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# Briggs Talks on the Boys of Carlisle in 1812

*Jackie Turnquist*

Off to War! Brandishing an authentic, 6-foot long musket from 1809, Ray Briggs led the Carlisle Historical Society audience into war during his presentation at the October meeting. Ray began with a demonstration of how a musket was prepared for firing – put in some powder, add a 69 caliber lead ball, push in the ramrod and shove everything down the barrel, reverse the ram rod, put more powder in the pan, close the pan, full cock, FIRE! – a process that emphasized the “good news/bad news” of battle during the early 19th century. The good news was that the British

soldiers took just as long to prepare their muskets; the bad news is that while the American soldiers were loading theirs, the native fighters had already unleashed 10 arrows each. The Americans’ bayonets and swords were the equalizer.

A typical musket used during the War of 1812 could shoot from approximately 100 yards with poor accuracy, from 75 yards with good accuracy, and at 25 yards they might actually hit the target – if the gun fired at all, which it usually did. The musket Ray used for his demonstration is the same firearm used by his ancestor, William Young, at the Battle of Ogdensburg on February 22, 1813. He brought this musket, along with several other artifacts, to his presentation.

War was declared on June 18, 1812 by a reluctant President Madison. America had only about 12,000 troops and hardly any navy; but Britain was violating our shipping by impressing our sailors in order to man their warships in their war against France. They stopped 1,000 American ships on the open seas and in English ports and impressed approximately 5,000 of our seamen.

Not everyone here in America was eager to engage in war with Britain. Northern New York was experiencing good trade with Canada and many in New England continued to have close ties with England. But, war was declared and soldiers were needed. The first levy of soldiers in Schoharie County occurred in 1812, with men from the southern part of the county marching to Sackets Harbor. There are few records of those who served from this group. On December 19, 1812 a general muster order was given to meet at the Cobleskill Gun House, located on the corner of East Main and Spring Street. This group would serve in Captain Giles Kellogg’s Volunteer Artillery.

As was common at that time, some men who were called were dismissed or had someone to substitute for them. The soldiers received two months' pay in advance and were ready to go to Ogdensburg on December 26, 1812. Kellogg hired two scouts, Peter Shaeffer and Abram Vroman, to lead them to Little Falls. From there they had to travel an additional 180 miles to Ogdensburg. This trek was undertaken during a particularly harsh January. They arrived in Ogdensburg on January 12 or 13, having traveled roughly 10-12 miles per day.

The boys from Carlisle included Peter Burhans, William Young, Zachariah Burhans, Charles Chase, Eli Peck, Asa Whitmore, John Lakham, Walter Wright, John Hyney, John Joseph Becker, John Lord, David Brown, Aaron Malick, Henry Moak, Cornelius Osterhout, Charles Gordon, Elias Malick, Peter VanDerWerken, Abraham Wessel, Jacob Young.

In Ogdensburg they were joined by Captain Forsythe of Montgomery County. Captain Forsythe decided to take a group across the St. Lawrence to blow up some British stockpiles, which they did successfully. Then they went north with about 70 men at night to the town of Brockville in order to liberate some American prisoners. They were unopposed and were able to release all the prisoners but one who was imprisoned for murder and was scheduled to be hanged the next day. Although this individual swore if released he would fight for the Americans, he was not a political prisoner and was left. Fifty-five prisoners, some of whom were officers, were released. Only one shot was fired leaving one soldier wounded.

Spies told the soldiers that the British were about to attack. When Captain Forsythe, the commanding officer, asked for additional support (they had only about 300 soldiers), none was given. They were told they could choose whether to retreat or stay and fight. They chose to fight.

Not only lacking in troops, their defenses were a bit outdated, including a 12- pound iron cannon last in use during the Battle of Saratoga in 1777 – 36 years before. British forces (regulars, militia and Indians) attacked the Americans on February 22, 1813. The battle lasted only an hour and a half before Forsythe's troops retreated. Twenty Americans were killed or wounded, among those being William Young of Carlisle, Ray's ancestor. Shot in the thigh bone of the left leg, William was tended to by his comrades for several days before Dr. J. W. Smith was called. The wound turned gangrenous and the leg was amputated by the doctor on March 8.

Have you ever considered just what was involved in the amputation of a limb in 1812? Ray kindly painted a vivid picture for us all – no anesthesia so the patient would be given as much alcohol as could be spared, given a bullet or a leather belt to bite down on, was held down by five or six sturdy men, and the limb cut off. A "good" surgeon could amputate a leg in 10 minutes.

The Old Stone Fort in Schoharie has, in its library archives, a folder containing several original documents from Captain Kellogg's Artillery. Upon studying these documents, Ray was able to find many gems, including the physician's bill for his ancestor's treatment, affidavits of enlistments, substitute bonds, and inventories of soldiers' property.

For \$25, William Young and another wounded soldier, Michael Pierce, were transported to Sackets Harbor to join the rest of the volunteers. William was discharged in July, 1813 and returned to Carlisle. Captain Kellogg's Voluntary Artillery was active until December of 1813 when their one year of service was completed.



Ray Sr., his grandson Brian and his son Ray Jr., display some of the artifacts from William Young.



Ray Briggs gives a passionate lecture on the Boys of Carlisle

At the age of 32, William married Katherine Petrie, age 20, and they had 5 children. He was a cobbler and, according to Katherine, suffered from his wound all his life. He died at 72 from “dropsy of the heart”. The musket, bayonet, sword, cartridge pouch and powder flask used by William Young at the Battle of Ogdensburg are the only known artifacts from the battle. In 2006, Ray, his son and grandson traveled to Ogdensburg for the battle reenactment with these items. They were welcomed by the reenactors and media, who took several pictures and admired the artifacts. They were the only known descendents to return to the site of the battlefield, according to local historians.

“You can own an antique gun, but when you know the story behind it, it means so much more.” Ray shares the story of his ancestor to pay tribute to what William, and many others, did for his country and to remember how he suffered.

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