THE WAR OF 1812

This walk of modern Kingston is of buildings and sites as they existed on November 10 1812. Kingston had started its modern life as Cataraqui in 1783, became known as Kingstown, and by 1812 was the village of Kingston. It had, perhaps, 1000 inhabitants and 100 houses. November 10 1812 was a special day in its life. The plaque at stop 4 will explain. You can also read “Commodore Chauncey’s Attack on Kingston Harbour, November 10, 1812” by C. P. Stacey in The Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XXXII, 1951, or you can search for “Attack on Kingston Harbour” or “Flight of the Royal George” online.

APPROXIMATELY 1 HOUR  Please be respectful of private property.

The 1812 walk is longer than the other City Walks, and will take at least an hour. There are few buildings remaining from 1812, so be prepared to look mostly at sites rather than buildings. An 1812 street map (page 22) shows the small size of the village of Kingston. Note that the 1812 street names are in brackets. Where there is no bracketed name, the street did not exist in 1812.
The Walk of 1812

Start at the Visitor Information Centre, 209 Ontario St. across from City Hall.

1 Look into Confederation Park. In 1812 the shore of Lake Ontario was this side of the fountain basin. Between Ontario (Front) Street and the water would be wharves, warehouses and storage buildings.

2 Look west, away from the lake. In 1812, you would have been looking at the new market place which spread from Clarence (Clarence) Street to Brock (Market) Street. There was a covered market building, stocks and a whipping post. It was also used as a parade ground. It had been the site of Lieutenant-Colonel Bradstreet’s artillery batteries in 1758. (also see stop 13). On the far side, where you now see the red brick British Whig building, you would have seen St. George’s Church in the trees. Already 20 years old, it had been enlarged in 1802. Walker’s Hotel was at Brock and Ontario (Market and Front) Streets, and the Kingston Hotel at Clarence and King (Clarence and Church) Streets.

Walk south (with the lake on your left) for three blocks to Ontario and Earl (Front and Centre) Streets.

3 The Lines House stood here until 1987. Very few frame houses survived Kingston’s many fires, and it is ironic that this one was burnt in 1988 soon after it was moved.

Turn left on Earl (Centre) Street and walk to Battery Park on the shoreline. Turn right and walk across to the plaque.

4 Read the plaque. Look across the water to the grey buildings of the Royal Military College (RMC). In 1812, the Provincial Marine Naval Yard was there. You are standing on the site of a one-gun battery. Another small gun battery was where the closest Martello Tower you see was built in about 1855. A blockhouse, with a six- and a nine-pounder gun, was on the high ground of Point Henry, which you can see beyond RMC.
Continue past the plaque to Gore (Point) Street and turn right. Walk, with the lake behind you, to Ontario (Front) Street, continue south (left) to Lower Union (School) Street and turn west (right). Walk up to King (Church) Street.

5 Look left (south). On the other side of the Park, beyond the houses you see ahead of you, Reverend Dr. John Stuart built his house in about 1785 in what was then the countryside. He was chaplain to the 2nd Battalion, King’s Royal Regiment of New York during and after the American War of Independence, later stationed in Fort Frontenac (stop 13). He built St. George’s Church in 1792 (stop 2). He also started a school in his house.

6 On the north-east corner, approximately where 161 King Street now stands, was the first schoolhouse built in Upper Canada. It was named the Midland District Public School. It had been started by Stuart in his home in 1786, and then moved in to a proper school house here in 1792.

Turn right and walk one block on King (Church) Street.

7 The house on the corner of Gore and King (Point and Church) Streets, 59 Gore Street, is
a controversial one in Kingston. Legend says that part of it was brought over the ice from Carleton Island (see comment at stop 13) after 1783. If so, it is surprising, as architectural historian Jennifer McKendry notes, that it was placed at the opposite end of the settlement from the protection of the Barracks. It disappears and reappears on maps. Maybe the present building includes the remains of one of the city's first houses. Church Street continued less than a block further west in 1812.

Continue along King (Church) Street to 232.

8 The front of this frame house was probably built before 1812 and has not been greatly altered. The second storey may have been an early addition. It is typical of what the larger frame houses would have looked like in 1812. (photo on previous page)

9 Turn west, away from the lake on William (William) Street and continue to Bagot (Rear) Street, so named because it was the rear of the town.

9 There were very few buildings to the south, (to the left on Bagot), but streets had been planned and building lots had been sold. Where the Kingston Frontenac Housing Corporation apartments now stand was the first stone church in Kingston. It was the village's second church. Named St. Columba’s Roman Catholic Church, or The French Church, it was built by Master Mason F. X. Rochleau (whose house we will visit later at stop 16). It was used as a hospital in the War of 1812, but would again be a church, known as St. Joseph’s, from 1816 until 1891.

Continue north on Bagot (Rear) Street with the lake on your right for two blocks to Brock (Market) and Clarence (Clarence) Streets.
On your left was Selma Park and a one
storey frame house built by Sir John Johnson,
but now owned in 1812 by Roman Catholic
Bishop Macdonell. The Park extended from
Johnson to Princess (Store) Streets and west
three blocks to Barrie Street.

Continue north two blocks to Queen (Grave) Street,
turn left, and walk one block.

You are at the intersection of Montreal
and Queen (Grave) Streets, by the Lower Burial
Ground, outside the village in 1812 (there was
a Garrison Burial Ground even further out).
This cemetery is the earliest consecrated ceme-
tery in Ontario, started in 1783. Early promi-
nent citizens were buried here, including John
Stuart (see stop 4) in 1811 in the Stuart “lair”.
The original cemetery wall was built by F. X.
Rochleau in 1799, but has been rebuilt.

You now have two options.

IF YOU ARE SHORT OF TIME, continue north on Mon-
treal Street for one block, turn right on Ordnance
(Cross) Street; walk three blocks east, downhill, to
Wellington (Brewery) Street and turn right. Almost
immediately, turn left onto Place d’Armes. In 1812
you would have passed a number of military build-
ings. Continue toward the Cataraqui River, and you
are approaching stop 13.

IF YOU HAVE TIME, continue north on Montreal Street
for three blocks to North Street (not a four-way inter-
section). Turn right and go downhill on North Street
for two blocks to Rideau (Garden) Street and you will
see Rideaucrest Home across the road.

The British government built houses for
Joseph Brant and his sister Molly here in 1784,
outside the village, in recognition for the work
they had done in the American colony as British
patriots. You will find a plaque by the main en-
trance (to your left) and a bust of Molly in the
courtyard (ask at reception for directions).

Go south on Rideau (Garden) Street (keep the water
on your left) and take the first street on your left,
and then the first right Wellington Street (Brewery).

In 1812 Brewery Street was closer to the water
than Wellington is now and you would be walking
through Kingston’s first brewery built by James
Robins in 1793. Look up high on 308 Wellington
Street and you will see a beer barrel and a mashtun
as a reminder of an 1835 brewery. Take the first
left (Place d’Armes) and continue toward the
water. In 1812 you would have passed a number
of military buildings between North Street and
Place d’Armes.

Where Place d’Armes joins Ontario (Front)
Street, you will find a reconstruction of the north-
western bastion of the old Fort Frontenac. The
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fort was built by the French, rebuilt by them in 1695 and left in ruins after a 1758 attack by the British forces under Lieutenant-Colonel Bradstreet. It was restored in 1783 (see painting on page 25) when the British army had to leave their base on Carleton Island in the St. Lawrence River because it was too close to the proposed new boundary with the United States. They moved here. Cross Ontario (Front) Street (very carefully) and look inside the gates of today’s Fort Frontenac. You can see to your right, below the level of the parking lot, the remains of the southeastern bastion of the old Fort Frontenac. The lake shore used to very close to the north of Place d’Armes — a few yards on the other side of the street when you look from the K Rock Centre. When you look inside Fort Frontenac, the lake shore was about where the three storey buildings stand to your left.

Walk south on Ontario (Front) Street, with the stone wall of modern Fort Frontenac on your left. Old Fort Frontenac extended close to the intersection of Ontario (Front) and The Tragically Hip Way (Barrack).

At Ontario (Front) Street and Queen (Queen) Street was Pete Smith’s, Kingston’s first stone house. Turn right and continue west one block to King (Church) Street.

Across the street is 70-74. This stone house was built by Francis Xavier Rochleau (see stops 9 and 11) in 1808 — look high up on the wall next to the passageway for his mark. The house was built right on the property line, as was the custom at the time, to give private space behind for the owners.

Turn right on Ontario (Front) Street, and you will soon be at the Visitor Information Centre, having walked all around the Kingston of 1812.

Here the Commanding Officer’s, or Government House would have blocked your way. It was built in the middle of the present day intersection. The Commanding Officer’s wife had to ‘hurry the children into the cellar to avoid the bullets that pierced the wooden walls of the pretty white cottage’ during the November 10th 1812 attack. Read about it in Historic Kingston, volume #13 page 10, available in the Central Kingston Public Library, 130 Johnson Street.

Turn left and walk south on King (Church) Street to Princess (Store) Street, turn right and walk a little way up.

Robert Macaulay’s house was on the southwest corner. He probably rafted it across from Carleton Island, and used it as a General Store. It survived well into the 20th century.