



## Exploring Ontario's Past

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Andrew Hind

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### Lower Landing, Holland River

Up until the mid-point of the 19th century, Lake Simcoe was part of a vital transportation route that linked Lake Ontario with Lake Huron, and by extension eastern Canada to the west. Never was this route more needed than during the War of 1812.

One of the vital areas along this highway was Lower Landing, located along the east branch of the Holland River about five kms north of Holland Landing. From 1812 to 1815, the Lower Landing, or Soldier's Landing as it became known for a time, was a hive of frenzied military activity.

This seemingly innocuous location, forgotten today, literally helped save our nation.

The Lower Landing – and indeed the entire route - had been used by Indigenous people for centuries before it was pressed into war service. Travelling up the Rouge River from Toronto, they then followed trails to the landing on the Holland River. They would paddle down the Holland River into Lake Simcoe, across to the head of Kempenfelt Bay where Barrie stands today, and then portage nine miles to Willow Creek, which fed into the Nottawasaga River and, eventually, into Lake Huron at Wasaga Beach.

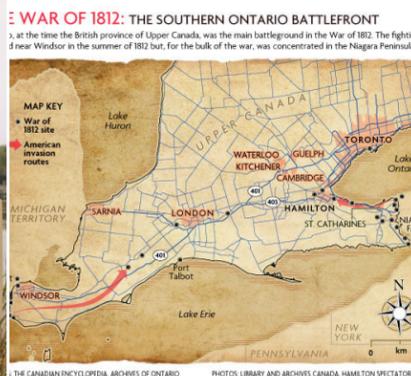
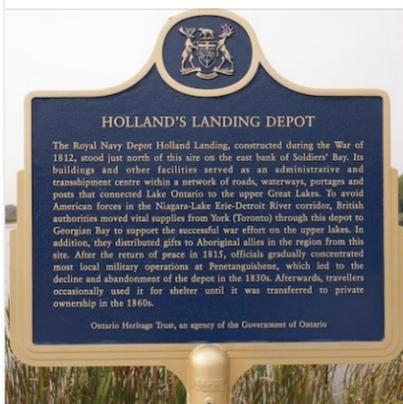
When the War of 1812 erupted, the Americans quickly cut Britain's maritime lines of communications between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron. Britain would have to rely on the overland route to support her forces in the west. Lower Landing became a storage depot, where material was gathered before shipping across Lake Simcoe and further west. Extensive wharves were built, and warehouses and accommodations raised.

Hundreds of men and tons of supplies, everything from payroll to food, ammunition to beef oxen, passed through. If not for these men and material, Britain would have been defeated in the west and modern-day Canada likely would stopped on the shores of Lake Huron.

Even after the war, the landing remained in use by the British in supplying her naval base at Penetanguishene until 1825.

Worryingly, the site of Lower Landing may be lost forever – without any significant archeological work ever having been done – due to the proposed Bradford Bypass.

*The map below shows just how easy it was for America to strangle Britain's lifeline to the west. The Niagara River, Lake Erie, and the St. Clair River all form easily interdictable chokepoints. Loss of control of even one would cut off Lake Huron.*



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