

# LOCAL

News Desk, 905-526-3420

## ‘I would love to see them at rest’

**BY JAMES ELLIOTT**

STONE CREEK ♦ Will the last bones of the Battle of Stoney Creek, both British and American, be finally laid to rest?

That’s the question to be pondered by the city as the approaching bicentennial of the War of 1812 focuses national and international attention on the Stoney Creek battlefield.

In 1998 and 1999, excavations prior to the renovation of the Lion’s Monument parkette on King Street uncovered the remains of 24 bodies buried after the June 6, 1813 battle. The archeologist who carried out the work excavated a shallow, irregular trench that continued under the adjoining private property to the east of the parkette. Restricted by her provincial licence to the parkette, the archeologist was unable to excavate the trench even though there were bones plainly evident in the soil of the adjoining property.

In the spring of 2000, the remains of the 24 soldiers were reinterred with considerable ceremony in the refurbished parkette.

Stoney Creek council had approved \$45,000 to continue the work but it died after the municipality amalgamated with Hamilton.

Based on historical records, there could be as many as 16 bodies buried under the former hair salon

### Bones of 1812 soldiers await re-burial

and women’s spa next door.

For more than a decade since their discovery, the remains have remained under the front lawn of the neat, white bungalow at 70 King St. West.

As yet, there are no concrete plans to complete the job and recover the remaining bones before 2012, but that could change if Ward 9 Councillor Brad Clark has his way. Clark, whose ward includes the Stoney Creek battlefield, has submitted a notice of motion to put a plan together to complete the dig, recover the remains and re-bury them in the parkette. It is to come to the city council meeting next Wednesday. He says staff has estimated the cost at about \$30,000.

“I think it’s a great project, the appropriate thing to do. There isn’t a more pressing archeological dig in our area. It should be completed before the 200th commemoration. I’ve asked staff to report back to us how we would make this happen and we’re just going to have to pursue it.”

He said councillors Bob Bratina and Brian McHattie have both endorsed his plan. Ward 10 Councillor Maria Pearson said she has reservations about whether the city can spare the cash. “I’d love to

see it done but I’m caught up in budgetary restraints right now. I’d be very supportive but my caution is dollars right now.”

The property is owned by the estate of the late Dr. Bernard Wolos. His wife, Patricia Wolos, said she would welcome further excavation to remove the remaining bodies.

“I don’t like the idea that they (the remains) are there. I would love to see them at rest, too, the bodies put into a proper place.”

The archeologist who completed the excavation work in 1999 said she would be relieved to see the city finally “do justice to this site.”

However, Rita Griffin-Short is still upset the city did not honour Stoney Creek’s commitment to complete the work.

The \$45,000 had been budgeted to locate the end of the trench and write up and publish the results, “then I got a phone call telling me not to send any more invoices, that they weren’t going to pay me and I was told to stop doing any work. I was stiffed, big-time.”

In retaliation, Griffin-Short retained several dozen predominately American military buttons recovered from the site, which she paid to have conserved by Parks Canada. If the city would pay for her work, she

said, “I would write up the buttons and they could have them.”

During the nearly two centuries since the original burials, the site has been repeatedly disturbed by spring plowing, construction work and relic hunters, most notably the local justice of the peace Peter Van Wagner, who removed 22 skulls from the site during the 1880s to illustrate his lectures on phrenology, a 19th century pseudoscience that held that character and mental capacity were related to skull shape.

What Griffin-Short found in 1998-99 was more refuse pit than burial site. There were no proper burials, only disconnected human bones mixed in with animal bones and domestic rubbish.

“I would come home at night and be so upset to think that people had dug these up and thrown human bones in with all this garbage. I just can’t understand the disrespect.”

Historical records indicate that 61 bodies from both sides were buried on June 6, 1813 – 20 or 22 in what is now Stoney Creek Cemetery, and the remainder, 39 or 41, in or around the current Lion’s Monument parkette.

*James Elliott is the author of Strange Fatality: The Battle of Stoney Creek, published in May by Robin Brass Studio.*

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