--than the brothers. Mary, who was in her 19th year, was to cherish, until old age, the memory of having been a dancing partner of the lamented Brock. She later married John Campbell Garden, son of UEL William Garden, a second connection of the two families. Amelia, eldest of the sisters, had lost her heart to a dare-devil Irish subaltern of Brock's old Regiment (Lt. Alexander Garrett), whom she married in 1813.

The campaign of 1813 in the Niagara peninsula opened with the disastrous battle of Fort George, on May 27th, in which the 1st Lincoln was engaged and its flank companies were badly cut up. The retirement of the British forces to Burlington followed; the victorious invading force swept the length of the peninsula, and members of the Thompson family who remained in their home in Grantham, like many another old Loyalist family, found themselves at the mercy of their ancient enemies. Soon a more personal sorrow deepened for them the bitterness of defeat. On June 4th, young Oliver Thompson, in his 16th year, died from exposure and disease sustained while on military duty.

Foremost among the British advanced parties was the troop of Provincial Dragoons commanded by Capt. William Merritt, and one of his men was Frederick Thompson. The families were neighbors. On the evening of July 18th, 1814, this little unit, out on a reconnoitering expedition, was ambushed "on the hill next St. David's" by a body of the enemy estimated to be two hundred strong, who poured in two volleys at pistol range but with such poor aim that only one man of Merritt's troop was hit--Thompson. His wound was severe and he, with one companion, named Woodruff, fell into the enemy's hands. Thompson was released on parole, probably because the enemy did not wish to be burdened with a wounded prisoner, and he was so badly hurt as to be unfit for further service during the war.

The neighborhood of St. David's had been the scene of numerous skirmishes and of mishaps to the US forces during the campaigns of 1813 and 1814, and the inhabitants of the place by their unquenchable and militant loyalty had earned bitter resentment of the invaders. The skirmish of the 18th of July seemed the last straw, for on the 19th, their volunteers came again, in force, and burned the whole village, with its mills. This cruel proceeding, heartily condemned by the US regular army, served but to stimulate the Canadian militiamen to greater exertions for the defense of their country.

On that same day, the British field force advanced to "the Ten" and about 30 active and resolute spirits, nine of them being officers, volunteered to form a new corps of observation, to scout upon the enemy's flanks and restrict the movements of detachments at any distance from his main body. Capt. James FitzGibbon was in command and the party included Capt. William Thompson and Ensign Augustus Thompson., the latter being detached from duty with his regiment at Fort Mississauga. The service was recognized to be a most dangerous one, but no-one anticipated the speedy fate that awaited the little band. On July 22, a detachment of FitzGibbon's men sailed from "theTen" to Queenston and down the river road in rear of the US army, then lying before Fort George. Discovered and pursued, they had a running fight back through Queenston, losing their rear guard to the enemy's cavalry. At St. David's, FitzGibbon and several fresh men met the fugitives and the united party turned at bay and held the position against their pursuers for two hours. Capt. Thompson with 12 men formed the right flank. The enemy having apparently abandoned the contest, the Canadian scouts continued their retirement towards "the Ten". Stopping for a meal at John Collard's house, the party encountered a surprise attack. Thompson and two others rushed upstairs with muskets and fired out of the windows, killing a dragoon and several horses, while the others were forced to yield. Enraged by the firing from above, the enemy disposed to seek revenge, but were stopped by the pleadings of Mrs. Frances Lowell, a victim and widow of recent ravages at St. Davids, seeking refuge at the Collard house. She prevailed upon the enemy to accept the surrender of the three officers in the attic as prisoners of war. The captors severely abused their prisoners who

included Thompson and his brother. The house was then burned, and FitzGibbon's little corps was reduced from thirty to eleven men.

Of the four Thompson brothers who had been in the Canadian forces at the outbreak of the war, not one now remained on service. Oliver was dead, Frederick disabled, and William and Augustus were prisoners. When the news of the misfortunes of the latter three reached their father, his sorrow was more than his weakened state could sustain, and on August 7th, 1814, he died.

Before Cornelius died, Lundy's Lane had been fought, where William Merritt and others became prisoners of war. In the internment quarters at Cheshire, NY, Merritt found, among other prisoners, the two Thompsons, and there they remained until the treaty of peace brought about their release in 1815. Cornelius's widow's petition of 1818 for relief and compensation was not realized.

William Thompson went on to become MP for West York, Upper Canada.

B. Purin -- adapted from E. Green's "A Little Study in Loyalist Genealogy: The Thomsons of Perthshire," Ont. Historical Soc., 1934.