

A Neighbourly War - Robert L. Dallison

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When most people think of the War of 1812, they think of the Niagara frontier, the British burning of the White House, the harrowing tale of Laura Secord, and the much-ballyhooed Battle of New Orleans. But there was more of British North America involved in the war than Upper and Lower Canada. With Great Britain locked in battle with Napoleon's France, the United States pounced on the chance to declare war on Britain. In New Brunswick, the threat of invasion was a very real possibility. Fearing for their lives, families, and property, the people and their legislative assembly adopted every possible measure to make New Brunswick ready for war. However, an officially undeclared state of neutrality was established along the Maine border, and the threat faded. Supporting the British army in its efforts in Upper and Lower Canada and the navy in its operations along the Atlantic coast led to major growth in the province's war economy. As the war moved into its final year and Napoleon's empire fell in Europe, Britain became much more aggressive in its North American campaign. Buoyed by this, the New Brunswick government decided to press its claims to the unresolved international border with Maine. The British military thus occupied the Penobscot River Valley, and northern Maine was declared part of New Brunswick. By the end of the war, and the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, the unresolved border remained unresolved. The economic, political, geographical, and societal results of the War of 1812 continue to be felt in New Brunswick. The war strengthened the colony's ties to Britain, built up its economy, and led to the growth of major cities, especially with the settlement of retiring soldiers. Shipbuilding and supplying the British troops had led to growing profits for farmers, fishermen, merchants, and labourers. Although it would be decades later before the boundary issue was officially settled, there are areas still in dispute. Unlike its Upper and Lower Canadian cousins, the war in New Brunswick may not have involved the burning and pillaging of towns and villages, but its effects were nonetheless important and far-reaching.

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