

# The Murder of Captain William Francis An Incident in the War of 1812

Charles Garrad

Volume 111, numéro 2, fall 2019

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065080ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065080ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

## Résumé de l'article

*Le capitaine William Francis a été assassiné durant la Guerre de 1812. Était-il un innocent tué par des partisans américains dans le cadre d'une stratégie militaire ou sa mort avait-elle été de nature plus personnelle? Dans cet article, nous concluons que l'assassinat était le résultat d'une longue dispute entre William Francis et son assassin John Dickson, aggravée lorsque Francis avait témoigné contre certains membres de la bande de Dickson. Cette querelle a eu des répercussions sur plusieurs actions militaires durant la guerre, celles de Sutherland, de Port Dover, de Port Rowan et de McCrae, ainsi que la bataille de Nanticoke. La guerre présentait à certains l'opportunité de régler des comptes personnels.*

## Citer cet article

Garrad, C. (2019). The Murder of Captain William Francis: An Incident in the War of 1812. *Ontario History*, 111(2), 127–151. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065080ar>

# THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN WILLIAM FRANCIS

## An Incident in the War of 1812

by Charles Garrad

On the 3rd of December 1814, Elizabeth 'Dixon' (actually Dickson) appeared before two Justices of the Peace and swore the following statement:

Personally appeared before us, George C. Salmon and Thos. Bowlby, Esqrs., two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the London District of Upper Canada, Elizabeth Dixon, who deposeth and saith that John Dixon, her husband, left this country and went to the United States since the commencement of this war, and that she followed him to the neighbourhood of Buffalo; that during the time she was at that place, her husband John Dixon, John Robinson, and Henry Dochstader passed over into Canada together, and that she heard them say they were determined to take the lives of Col. Thos. Talbot, Capt. Wm. Francis, Thomas Francis and William Drake. That sometime about

### *Abstract*

*Captain William Francis was murdered in the land war in Canada in the War of 1812. Was he an innocent farmer murdered in his bed by American partisans as part of some larger military strategy or was his death more personal in nature? This article concludes that the murder was the result of personal antagonism between John Dickson, the murderer, and William Francis of many years duration newly exacerbated by the testimony given against a number of Dickson's gang. This feud had repercussions in a number of actions during the war including the Sutherland Raid, the Port Rowan, Port Dover, and McCrae incidents, and the Battle of Nanticoke. This article shows that, for some, the war was an opportunity to settle personal scores.*

**Résumé:** *Le capitaine William Francis a été assassiné durant la Guerre de 1812. Était-il un innocent tué par des partisans américains dans le cadre d'une stratégie militaire ou sa mort avait-elle été de nature plus personnelle? Dans cet article, nous concluons que l'assassinat était le résultat d'une longue dispute entre William Francis et son assassin John Dickson, aggravée lorsque Francis avait témoigné contre certains membres de la bande de Dickson. Cette querelle a eu des répercussions sur plusieurs actions militaires durant la guerre, celles de Sutherland, de Port Dover, de Port Rowan et de McCrae, ainsi que la bataille de Nanticoke. La guerre présentait à certains l'opportunité de régler des comptes personnels.*

the first of November last they returned to the house of her husband, John Dixon, near Buffalo, that John Dixon was wounded and died a few hours after he reached his house; that she heard them say that they had killed Capt. Francis and burnt his house and him in it; that she had seen also at the house of her husband, near Buffalo, several persons who had left this Province and remembers seeing the following persons: Eber Decew, John Vandervoort, John Van Allen, John Gibbs, Barney Gibbs, Martin Burnham, Guy P. Richards, George Wolfe, John Kendrick and Simon Mabee, and that she was at her husband's funeral, and a few days after she left the United States and came into this Province. (Sgd) Elizabeth her (X) mark Dixon.

Sworn before us this 3rd December, 1914  
(Sgd) George C. Salmon, J.P., Thos. Bowlby, J.P.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Thomas Talbot forwarded this deposition to headquarters with his own report. By this time, John Dickson was dead:

The late John Dixon, who headed a gang of marauders composed of the undermentioned persons, was a native of the United States of America, but resided in Upper Canada for several years prior to the commencement of the present war, where he married the daughter of a U.E. Loyalist. He fled from Long Point to Buffalo in 1813, when troops of the United States occupied Fort George and the Niagara Frontier. From the unsettled state of the coast of Lake Erie between

Dover and Fort Erie, this gang have been enabled to make repeated incursions in this part of the Province, where they have plundered several families and have frequently fired on the inhabitants. His last act was the murder of Captain Francis, in the perpetration of which it appears from the annexed deposition, he was assisted by two other men, Henry Dochstader, a Canadian, and John Robinson, supposed to be a citizen of the United States.

#### **Names of Dickson's Associates.**

- John Dixon, born in the United States
- Murderers
- Henry Dochstader, a Canadian
- John Robinson, United States
- Simon Maybee, born in United States
- Samuel Green, born in United States
- John G. Harris, born in United States
- Robert Carr, born in Ireland
- Augustus Parks, Born in United States
- John Vandervoort, born in United States
- Elias Long, born in United States
- Barnabas Gibbs, born in United States
- John Gibbs, born in United States
- Wm. Corbett, born in England
- Guy Richards, born in United States

The above persons have all been residents of Upper Canada for several years before the war. Dochstader is half Indian, born in Upper Canada.

Thos. Talbot.  
Long Point, 4th December 1814<sup>2</sup>

Any reasonably comprehensive study

<sup>1</sup> E.A. Cruikshank, *The Documentary History of the Campaign on the Niagara Frontier in 1814*, 9 vols. (titles slightly vary), n.d.-1908, Lundy's Lane Historical Society, Welland (hereafter Cruikshank, *Doc. Hist.*) II pp. 318-19; as will be seen, this apparently frank account contains an element of misinformation in that Elizabeth withholds mentioning her brother Elisha Green and also Samuel Green, possibly also a relative.

<sup>2</sup> Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" II pp. 317-18. The gang had probably earlier also included Elisha Green (Dickson's brother-in-law), Isaac Pettit (Dickson's sister-in-law's husband, then in jail), James Johnson (in jail) and John Shufelt (killed) per Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" VIII pp. 183-84.

of the 1812-1815 land war in Upper Canada might be expected to mention the murder of Captain William Francis.<sup>3</sup> The more detailed studies name the principal perpetrator as John Dickson, often mis-spelled 'Dixon', and the most generous describes his gang as "American irregulars."<sup>4</sup> Other than generally observing that militia officers were the frequent impersonal targets for American-based marauders<sup>5</sup> none of the published sources examined consider that John Dickson may have had personal motives. This is understandable, being that little is known about the two men. What *is* known, linked by reasonable suppositions, allows the conclusion that the murder was not an impersonal act within some larger military strategy but the result of personal antagonism between Dickson and Francis of many years duration newly exacerbated by the testimony given by William Francis and his son Thomas at the recent Ancaster Assizes against a number of Dickson's gang.

To support this supposition with so little hard direct evidence it is necessary to review in some detail what is known of the two men and of the events and personalities of their day which coloured and affected their lives.

### *The Long Point Settlement of Ontario*

Even before he reached Upper Canada in 1792 to assume both the civil Lt. Governorship and military command of the new Province of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe had formed plans for the Long Point district of the north shore of Lake Erie, which he held unswervingly throughout his tenure until he left in 1796 sick and frustrated. In his view a military base at or near Long Point was the absolutely essential precursor to settlement. Such a base would naturally spawn a town of considerable significance. A military base, even a blockhouse, would allow a naval arsenal, shipbuilding, and a harbour. Located at Long Point, it would be halfway between the present bases of Niagara and Detroit which were due to be given to the Americans, being at the same time a substitute for and defence from both. The same base would protect the most practical route of entry for the Loyalists expected to arrive from Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maryland and other States. At the same time, it would protect a road inland to the Thames and allow river communication with and beyond Detroit safe from the reach of

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps typical is Pierre Berton, *Flames Across the Border 1813-1814* (Penguin Books 1988), p. 526, which movingly but inaccurately portrays "an innocent old Loyalist farmer, William Francis, murdered for no good reason in his bed at Long Point by American partisans." There are too many similar secondary source references to the incident to conveniently cite them here.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Jesse Edgar Middleton and Fred Landon, *The Province of Ontario—A History 1615-1927*, vol 1 p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the "avowed object" of William Sutherland's raiders "was to recover property they had abandoned and make prisoners of the most active officers of the militia," E.A. Cruikshank, "The County of Norfolk in the War of 1812," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* (hereafter *OHS P&R*) XX, 23; as will be seen, John Dickson had tried to kill other officers on other occasions.

American shore guns or Lake Erie ships. The base and road would serve and protect a safe capital town at London, and garrisons at London and Long Point would control the Indian trade, separate the Grand River and western Indians, and guard the settlers from passing war-parties. This last issue was of such importance that no settlement at Long Point was authorized until after Simcoe's personal inspection in 1795 following the termination of hostilities in Ohio.<sup>6</sup> Simcoe's conviction that a military presence at Long Point was essential was not reduced by the failure of his military superiors to agree. His ace-up-the-sleeve was his dual military and civil roles.<sup>7</sup> His civil mandate to settle refugee Loyalists came directly from the highest possible source, the King himself.<sup>8</sup> He also controlled the establishment of militia<sup>9</sup> and he had long advised Whitehall he would place a militia garrison at Long Point if he at least could get a block-house.<sup>10</sup> Even without a block-house he could still have a garrison of sorts at Long Point, under his control,

by settling military Loyalists there and forming them into a militia. Long Point could still become the "Military Colony" for which he had always argued. This would be done by settling only "Loyalists of the most determined principles" and forming them into a militia. The system of settlement would be to give large grants to Officers of proven loyalty who in turn would obtain settlers.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, any known military Loyalist with a scheme to settle at or near Long Point with a number of his fellows became certain to meet with an enthusiastic reception and quickly find himself not only possessed of a large grant and considerable jurisdiction over who he was to settle in it, but also of a commission in the putative local militia accompanied with various civil appointments. William Francis was such a man.<sup>12</sup>

### *William Francis*

After Revolutionary War service as Quartermaster of the King's American Dragoons, William Francis seems to

---

<sup>6</sup> Summarised from references contained in E.A. Cruikshank, *"The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe..."* 5 vols, 1923-31, The Ontario Historical Society, q.v., (hereafter Simcoe Correspondence). There are some 300 references in the five volumes to Long Point, Long Point Harbour, Long Point settlement, Lake Erie, Lake Erie Districts and London, too numerous and repetitious to conveniently cite individually here. See also L.H. Tasker, "The United Empire Loyalist Settlement at Long Point, Lake Erie" *OHS P&R* II, 43-47, also Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 9-12.

<sup>7</sup> "My civil and military duties are so intimately blended... it is impossible for me to separate them," Simcoe to Alured Clarke, Navy Hall, 31 May 1793, Simcoe Correspondence I p. 341.

<sup>8</sup> Dundas to Simcoe, Whitehall, 20 June 1792, Simcoe Correspondence I p. 167-67.

<sup>9</sup> Simcoe to Dundas, Navy Hall, 4 November 1792, Simcoe Correspondence I p. 247; Littlehales to Lieutenants of Counties, Navy Hall, 5 December 1793, Simcoe Correspondence II p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Simcoe to Dundas, York, 23 February 1794, Simcoe Correspondence II p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> Simcoe to Henry Dundas, York, 20 September 1793, Simcoe Correspondence II pp. 56, 62; Simcoe to Henry Dundas, Quebec, 28 April 1792, Simcoe Correspondence I p. 144; Simcoe to the Privy Council, Navy Hall, 1 September 1794, Simcoe Correspondence II p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 12.

have become a personal courier for Lt. Gov. Simcoe. He travelled for Simcoe extensively, being in New York in August 1794 and Detroit the next winter.<sup>13</sup> It is not recorded that he visited the Maritimes at any time but at some time following Simcoe's 1792 proclamation offering free Crown land<sup>14</sup> he must either gone there himself or communicated there as part of his plan to recruit twelve Loyalist families to settle on his proposed 10,000-acre grant at Long Point.<sup>15</sup> Francis headed the list of applications for land at Long Point and received the 10,000 acres for which he applied. This large grant was in recognition both of Francis' past military services and his present settlement plan.<sup>16</sup> It is probable that Francis went himself to Nova Scotia early in 1796 to escort his settlers to Long Point. By June

they had arrived<sup>17</sup> and Francis' grant was confirmed.<sup>18</sup> There were already competing applications for some of Francis' land and the mill-seat on it.<sup>19</sup>

Only two of Francis' party are specifically identified in the subsequent surviving records as "Mr. Francis' settlers". These were Thomas Bowlby and Thomas Hamilton from Nova Scotia, recommended by Francis for 400 and 600 acres respectively. They and Francis settled on prime lakefront adjacent lots in the Township of Woodhouse and so remained neighbours.<sup>20</sup>

The settlement plan was short-lived. In 1796 Francis' patron John Graves Simcoe was replaced by Peter Russell. Although Russell had been a sometime military officer and had Simcoe's confidence, and continued the policy that "the

<sup>13</sup> George Hammond to J. G. Simcoe, New York 10 August 1794, Simcoe Correspondence V pp. 101, 103; R.G. England to Simcoe, Detroit, 31 December 1794, Simcoe Correspondence III p. 244.

<sup>14</sup> Proclamation 7 February 1792, Quebec, Simcoe Correspondence I pp. 108-109.

<sup>15</sup> "When this news (of the Proclamation) reached Nova Scotia, William Francis was chosen to represent a group of Loyalists in Annapolis County" per Hylda Howes, ed., *Heritage Buildings of Norfolk*, pp. 48-49; E.A. Owen, *Pioneer Sketches of Long Point Settlement* (1898), p. 64 is in error in stating that Gov. Simcoe went himself to New Brunswick in 1794 to recruit settlers to "start a settlement at Long Point," It is not impossible that Francis visited both the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick United Empire Loyalist (hereafter UEL, UELs) settlements.

<sup>16</sup> "The maximum grant of twelve hundred acres was made to about one hundred persons in all. Among these were... William Francis... who had come in from the United States,... adjudged the maximum grant on account of... good character and known loyalty, or... services in bringing in settlers." Simcoe Correspondence V pp. 191-92.

<sup>17</sup> In the rejection of Solomon Seacord's application for some of "the Tract set aside for Mr. Francis" Mr. Francis was noted as "being since arrived" on 20 June 1796, Simcoe Correspondence IV pp. 313-14.

<sup>18</sup> "Francis, William, Woodhouse. East half of the township. About 10,000 acres" Applications for Land in the Long Point Settlement; "Mr. William Francis, Quarter Master in the King's late American Dragoons—& associates—Order in Council 22 June 1793—10,000 Acres for himself & twelve families, & the same to be reserved at Long Point," Summary of Applications for Land, 20 June 1796, Simcoe Correspondence IV pp. 313, 315, 317; also see Third Report of the Bureau of Archives 1905 p. 248.

<sup>19</sup> Concerning Solomon Seacord (Secord) see above. "Christopher Buchner praying for a lot of land to comprehend the lower Mill seat on Patterson's Creek. The Mill seat has been long promised to Mr. Francis." Petitions Read 13 July 1796, Simcoe Correspondence V p. 235; the mill seat became Dover Mills.

<sup>20</sup> "Petitions Read on 9th July 1796: No. 2 Thomas Bowlby. The Petitioner, being one of Mr. Francis's



five Long Point townships... be thickly seated by known Loyalists," he was not himself a UEL or the same sort of man and officer that he replaced.<sup>21</sup> His past reputation may not have inspired confidence or loyalty in Francis. Soon Francis advised that as several of his potential settlers were dissatisfied with the locations he had given them he wished to relinquish his patronage of them, keeping 2,000 acres for himself. As to be expected he received a militia appointment (Captain of 2nd Norfolk Militia Regiment) and became a Justice of the Peace.<sup>22</sup> John Dickson was a member of this regiment until he deserted.

Russell instructed that the dis-

puting would-be settlers be referred to him but opened the remaining lands to other applicants.<sup>23</sup> The days of Empire Loyalist (UEL) exclusivity and preference at Long Point were near an end.

### *John Pegg and Isaac Pegg*

While the designation "one of Mr. Francis' settlers" was heard no more, UELs from Nova Scotia, probably brought by Francis, continued to receive deeds on the former Francis grant, while others settled near.<sup>24</sup> A much larger number of UELs came from New Brunswick and some settled on the William Francis grant.<sup>25</sup> Pertinent to this story is a party including Solomon Austin, vari-

---

settlers and recommended by him for 400 acres in the 10,000 appropriated for them on the West side Patterson's Creek, he is recommended by the Committee for 400 Acres". No. 13; "Thomas Hamleton (Hamilton), being one of Mr. Francis's settlers & recommended by him for 600 acres in the 10,000 appropriated for them on the West side of Patterson's Creek, he is recommended by the Committee for that quantity" RP I pp. 67, 68, Simcoe Correspondence V pp. 216, 217 and *Nineteenth Report of the Department of Public Records and Archives of Ontario* (1930), p. 26, on which the name is correctly rendered Hamilton; Thomas Bowlby received Lot 4 in Concession 1 and Lot 4 in Concession 2, Thomas Hamilton received Lots 1, 5 and 15 in Concession 1, William Francis received Lots 10, 12, pt. 13, 14 in concession 1, 10 and 11 in Concession 2 and others behind "Abstract of Titles (hereafter land records), Woodhouse Township"; William R. Yeager, *Early Norfolk County Land Patents* (Norfolk Historical Society, 1981), pp. 69-70.

<sup>21</sup> E.A. Cruikshank & A. F. Hunter, *The Correspondence of the Honourable Peter Russell... during the official term of Lieut.-Governor J. G. Simcoe...* Vol. 1, 1796-1797 (1932), (hereafter RP I) The Ontario Historical Society p. 143; "Peter Russell" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (hereafter DCB) V, pp. 729-32.

<sup>22</sup> RP I p. 70; John Norton, *The Journal of Major John Norton 1816* (The Champlain Society, Toronto), 1970, p. 344; Port Dover developed on Francis' lake front lots but by 1807 he had sold them, some to Thomas Bowlby, (per land records) and moved to Walpole Township.

<sup>23</sup> Russell to Smith 14 October 1796, RP I p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> For example, William Drake, presumably the same that John Dickson wanted to kill, also came from Digby Tp., Annapolis County, Nova Scotia as did the Bowlby and Hamilton families, per Isaiah W. Wilson, *A Geography and History of the County of Digby Nova Scotia* (1900), pp. 65, 386. Although his Crown Grant in Ontario was in Walpole Township rather on the William Francis grant in Woodhouse, it seems William Francis was residing on Drake's grant (subsequently sold to Thomas Francis) when he was murdered.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Pioneer Sketches*, identifies eighteen of his Long Point subjects as arriving from New Brunswick but only one from Nova Scotia. Tasker, "United Empire Loyalist Settlement," 68-69 lists 47 UELs (of which only 35 can be identified by this writer on the UEL list) settled at Long Point, twenty of which are on the New Brunswick UEL list per Esther Clarke Wright, *The Loyalists of New Brunswick* (Wolfville,

ously listed as “Asten, Aston or Austen” on the New Brunswick Loyalists list,<sup>26</sup> who had served in the Queen’s Rangers under Simcoe and knew him personally. In 1797 Austin received 600 acres on the Francis grant immediately behind Thomas Bowlby’s holdings, including a mill site on the River Lynn which became Austin’s Mills. Each of his children received 200 acres, and the lots assigned to his daughters, Mary Austin Walker and Amy Austin Styles, were near to their father’s. The route from New Brunswick was evidently overland, through Philadelphia and Buffalo to Newark, because of the wagons and cattle. While on this journey the Austin party engaged as a drover a young unmarried man named John Pegg.<sup>27</sup> Pegg subsequently married Solomon Austin Sr.’s fourth daughter Elizabeth and their son Nathan married his cousin, a daughter of Solomon Austin Jr., thus reinforcing the Austin-Pegg connection.

John Pegg’s presence in the records of Norfolk County provides a slender

but fortunate clue in the reconstruction of later events. Not long after his arrival in Norfolk another strand in the web of events was woven when his uncle Isaac Pegg, in Philadelphia, decided to migrate to Upper Canada, perhaps on John’s recommendation. The Isaac Pegg family followed the Quaker route to York and Yonge Street and eventually settled in East Gwillimbury Township. Germane to this history is the surprising strength of the subsequent interaction and communication between the distant East Gwillimbury and Long Point settlements for which the Pegg family connections in both must have been at least partly responsible. A number of Norfolk County names soon begin to appear in northern York and future Simcoe counties, as later generations sought to locate available lands. Isaac Pegg’s son, Joseph, certainly, and daughter Elizabeth, inferentially, both married spouses from the Long Point settlement. They too have parts in the unfolding saga of John Dickson.<sup>28</sup>

---

Nova Scotia, 1955), Appendix pp. 253-345. Comparison of the names of 180 Loyalists on the New Brunswick list who certainly or probably moved to Upper Canada against various Long Point sources finds at least twenty-eight correspondences.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *The Loyalists*, p. 257.

<sup>27</sup> Simcoe Correspondence IV pp. 313, 317; Owen, *Pioneer Sketches*, pp. 76-83, 364; interestingly Owen states that Solomon Austin’s “family came to Upper Canada with a party of United Empire Loyalists consisting of twelve families” but is seemingly unaware that the Austins were ever in New Brunswick; see also “The Austin Family” (in) H.R. Page & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Haldimand and Norfolk* (Toronto 1877-1879), p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> For Pegg relationships, genealogy and history see: Donna L. Lynn, *Genealogy of the Descendants of John and Elisabeth (Pegg) Brasure* (Orange, California, 1973); Page, *Illustrated Historical Atlas*, p. 66; Owen, *Pioneer Sketches*, pp. 82, 360-65; William Wesley Pegg, *Genealogy of the Pegg Family from 1708 to 1911* ms. (Norfolk Historical Society, 1911); Milton N. Pegg, *A Family Tree and History of some of the Pegg Families descended from Daniel Pegg of Philadelphia* (Greenwood, 1970); Paul E. Pepper, *Some Norfolk County Letters and Papers 1815-1894 of Park, Pegg, Pettit* (1974).



### Thomas Bowlby

If William Francis needed consolation for the premature termination of his settlement plan he had only to refer to Thomas Bowlby. Thomas was born in New Jersey where his father Richard Bowlby was a Justice of the Peace but lost his wealth to the revolutionaries and sought sanctuary in Nova Scotia's County of Annapolis. There the Richard Bowlby family of eight was listed on the June 1784 Muster Roll. Thomas moved to Norfolk in 1796 as part of the William Francis resettlement plan and there lived out all his remaining life. He became a prominent citizen and judge, serving long and faithfully as Justice of the Peace (as had his father in New Jersey), including through the difficult times of the War of 1812. He too would have his part in the events surrounding the murder of his patron and former neighbour, Captain William Francis, by another of his former near neighbours, John Dickson. Surprisingly, despite his unwavering loyalty to the Establishment, he does not seem to have incurred the personal animosity of John Dickson. The reason for this is unknown. Thomas Bowlby had strong Ma-

sonic connections which on one notable occasion influenced invading American marauders to desist in their destruction but there is no evidence that John Dickson was a Mason. Perhaps there was an admiration on John Dickson's part which began back in Nova Scotia.<sup>29</sup>

### Thomas Hamilton

Thomas Hamilton, on the other hand, did not stay at Long Point. Once it was certain that York would be the new capital and not London, he sold out<sup>30</sup> and moved there. As a man of many talents, equally proficient at a number of trades, he became well established at York and there lived out his allotted span variously as a blacksmith, store-keeper, hotel-keeper, ship-owner, highway overseer, fence-viewer, Deputy Serjeant at Arms of the House of Assembly, Coroner of York County, Deputy-Sheriff, Master of York Masonic Lodge, and Militia officer. He was reportedly at the Battle of Queenston Heights in 1812 and, as Captain of York militia, was captured by the Americans during their attack on York in 1813.<sup>31</sup> He did not sever his connections with the Long Point set-

<sup>29</sup> For Bowlby (sometimes Bawlby, Bouslby, Bowlsby) family history and genealogy see W.A. Calnek, *History of the County of Annapolis* (1897), pp. 483-84, A.W. Savary, *History of the County of Annapolis Supplement* (1913), pp. 64-65, 107, Tasker, "United Empire Loyalist Settlement," pp. 68, 94; Owen, *Pioneer Sketches*, pp. 352, 376-81, Isaiah W. Wilson, *A Geography and History of the County of Digby, Nova Scotia* (1900), pp. 65, 389. The Thomas Bowlby, New Jersey Volunteers, on the New Brunswick UEL list (Wright, *The Loyalists*, p. 262) was an uncle; a nephew Adam Bowlby also came to Norfolk.

<sup>30</sup> Hamilton's Crown grants in Woodhouse Township were registered in 1798. He sold Lot 1 to Philip Force (Forse) formerly of the New Jersey Volunteers, and lots 5 and 15 to Richard Mead, per land records. Both buyers are named on the New Brunswick Loyalist list (Wright, *The Loyalists*, pp. 282, 305).

<sup>31</sup> Ontario Archives, *Ninth Report 1912*, 17-9, 20, 45, 64, 161. There are twenty mentions of Thomas Hamilton in the York directories between 1797 and 1823 per Christ Mosser, ed., *York, Upper Canada, Minutes of Town Meetings and Lists of Inhabitants 1797-1823* (Metro Toronto Library Board, 1984);

tlement as in 1807 Thomas Hamilton of York made a petition jointly with his former near-neighbour Abraham Powell of Charlotteville Township<sup>32</sup> and indeed his shipping route from Niagara to York serviced the road connection to Long Point. While there is no known record that he was ever again in touch with John Dickson whom he had known many years, or John Dickson's son, whom he had known since birth—he had probably travelled from Nova Scotia with both of them, as will be seen—there is a hint that in the last year of his life he set in motion events that would later help John Dickson's son. This in turn suggests that the old relationship was at least to some degree maintained.

As a UEL, Thomas Hamilton applied for land for his adult sons and daughters. In the last year of his life, 1831, he applied on behalf of his youngest son, Sidney Smith Hamilton. When he eventually received the deed in 1836, Sidney Smith Hamilton, deeply involved in extending his inherited late father's shipping and commercial enterprises out of York, had no interest in 200 acres in a remote new bush township. But he seems to have certainly known who would be interested and capable of pioneering the land into a farm. The speed with which he sold it speaks of pre-agreement. To

whom he sold it speaks perhaps of compliance with his father's wishes, the final outcome of the old Nova Scotia connection. It surely cannot be coincidence that the son of Thomas Hamilton sold his land to the son of John Dickson.

### *John Dickson*

Another person who certainly travelled from Nova Scotia to Long Point, probably with Thomas Hamilton and others of Mr. Francis' settlers, but whose name entirely escapes the record because, apparently, he received no land, was John Dickson.

The name *Dickson* (often *Dixon*) was well known both in Nova Scotia and Upper Canada from other and unrelated Dickson/Dixon families. In Nova Scotia there were even other unrelated *John Dicksons*. That it can be proposed that the John Dickson of Sandy Cove, Nova Scotia, and Paspebiac, Quebec, is the same John Dickson later in the Long Point settlement in Upper Canada in the absence of any record relies on his association with the Hamilton family whose history is well documented.<sup>33</sup> On 12 May 1778, Thomas Hamilton (senior), his three sons and a partner, John Dickson, then of Granville, Nova Scotia, but earlier from New England, started a fishing business at nearby Sandy Cove.<sup>34</sup> The partnership

see also *Thomas Hamilton, Town of York Pioneer, Some Ancestors and Descendants* (Sault Ste. Marie, June 1988), hereafter *Thomas Hamilton*. The writer is deeply indebted to Mrs. June Hamilton for extensive guidance, correspondence and useful suggestions as this present work developed.

<sup>32</sup> Public Archives Canada microfilm C2046 H8/62 vol. 226. Abraham Powell appears on the New Brunswick Loyalist list (Wright, *The Loyalists*, p. 320). He became well known at Long Point.

<sup>33</sup> *Thomas Hamilton*.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Osler & Mary Kate Bull, *Sandy Cove, the History of a Nova Scotia Village* (1870); Wilson,

ended when the lands on which the partners had built their buildings but had failed to patent were allocated to arriving Loyalists. The Hamiltons mostly applied for land themselves and took to farming and other pursuits. John Dickson married a forty-two year-old Acadian widow who must have been older than he.<sup>35</sup>

Elizabeth-Gertrude Brasseur married “à Paspebiac, le 5 novembre 1787, Jean Dickson, ‘Americain de nation.’”<sup>36</sup> Although John Dickson was probably in Nova Scotia during the American Revolution and had no part in it, he evidently identified with the new ‘American Nation’ strongly enough that it became part of his marriage record. The bride’s family was originally from Nova Scotia but had been removed by the French authorities before the Anglo-colonial conquest and the ensuing dispersal of the Acadians. At the time, returned relatives of the Brasseurs and of Elizabeth-Gertrude’s first husband were re-establishing themselves in Nova Scotia near the Hamilton/Dickson establishment at Sandy Bay where the couple presumably lived. Very soon a son was born<sup>37</sup> and was named John Dickson, the same name as his father. About four

years later the new mother died. At the time of the wedding in 1787 the youngest of the Hamiltons, Thomas Hamilton (the second, 1770-1831), was seventeen. He would have been well aware of the marriage of the family partner and the subsequent birth of John Brasseur Dickson. In later life John Dickson Jnr. spelled his mother’s name not as ‘*Brasseur*’ but ‘*Brasure*’.

News of Simcoe’s proclamation of offering free land in the newly created Province of Upper Canada<sup>38</sup> caused enough interest in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia that soon mutual-aid groups were formed to take up Simcoe’s offer. How William Francis organized a group is not known but it is certain that in 1796 Thomas Hamilton (the younger), his bride and new-born son, with Thomas Bowlby and his family, moved from Digby, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, to Long Point, as part of Mr. Francis’ group of twelve families. While the records are entirely silent and unable to verify the supposition, John Dickson and his eight-year-old son were either in the party or followed shortly after at the behest of Thomas Hamilton, for at this time the

---

*Geography and History*, p. 38, Nova Scotia, *Place-Names and Places of Nova Scotia*; *Sandy Cove* (Digby County, 1976), p. 606, “Sandy Cove fut habite par Thomas Hamilton et John Dickson... qui s’y sont etablis en mai 1778” J. Alphonse Deveau, *Clare ou La Ville Francaise*, (1983?) I p. 44; J. Alphonse Deveau, *Along the Shores of Saint Mary’s Bay* (1977) I p. 55, *Thomas Hamilton*.

<sup>35</sup> There is no known record of John Dickson snr’s date of birth, or age at death in 1814. If the same age as his bride Elizabeth-Gertrude Brasseur he would have been 69 in 1814, but if a contemporary of his partner Thomas Hamilton’s “three sons,” he would have been more likely in his early 60s. His activities during the war and in coming from Buffalo to kill Capt. Francis in 1814 indicate a vigorous man and argue for the younger age.

<sup>36</sup> Bona Arseneau, *Histoire et Genealogie des Acadiens* (Les Editions Lemeac III, 1978), p. 1123.

<sup>37</sup> Probably 1788 or 1789, as he was believed to be sixty when he died in 1749.

<sup>38</sup> J.G. Simcoe Proclamation, 7 February 1792. Simcoe Correspondence I pp. 108-109.

records of both men end in Nova Scotia and resume at Long Point. As will be seen, there is a hint that even thirty years later sons of Hamilton and Dickson in Upper Canada were still in touch with each other.

If John Dickson Sr. was among this party, as seems most probable, but flaunted pro-revolutionary American sympathies, as seems most likely, he would have received neither land nor sympathy from William Francis whose mandate was to settle Loyalists. Perhaps at this time were sown the seeds of the lasting antagonism between the two men.

John Dickson Sr. settled in Norfolk County and married again. His new father-in-law, Reuben Green, was a former serjeant in the 1st Battalion, New Jersey Volunteers, and at least nominally a UEL, by which means six of his children, including Elizabeth Green, who married John Dickson Sr. received grants. By this marriage John Dickson acquired as relatives-in-law Elisha Green (wife's brother) and Isaac Pettit (wife's sister's husband), and possibly a connection to Samuel Green and several Markles<sup>39</sup> and through them to an even wider circle of pro-American sympathizers, whose names will enter the record at a later date

and appear prominently among those accused of High Treason. In 1803 Reuben Green purchased a 200-acre lot in Township of Townsend,<sup>40</sup> next to the Pettits.

### *Events of 1813-1814*

While the early victories of Isaac Brock in the War of 1812 for a while quieted the malcontents, the US occupation of Fort George on Canadian soil on 27 May 1813 provided both the impetus and the route for American sympathizers at Long Point to move to the US. John Dickson Sr. was one who did so<sup>41</sup> together with his brother-in-law Elisha Green and at least six others later identified as "Dickson's gang" and perhaps four more who may have been part of the gang but who were caught before Col. Talbot compiled his list. Their names appear as deserters from the 2nd Norfolk Militia regiment.<sup>42</sup> The loss at Moraviantown in October 1813 caused the troops at Long Point to be withdrawn, the militia disbanded, and the siege of the Americans pent up in Fort George to be lifted. The subsequent events in the Niagara area and beyond are recorded history.

Having arrived at Buffalo to side with the Americans a number of options

<sup>39</sup> William D. Reid, *The Loyalists in Ontario, The Sons and daughters of The American Loyalists of Upper Canada* (Hunterdon House, Lambertville, New Jersey, 1973), p. 133; the exact relationships, if any, to Samuel Green and the intermarried Green/Markle families, has not been traced.

<sup>40</sup> Lot 6, concession 14, per Land Records; Tasker, "The United Empire Loyalist Settlement," p. 122 states Reuben Green received 500 acres in Townsend as a military grant in 1811. The writer could not find a confirming entry in the land records.

<sup>41</sup> Per Thomas Talbot, Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist." II p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> E.A. Cruikshank, "A Study of Disaffection in Upper Canada in 1812-15," *Transaction of the Royal Society of Canada* (1912), 62-63 "Names of persons who joined the enemy from the limits of the 2nd Regiment of Norfolk from June, 1812 to June, 1814."

were open to John Dickson Sr. He probably could have joined either of the two pseudo-military groups operating out of Fort George and Buffalo to obtain equipment, supplies and perhaps some quasi-legitimate status but did not do so. Dr. Cyreneus Chapin's Buffalo Militia of "mounted volunteers" seems to have been composed of Buffalo residents, and were recognised as a military unit by the British on at least one occasion.<sup>43</sup> A group far more likely to have appealed to Dickson, it might be thought, was Joseph Willcocks' "Canadian Volunteers" (after July 1813) which included Abraham Markle (after November 1813), possibly related to John Dickson's wife, and Benajah Mallory (after November 1813), who had lived in the adjacent township of Burford and who was well known as formerly the local Member of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, he did not join the "Canadian Volunteers" but worked with them, at least with Major Abraham Markle and 1st Lt. Oliver Grace on the Port Dover raid, as an independent gang. There were several such independent gangs.<sup>45</sup>

Being independent of the US mili-

tary and in consequence lacking in funding, equipment and supplies, John Dickson would have to resort to thievery, robbing houses, smuggling and the like to sustain his operations. That this is exactly what he did both confirms he operated independently and suggests he had a hand in any raid whose principal purpose was looting to fund other raids, coupled with the opportunity for personal revenge. During 1813 and 1814 there were a number of such raids and incidents. John Dickson's name is certainly associated with some, and the names of known members of his gang with others, suggesting his unrecorded involvement.

### *The Sutherland Raid October 1813*

An account of this raid was provided by a participant, Simon Mabee, who was captured and interrogated:

Says that on or about the 9th day of October last, he and Samuel Green, Isaac Pettit, Elisha Green, John Shufelt and James Johnson... went to Buffalo, and there joined a party of Americans who were bound for the London district under the command of William Sutherland, and that their object was to take

<sup>43</sup>As militia, Chapin's corps was released under parole following the surrender of the invading American force of which they were part at Beaver Dams.

<sup>44</sup>See "Markle", "Mallory" DCB VI pp. 488-91, VIII pp. 606-610.

<sup>45</sup>His name and those of his gang do not appear on the several muster rolls of the Canadian Volunteers. The muster rolls may be found in Donald E. Graves, *Joseph Willcocks and the Canadian Volunteers: An Account of Political Disaffection in Upper Canada During the War of 1812*, (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1982), pp. 114-35. For a further history of the Canadian Volunteers see also Donald E. Graves, "The Canadian Volunteers 1813-1815," *Military Collector & Historian, Journal of The Company of Military of Military Historians*, (Washington DC 3: Fall 1979), 113-17; the British did not regard the Canadian Volunteers as a military unit but as civilian traitors. Of the forty or so men indicted in absentia for High Treason during the Ancaster Assizes of 1814 thirteen were members of the Canadian Volunteers and nine of Dickson's independent gang. This was a civil, not a military, court.



public officers and public property; that the party consisted of Guy P. Richards, John Harvey, Fred'k Onstine, Henry Onstine, George Peacock and one of his sons,... and others, to the number of thirty men... that they have taken several prisoners, viz., Lieut. John Williams, John Bonnet, Richd Drake, Phineas Drake, John Rickard, Col. John Warren... subjects of the Province... sent to Buffalo; that Guy P. Richards, Samuel Green and John Shufelt took a boat... John Brown [and] Samuel Green... their object was to get volunteers to join their party and to take away public officers: that they took William Francis prisoner, and took six head of cattle belonging to him, and took them to Buffalo...

Simon his X mark Mabee

Taken and acknowledged before me this  
12th Nov. 1813, Thos. Bowlby, J.P.<sup>46</sup>

Noticeable in Simon Mabee's statement is the absence of John Dickson's name from the group that went to Buffalo. It seems that Simon Mabee is withholding any information not already known to his captors. The absence of John Dickson's name from the raiding party is perhaps capable of a different explanation. As will be seen, being an experienced small boat sailor (he had been a fisherman in Nova Scotia) it was probably his task to land supplies for the raiding party by boat. This is the expla-

nation offered for what the writer terms the Port Rowan Incident. Also noticeable is the specific reference to the capture of William Francis, suggesting that to Simon Mabee this was an important goal perhaps on behalf of his closest associate, John Dickson. That John Bonnet and Richard Drake were seized suggests the pattern of personal revenge so marked in this and later raids was already established. Private John Bonnet had previously been injured, as were Captain John Bostwick and Lt. George Ryerson, and Sergeant Richard Drake had distinguished himself, as did Sgt Henry Medcalf, defending a gun battery at Frenchman's Creek on 28 November 1812. All these men were later subjected to personal retribution by revengeful gangs, including Dickson's. William Francis was taken to Fort Niagara, but freed when Fort Niagara was captured by British forces on 19 December 1813, and returned to Walpole Township.<sup>47</sup> At some time the captives Simon Maybee and John G. Harris escaped.

### *The Port Rowan Incident* 1813

In 1813 there was a tavern here... and one store... At that time an American, by the

<sup>46</sup> "Examination of Simon Mabee" (in) Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" VIII pp. 183-84. All six men named with William Sutherland were from Long Point and deserters from 2nd Norfolk Militia Regiment. Twelve of the augmented party of thirteen would be accused of High Treason. See Cruikshank, "A Study of Disaffection," pp. 39, 62-63; E.A. Cruikshank, "John Beverley Robinson and the Trials for Treason in 1814" *OHS P&R*, 25, 202; Court of Oyer & Terminer & General Gaol Delivery Held at Ancaster 1810-1835 "Minute Books" Ontario Archives Microfilm MS530., (hereafter Court of Oyer & Terminer) various dates June to 10 August 1814.

<sup>47</sup> Concerning the Frenchman's Creek action, see Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 20-21; concerning the capture and release of Captain Francis, see Norton, *Journal*, 344, 346.

name of Dickson, was engaged in smugglin' goods from the other side into this port. George Ryerson came up here one day with six soldiers to arrest Dickson an' confiscate his goods. The boat lay down there in the bay in plain sight of the house here, an' when Ryerson arrived he an' Dickson had a fight. Dickson finally surrendered, an' Ryerson put the soldiers on board the boat an' told them to sail into Port Dover with the prisoners and cargo. When they sailed away the cargo was secreted in the marsh, an' Dickson, soldiers and all headed for the Land o' the Free.<sup>48</sup>

It is suggested that the most likely explanation of John Dickson landing goods at Port Rowan and why the incident escaped the official record<sup>49</sup> is that it was a lesser part of the Sutherland raid and very much overshadowed by it and the ensuing excitement that became known as the "Battle of Nanticoke". The quotation explains that the supplies did not reach the raiders, and events proved their hope of reaching Port Rowan excessively optimistic. They got no further than Port Dover and retired to Nanticoke where they were attacked and largely captured in an event which is known as The Battle of Nanticoke.

## *The Battle of Nanticoke* *November 13, 1813*

The reaction of the inhabitants to Sutherland's invasion has become known informally as The Battle of Nanticoke.<sup>50</sup> Although John Dickson was not recorded as present, the event is relevant to his history.

Lieut. Colonel Henry Bostwick, an energetic young officer, who was in command of the Oxford militia, assembled a body of forty-five volunteers... and surprised the marauders in the house of John Dunham, near the mouth of Nanticoke Creek on Lake Erie... Three of them were killed and eighteen captured... Dunham and three others were subsequently executed.<sup>51</sup>

The militia at the time was inactive and the volunteers were acting on their own initiative. They were in consequence careful to establish as much legitimacy as the circumstances allowed by formally calling a public meeting of which minutes were kept, a chairman and secretary elected, a mandate (in modern parlance a 'mission statement') was defined, a series of resolutions adopted, and the names of those in attendance recorded.<sup>52</sup> This pro-

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Ellis of Port Rowan (quoted in) Owen, *Pioneer Sketches*, p. 461. At the time, George Ryerson was a Lieutenant in the flank company of the 1st Norfolk Militia commanded by Captain John Bostwick (Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 17). After October 1813, his six "soldiers" would have been local settlers of the disbanded militia.

<sup>49</sup> For e.g. Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" has no mention of it.

<sup>50</sup> Shirley Dossier, *Nanticoke Through the Years*, (Norfolk Historical Society, 1990), p. 5. The battle reportedly took place on Lot 7, Concession 1, Walpole Township. The historic plaque noting the event at the Nanticoke Community Centre (former school) is simply titled "NANTICOKE".

<sup>51</sup> Cruikshank, "A Study of Disaffection," 39-40.

<sup>52</sup> Of the thirty-eight in attendance no less than thirty appear on the New Brunswick Loyalist list (Wright, *The Loyalists*) or appear to be their descendants. Governor Simcoe's Loyalist settlement policies were in no short measure vindicated on this occasion.

cedure, it may be assumed, resulted from the guidance of the elected chairman, no less than Thomas Bowlby J.P., who certainly knew most if not all the Long Point participants among the raiders. That the meeting was held in the house of Captain William Drake of Port Dover is understandable if the Richard and Phineas Drake captured by the raiders were his relatives. Drake and other older men at the meeting did not take part in the actual attack on the raiders, but possibly it was his role in organising the resistance that earned him the enmity of John Dickson. Captain Drake's name is found among the others, Captain Francis, Thomas Francis and Colonel Talbot, whom Dickson intended to kill in 1814.<sup>53</sup>

### *The McRae Incident December 1813*

Lieutenant Henry Medcalf of the 2nd Norfolk Regiment... learned of the presence of an American party near Chatham... took the place by storm and then brought all his prisoners to Long Point."<sup>54</sup> This summarises an enterprise of Lt. Henry Medcalf and a party partly gathered en route who marched day and night some sixty exhausting miles in December from Dover to near Chatham to surprise and capture "three officers and

thirty-six men of the U.S. infantry" without loss. Medcalf did not in fact bring all his prisoners to Long Point. Five of them were too wounded to move and were necessarily paroled and left while two more escaped during the return to Dover as his report makes clear. Medcalf does not identify the two escapees or mention that his prisoners were other than the "U.S. infantry", elsewhere specified as "the 26th Regiment of the line."<sup>55</sup> However, another source reports that the captured included "about fifteen inhabitants of the Province" including Isaac Pettit (brother-in-law of John Dickson's wife) and that one of the two that escaped was none other than Abraham Markle (also possibly related to John Dickson's wife) whom John Dickson accompanied on the Port Dover raid the following May. It is certain therefore that John Dickson's sympathy lay with the captured and the possibility exists that the unidentified second escapee with Markle was John Dickson himself. Henry Medcalf was undoubtedly marked for revenge, and when Isaac Pettit was brought to trial, found guilty and condemned to death the following year, so would be the witnesses against him. These included William and Thomas Francis.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Port Dover Raid May 1814*

The concept of a commando-like raid on Port Dover to destroy the mills and British military flour supply was

<sup>53</sup>For details see Cruikshank, "Doc.Hist" VIII pp. 157-58; Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 27-28; see also George F.G. Stanley, *The War of 1812* (Canadian War Museum, 1983), p. 276.

<sup>54</sup>Stanley, *The War of 1812*, p. 276.

<sup>55</sup>Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" IX pp.43-45.

<sup>56</sup>The Honourable William Renwick Riddell, "The Ancaster 'Bloody Assize' of 1814," *OHS P&R* XX (1923), esp. 107, 108, 111, 112, 116; Court of Oyer & Terminer. This event would have been Abraham Markle's first aggression against the government since his desertion late November and his appointment as a Captain in the Company of Canadian Volunteers on December 12, not mentioned by his biographer DCB VI pp. 488-91.

proposed to the American army as a legitimate military objective. There was no military need or intention to harm or destroy Canadian civilians and their personal property. If the Americans were surprised at the eagerness of the Canadian renegades in Buffalo to accompany the raiders, they were naively appalled and ashamed at the excesses and destruction that the renegades caused to private property at Port Dover.<sup>57</sup> It is clear in retrospect that the US raid provided a heaven-sent opportunity to the renegades defeated at Nanticoke and McRae's for direct personal revenge on Colonel Bostwick, Capt. William Drake, Lt. Henry Medcalf, and other leaders whose property was sought out and destroyed while away elsewhere on active service, with the blame for their excesses falling onto the American military. John Dickson's presence in the party became noted: "Returned with the Americans at the taking of Dover" on the Militia deserters list. Also present were "young Green" (Elisha Green, his wife's brother), Samuel Green and Abraham Markle (possibly related), and Oliver Grace. "The traitorous element... made the most of the opportunity to vent their malice on former neighbours," and their excesses not only disgusted the American troops but alarmed official Washington enough to cause a court of enquiry. The American

Commander admitted that he permitted the excessive destruction because "he was urged to do so by people favourable to our cause" antagonistic to the "old revolutionary Tories" at Dover. One might suspect that John Dickson was one of those doing the urging.

The name of Captain William Francis, principal among the local "old revolutionary Tories" was not on the return of losses, he having long since sold his Port Dover lands and moved west to the Sandusk Creek. His release from imprisonment at Fort Niagara by the British on 13 December 1813 no doubt angered John Dickson, who would take revenge another day.<sup>58</sup>

### *The Ancaster Trials May to August 1814*

When the Americans occupied York in April 1813, the government was alarmed at the numbers of inhabitants who took the opportunity to express both disaffection with the government and sympathy for the supposedly American principles of democracy, equality and republicanism. A committee appointed to examine the situation recommended making examples of the disaffected. A number of prominent men petitioned for "measures sufficiently severe to quell the traitorously inclined." At long last, they felt, the civil authority moved to

<sup>57</sup>E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *Documents Relating to the Invasion of the Niagara Peninsula by the United States Army, commanded by General Jacob Brown*, (Niagara Historical Society), Sinclair to Jones 19 May 1814, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup>Cruikshank "A Study of Disaffection," p. 62; Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 29-33; Stanley, *The War of 1812*, p. 280; see also William Wood, ed., *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*, 3 vols, (The Champlain Society, 1920-1926), III pp. 88-92.

aid the war effort by making examples of those with “dangerous and treasonable inclinations” in the civil courts. The legal system would be used to “overawe disaffection.” The legal complexities of establishing for the first time in Upper Canada procedures and courts competent to hear charges of High Treason were launched following the capture of Sutherland’s raiders at Nanticoke and in the interim additional subjects were provided by Lt. Medalf’s efforts at McRae’s. As noted, John Dickson was not recorded as present at either incident but may have been present or associated in some way with both.

A number of considerations resulted in the trials being held at Ancaster in Markle territory. During June 1814, nineteen prisoners in custody were charged and tried. Of these, four were found not guilty and acquitted, seven were found guilty but reprieved and eight were found guilty and executed. As mentioned, notable among the accused captured at McRae’s was Isaac Pettit, John Dickson’s wife’s sister’s husband, while notable among the Crown Witnesses against him were William Francis and his son Thomas Francis. The names of six of Isaac Pettit’s co-conspirators captured at McRae’s are known from their subsequent rejected applications for bail as William Carpenter, Griffis Colver, Adam Crysler, Joseph Fowler, Dayton Linsey and Wadsworth Philips. Also identified among Medcalf’s prison-

ers were John Johnson, Benjamin Simmons and possibly Noah Payne Hopkins and Cornelius Howey. Of these eleven, eight came to trial at Ancaster during June for High Treason and were found guilty. Five of these were executed on 20 July. William and Thomas Francis both testified against Isaac Pettit and his co-conspirator Adam Crysler. Thomas Francis testified against John Johnson. Isaac Pettit was found guilty but reprieved and died in jail of “jail-fever” 16 March 1815. Adam Crysler was executed. John Johnson was found guilty but reprieved and banished to USA.

William Francis and/or Thomas Francis also testified against Isiah Brink and John Dunham (as did Richard Drake against John Dunham) and Garrett Neil, who was probably captured at Nanticoke with Dunham. All three were found guilty. Brink and Dunham were executed. Neil was reprieved but died in jail 6 March 1815.<sup>59</sup>

There remained the problem of those still at large accused of having deserted to the United States, joining the enemy in arms against loyal subjects, seducing citizens from their allegiance, and a variety of other traitorous offenses. Writs of Capias were directed to the Sheriff of the Niagara District for the apprehension of twenty-seven men for High Treason who, not unexpectedly, could not be found. The minutes of the session of Wednesday 10 August 1814 record the decision to issue the same writs to the

<sup>59</sup>Largely summarised from Riddell, “The Ancaster ‘Bloody Assize’ of 1814,” esp. pp. 107, 108, 111, 112, 116; Court of Oyer & Terminer; See also Wood, ed., *Select British Documents*, pp. 282-84.



Sheriffs of the Home and London Districts in the event that the wanted men may be found in those jurisdictions. On the list appear "John Dixon," his brother-in-law Elisha Green, and seven of those identified by Thomas Talbot as members of John Dickson's gang.<sup>60</sup>

If the Ancaster trials had the desired effect of quieting dissent generally they no doubt enraged John Dickson and the surviving members of his gang. Now that he was legally 'wanted' with death his fate if captured he may have become more desperate and resolved to take revenge while still able.

### *Possibly Markle's Spy June-August*

There are several mentions in American records that Abraham Markle, operating from the United States, had a spy whom he several times landed at Long Point and elsewhere and took off again by boat. The spy is never identified by name and the possibility that it was John Dickson arises from the known association of the two men on the Port Dover raid, and possibly at McRae's. As noted, both were connected to possibly-related branches of

the Green family and may have regarded each other as in-laws. Prior to the Port Dover raid information had been gathered by a spy that it would be a safe undertaking, the community being undefended. Spies were landed before the Charlotteville raid. John Dickson could have effectively operated underground as he had a safe haven in Norfolk with his sympathetic father-in-law Reuben Green, and elsewhere, as will be seen, he could impose himself on Mennonite settlers who would not refuse him food or shelter.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Port Talbot Raids*

Raids on Colonel Thomas Talbot's property occurred regular in 1814 (May, July, August, September) but on each occasion the raiders failed in their object of capturing Colonel Talbot. Prominent among the raiders were former settlers Andrew Westbrook and Simon Zelotes Watson and probably Daniel Norton, Samuel Doyle and James Pelton. These were not members of Dickson's gang and there is no evidence that John Dickson was involved. His later publicised determination to kill Talbot was presumably based on the expectancy of Talbot being at Long Point,<sup>62</sup> where

<sup>60</sup> Henry Dochstader, Samuel Green, Elias Long, Barnabas Gibbs, John Gibbs, Simon Maybee, and Guy Richards, in company with Benajah Mallory, Henry Onstine, William Sutherland, Andrew Westbrook *et al.* Court of Oyer & Terminer, 10 August 1814.

<sup>61</sup> Cruikshank, *Documents Relating to the Invasion*, pp. 20-21 Sinclair to Jones, 19 May 1814, "A Capt. Marcle... has sent several of his friends into their military Posts to gain all the information in their powers, which will be sent over to us on Sunday next by a person we shall take off from there"; p. 23, Sinclair to Jones, 27 May 1814, "Through this man, who I have landed several times in the Enemy's Country, Capt. Marcle has been enabled to correspond with his friends..."; Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 29; "Dickson there is no doubt was frequently concealed in Green's own house" Robert Nichol to William Halton 13 January 1816 (in) E.A. Cruikshank, ed., "Additional Correspondence of Robert Nichol" *OHS P&R* XXVI (1930), 72.

<sup>62</sup> Westbrook's gang was evidently drawn from the Talbot Settlement in a similar and equivalent way

Dickson's several attempts to kill Talbot were foiled by Talbot receiving prior warning. The operations of Westbrook's gang are of interest as it seems possible his and Dickson's gang had established territories within which each held monopolistic rights.

### *Charlotteville, 25 July 1814*

From 3 July to 5 November 1814 the Americans held Fort Erie. This gave them greater access to Lake Erie and allowed a number of raids to be landed by boat. John Dickson is not mentioned as present on any of them but may well have been. The marine approach would have appealed to him as an experienced sailor. On 25 July, sixteen volunteers accompanied the US forces landed by boat to raid Charlotteville, but their names are not known. That this raid occurred five days after the hangings at Burlington, and was directed at the jail and jailor, suggests that an objective may well have been to learn if any of the reprieved Ancaster prisoners had been lodged in the Charlotteville jail or were expected. If this indeed was a last attempt by John Dickson to rescue his brother-in-law Isaac Pettit

he was frustrated. Pettit had been sent to Kingston.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Muckle Incident August-September 1814*

Several strangers have appeared lately in the neighbourhood of Dover... One Dickson and Simon Mabee, a fellow who made his escape from justice last year, entered the house of a person named John Muckle in Townsend and forcibly broke open a chest and robbed him of 200 dollars. Several persons are in pursuit of them, but hitherto without effect.<sup>64</sup>

As noted, John Dickson's gang operated independently of US military supplies and financing and needed to obtain these in other ways. This example both confirms the need and indicates the method.

### *The Murder of Captain Francis October 1814*

About the middle of October, John Dixon (Dickson) again appeared in the country with a small band of refugees, and, besides committing other depredations, murdered Captain William Francis at his house in the township of Woodhouse in the most delib-

---

to Dickson's from the Long Point Settlement. There are numerous references to these raids, e.g. Stanley, *The War of 1812*, pp. 280-81; see also Wayne Paddon, *The Story of the Talbot Settlement 1803-1840*, (1975), pp. 44-47; Fred Coyne Hamil, *Lake Erie Baron* (1955), pp. 80-83.

<sup>63</sup> Kennedy to Jones 29 July 1814 (in) Cruikshank, *Documents Relating to the Invasion*, pp. 52-53; Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 34.

<sup>64</sup> Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist." II p. 193; Cruikshank, "County of Norfolk," 34; Simon Maybee and John G. Harris, two known associates of John Dickson, had been captured following the William Sutherland raid but had subsequently escaped; "Petitions Read on 13 & 14 July 1796" Simcoe Correspondence, V, pp. 232-34, 240; presumably John Muckle sr. who had served in Jessup's Corps and received considerable land in Townsend Tp., much of which he sold in 1803 (land records) allowing by process-of-elimination the conclusion that in 1814 he was living on Concession 5 of Townsend, some nine concessions away from John Dickson's base in Reuben Green's house on Concession 14. John Dickson clearly knew where the money was kept.

erate and cold blooded manner. They then burnt the house with his body lying in it.<sup>65</sup>

According to Dickson's wife Elizabeth Dickson, the entire purpose of the raid from Buffalo was to murder Col. Thomas Talbot, Capt. William Francis, Thomas Francis and William Drake. They succeeded only with the elderly Captain, possibly because the others were forewarned. Major George C. Salmon reported the event to Lt.-Colonel Parry at Burlington:

I am sorry to inform you Dickson's party have murdered old Captn Francis,... They came in the night... and insisted on having Francis... the old Man said he would surrender himself a prisoner but begged them to spare his life which they declared they would not—he then looked out of the upper window if there was any way to escape and was shot through the head... They would not suffer his remains to be removed which was then burned with the House—The adjoining family saw but three Men one of whom was Dickson, but from their conversation believe the party consisted of 30.... Woodhouse. Oct. 22, 1814.<sup>66</sup>

Col. Parry passed the news to Sir Gordon Drummond at Kingston who forwarded it to Sir George Prevost:

I enclose a letter and note forwarded by Lieutenant-Colonel Parry relative to a most atrocious murder committed by a small gang of ruffians on Captain Francis of the Norfolk Militia. Your Excellency will agree with me that it is very necessary that an efficient regiment be sent to Burlington... 26th October 1814.<sup>67</sup>

Captain Francis must have been quite elderly, inactive and retired. His death could have no military value. The extent of the outrage at Dickson's action might be measured in that it provoked two responses which were rare if not unique in the entire war: Lt.-Colonel Thomas Talbot expected General Sir Gordon Drummond to make it an international incident with the American military and government, and General Drummond offered a cash award for the capture of Dickson *et al.*<sup>68</sup>

Dickson's lakeshore land route via the Hoover and Klingensmith properties While Dickson is known to have

<sup>65</sup> Cruikshank, *Documents Relating to the Invasion*, p. 35 and other sources too numerous to individually cite.

<sup>66</sup> Wood, ed., *Select British Documents*, II pp. 275-76; both Dickson's and Westbrook's gangs made a number of unsuccessful attempts on Col. Thomas Talbot's life. Francis' house was "near the mouth of Sandusk Creek" per Dossier, *Nanticoke*, p. 5, "at the mouth of the Sandusk, in Walpole" (presumably Lot 20, concession 1 Walpole Township, at the time owned by William Drake and later Thomas Francis per land records); that his body was burned with the house is stated and it would seem most probable that it was entirely consumed in the fire (e.g. "the body of the murdered officer consumed" Fred Landon, *Western Ontario and the American Frontier*, (The Carleton Library #34), p. 41, although one source unaccountably states "Only the next day could they bury him beneath a large pine tree on the bank of Spring Creek, where he lies today in an unmarked, forgotten grave," per Norfolk Historical Society pamphlet n.d. "*Glorious Old Norfolk*," rear cover.

<sup>67</sup> Wood, ed., *Select British Documents*, III p. 286.

<sup>68</sup> Talbot to Parry; "I have offered a reward of two hundred pounds for the apprehension and conviction of the murderers of Captain Francis," Drummond to Sir George Prevost, 30 October 1814, Cruikshank, "Doc. Hist" II, pp. 276, 280.

landed at least twice by boat (Port Rowan and Port Dover) he also came to Long Point overland, presumably because of increased coastal vigilance and perhaps because he had acquired horses. His route from Buffalo passed the Sugarloaf Hill at Port Colborne and followed the north shore of Lake Erie:

At this period (1812-1815) the County was very sparsely settled, and the few white inhabitants along the Grand River and the lakeshore of Walpole and Rainham were possessed of very little to tempt the cupidity of the marauding parties... One party, however, under a leader named Dickson, made several incursions into the County from the Long Point settlements, following the lakeshore and plundering the needy settlers of what little they possessed... These raiders were in the habit of quartering themselves on the Hoovers (who belonged to the Mennonite persuasion, and were non-combatants), whom they forced to supply them with food and shelter. The Hoovers were at that time the wealthiest residents of Haldimand, and were suspected of disloyal tendencies from their entertaining this band of American raiders, but as the tenets of the Mennonites forbade them to refuse food or shelter to anyone, and above all, as the numbers and lawlessness of their guests made it madness to refuse them anything they asked, it was scarcely a fair charge.<sup>69</sup>

Like the shoreline, the land route also had its watchers: “...for a time small detachments of Canadian militia and regular British troops were stationed at vari-

ous points along the lake. The presence of these troops effectually stopped the incursions of such bands of the enemy as that led by Dickson.”

It was indeed a small detachment of Canadian militia, appropriately the 2<sup>nd</sup> Norfolk Militia from which Dickson had deserted and lately Captained by William Francis whom John Dickson had just murdered, stationed at a point along the lake shore that eventually and effectually put an end to John Dickson. Then there was Peter Klingensmith (various spellings) who “lived near the mouth of Nanticoke Creek before and during the war.” Kidnapped at the age of nine and adopted by Indians raiding Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania during the American Revolution, he came with the Six Nations to Grand River, Ontario, and was there identified by the Hoovers who not only came from the same county but knew the Klingensmith family there.<sup>70</sup>

At the time those vagabonds Dixon (sic) and others of that marauding party were committing depredations about this part of the country, he (Peter Klingensmith) was instrumental in saving the persons of Col. Talbot, Salmon Nichol and others who had been marked out by those vagabonds as victims to their murderous (?) vengeance on those in command by passing them warning of their danger on several occasions to the eminent danger of his own pat—after their apprehension he was allowed to settle on lot no. 4 in the Front or First Concession of Walpole...<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> “The Hoovers were the first who effected a permanent settlement in Walpole; they bought several hundred acres on the lakeshore, south of Selkirk, and a quantity of land also across the town line in Rainham”; probably Jacob Hoover, lot 23, concession I, Walpole Township, originally from Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

<sup>70</sup> “Klingensmith” DCB VIII p. 476.

<sup>71</sup> J. B. Askin to Thomas Clarke, Esq., Woodhouse, 13 June 1827, Ontario, Archives RG1 C-4 ms-

To Peter Klingensmith's initiative may be credited much of the total failure of John Dickson to substantially impede the local war effort by murdering any of the active officers. And perhaps if it was he who alerted the militia detachment waiting at the Sugarloaf hill, the credit might also go to him for the necessary termination of John Dickson's career.

### *The Death of John Dickson*

**October/November 1814**  
 "John Dixon (Dickson), the ringleader of this party, was mortally wounded in an encounter with some militiamen near the Sugar Loaf and died shortly after arriving in Buffalo."

A "few days" after the murder of William Francis, John Dickson and party were returning overland toward American-held Fort Erie and were some twenty miles from safety when they ran into militia at the Sugar Loaf hill at Port Colborne. Dickson was shot and mortally wounded in the subsequent skirmish but able to escape with his companions, who carried him dying home to Buffalo. According to his wife he died about 1 November in their house near Buffalo. She attended the funeral, and then returned to her father Reuben Green's house at Long Point.<sup>72</sup> As far as is known his gang was never heard from again.

### *The Green Family after 1814*

In 1816 Robert Nichol recorded his wartime memories of the Reuben Green family when he learned they were applying for land as loyal citizens.

[Reuben Green's] son Elisha joined the Enemy early in the War—& was one of the Gang of Plunderers that infested the Country... his daughter... was Married to the noted *Dickson* who murdered Capt'n. Francis & who was shot at Sugar Loaf for whom General Drummond offered a reward of Five Hundred Dollars—Dickson there is no doubt was frequently concealed in Green's own house...<sup>73</sup>

No action was taken against Reuben Green, his daughter Elizabeth Green Dickson or other supposed Loyalists who simply betrayed the oaths of loyalty taken to obtain land. All those tried or indicted at Ancaster had been guilty of more serious offenses such as taking up arms on behalf of the enemy, and murder. It had long been decided by "that no further Steps can now be taken in respect of such Settlers as may turn out not to be *bona fide* Loyalists." Six of Reuben Green's children were authorised grants by Order-in-Council, three before the war and three after. Somewhat surprisingly, the latter included Elizabeth, wife of John Dickson of Townsend Township, daughter of Reuben Green, Order-in-Council 23 December 1815.<sup>74</sup> The land

658, reel 503, frames 000046-8.

<sup>72</sup> Cruikshank "A Study of Disaffection," p. 52; Cruikshank, *Documents Relating to the Invasion*, p. 35 and other sources too numerous to cite individually. In 1991 the writer was unable to locate any record of John Dickson or his grave in the Buffalo area.

<sup>73</sup> E.A. Cruikshank, ed., "Additional Correspondence of Robert Nichol," *OHS P&R* XXVI (1930), 37-96. Letter from Robert Nichol to William Halton dated Woodhouse, 13 January 1816.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Dundas to Simcoe, Whitehall, 2 October 1793, Simcoe Correspondence II, p. 80. Simcoe



records indicate that by 1834 the last of the Reuben Green property on lot 6 concession 14 Townsend Township was sold and the family disappeared. Even in 1900, L.H. Tasker wrote “he had not obtained any further information about this family.”<sup>75</sup>

### *John Dickson's Son*

It is stated above that John Dickson had a son, John Dickson Jr., by Elizabeth-Gertrude Brasseur in Nova Scotia and following her death brought the son to Upper Canada with him. No record has been found supporting this hypothesis. No mention of him could be discovered in any Nova Scotia or Norfolk County records. However, there is convincing circumstantial evidence. It has been demonstrated that between the two settlements of Long Point in Norfolk County and East Gwillimbury in York County there arose extensive interaction, travel, migration, and marriage among inter-related extended families particularly involving the two branches of the Pegg family after Isaac Pegg's arrival ca. 1801. The marriage in 1821 of Joseph Pegg (1800-1878) of East Gwillimbury and Eliza Park (1801-1834) of Long Point both resulted from

and caused even more movement between the two settlements.<sup>76</sup> Probably about the same time as his own marriage (her first child was born in 1824), Joseph Pegg's sister Elizabeth Pegg of East Gwillimbury married John Brasure, of whom no prior records exist in York County, or anywhere. Fortunately, from this point the genealogy and history of John and Elizabeth Brasure are well recorded as are some of the Brasure family traditions of John Brasure's earlier days. Of these traditions the Brasure family genealogist has written:

Family tradition has it that John Brasure was born... in Nova Scotia, possibly of French origin... After his marriage, John settled near a Scotch settlement in Simcoe County, Ontario Province, Canada... John was born circa 1788 [this date is arrived at by subtracting his age as given on the tombstone from the year of his death.]

John (was) about four... years of age when (his) mother died. (His) father subsequently remarried, and this new mother was none too kind to John so [he] left home at a fairly early age It is thought that [his] mother was Brasure before her marriage and that John... took his mother's maiden name.

John was in York County, Ontario, Canada,

---

commented “All public Arrangements are liable to abuses. Some such may have existed in extending the King's late benevolence. It was just in its principle, and... wise and useful,” Simcoe, Memoranda, 28 February 1794 Simcoe Correspondence II, p. 168; *The Loyalists in Ontario*, p. 133; Tasker, “The United Empire Loyalist Settlement,” p. 122. It is not known if and where Elizabeth's grant was located.

<sup>75</sup> Tasker, “The United Empire Loyalist Settlement,” p. 122; the “Reuben Green, Innkeeper” whose will is on file at the Simcoe Registry Office is not the same Reuben Green.

<sup>76</sup> Some of Eliza (Mrs. Joseph Pegg) Park's unhappy and lonely letters written from East Gwillimbury to her parents and siblings at Long Point have fortunately survived. A number of them refer to visits between the two locations as do other related letters which are also preserved. See Paul E. epper, *Some Norfolk County Letters and Papers 1815-1894 of Park, Pegg, Pettit*, (1984), esp. pp. 10, 12, 15, 19. Eliza's sister Sarah Park married Jonathan J. Pettit.

then called “Upper Canada” or “Canada West”, by 1820. It was here that he met and married Elisabeth Pegg, the daughter of Isaac and Deborah (Parks) Pegg.<sup>77</sup>

John Dickson Jr. was born in Nova Scotia, and was Acadian on his mother’s side. Her name was Brasseur. In Ontario, at or near the Long Point settlement, his father John Dickson Sr. subsequently married Elizabeth Green. Whether she “was none too kind” to her husband’s son is not known.

John Brasure married Elizabeth Pegg of East Gwillimbury and bought a farm in West Gwillimbury near the extensive “Scotch Settlement.”<sup>78</sup> To propose that John Dickson Jr. and John Brasure are the same man it is necessary to consider why he would change both his name and his location, and particularly why he moved to East Gwillimbury. As to the first, having the same name as a hunted criminal with a price on his head in a district where he had robbed people and committed murder would certainly suggest the wisdom of changing both name and location. As to the second it is likely

that the network of inter-married extended families communicating between the Long Point and East Gwillimbury settlements provided both the route and the means. As in later years John Brasure successfully pioneered no less than three bush farms.<sup>79</sup> becoming ca. 1836 the first settler at Craigeleith, Ontario, it is suggested that the young boy who left home “at a fairly early age” found employment as a farm-hand, probably with one of the nearby intermarried Austin-Loder-Parks-Pegg-Pettit families, with whom he learned excellent pioneering and survival skills and through whom he was passed on to the Pegg relatives in East Gwillimbury for a new start. The secret of his real identity died with his generation and was safe for perhaps one and three-quarter centuries. Thomas Hamilton knew it of course and it is a reasonable supposition that his contribution to helping the boy escape the shadow of his father was to arrange for one of his own sons to sell his Crown Grant to him. It was when it was first noted that the Crown Grantee at Craigeleith, Ontario, and the settler

---

<sup>77</sup> Lynn, *Genealogy*. This writer must acknowledge much gratitude to Mrs. Donna L. Lynn for help and encouragement during the years of research underlying this article. Together we provided much business for our respective telephone companies and national postal systems.

<sup>78</sup> “The first extensive location of white settlers in the Township of West Gwillimbury bears the name of the Scotch Settlement” composed of Highland Scots who had returned from Lord Selkirk’s failed Red River Colony. Interestingly, one of them moved on to the Talbot settlement, west of Long Point. John and Elizabeth Brasure purchased Concession 5, lot 3, West Gwillimbury per A. F. Hunter, *A History of Simcoe County* (1909), II, pp. 18-22, 277. Hunter mis-spells the name “Brazier,” the most common of the many renderings of the name.

<sup>79</sup> In Ontario, West Gwillimbury township lot 3 concession 5; Collingwood township Lot 21 in Concession 2; in Wisconsin, where he died, at Pike Lake, Hartford, Washington County, Wisconsin. The Collingwood township property was the Crown Grant to Sidney Smith Hamilton, the youngest son of Thomas Hamilton. On this property a subsequent owner, Andrew Grieg. G. Fleming, father of Sir Sandford Fleming, developed the present community of Craigeleith.

to whom he sold the property, both had connections with Nova Scotia that the question was asked—is this a coincidence, or is there an underlying story? This article, albeit lengthy and digressive, is to record the answer to the question.<sup>80</sup>

---



---

<sup>80</sup> The research for this article involved many people although the responsibility for mistakes, errors and omissions is that of the writer. Thanks for much help go to William E. Britnell, Mississauga; Donald Graves, Ottawa; Mrs. Milton N. Pegg, Locust Hill; Hamilton Family, June and Malcolm Hamilton, Sault Ste. Marie, Dr. Avrille Bow, Toronto; Donna Lynn, Orange, California; Joyce and the late Donald “Buster” L. Plater, Craigleith; and to the patient staffs at Admiral Digby Museum, Digby NS; Anglican Diocese of Toronto Archives; Anglican Diocese of Quebec; Canadian Parks Service, Atlantic Region, Halifax NS; Centre acadien, University Sainte-Anne, Point-de-l’Eglise NS; Centre d’études acadiennes, Université de Moncton, NB; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library; Norfolk County Archives, Simcoe; North York Public Library; Nova Scotia Archaeological Society, Halifax NS; Pickering College, Newmarket; State Historical Society of Wisconsin; and others too numerous to mention.