

**Defending Our Home**  
**Loyalist Families of Dundas County**  
**and the Battle of Crysler's Farm**

**A War of 1812 Novel**

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CHAPTER 1  
SATURDAY JULY 23, 1813  
Dundas County, Upper Canada

“Do you know much about Canadians?” the farmer asked the soldier.

“No, I don’t,” the soldier replied.

“Know anything about their background or where they came from?” the farmer continued.

“No. Not at all,” replied the soldier. “Where do they come from?”

“Well,” said the farmer, “they’re a mixed bloodline that goes back to seventeenth-century France, but after all this time here they are now a distinct breed, I would say. A good number have come up from Quebec and now quite a few have gone south to the States. One of their real strengths is that they can take the cold weather. They’re small and tough and really hard-working. Canadians are high-spirited but also gentle and reliable. And as you can see, they crave affection.”

“I can see that,” said the soldier as he stroked her black hair. “What’s her name?”

“Her name is Bessie,” said the farmer, Jacob Doran. “Pretty little thing, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she’s a beauty all right,” replied the soldier in a thick Irish accent. He was Sergeant Marmaduke Kearns, 2nd Battalion of the 89th Regiment of Foot. “I came to the Canadas last year with Colonel Morrison. I miss being around horses. We had a black filly like this back at our farm in County Cork. She’s a great little horse. Lovely neck. Honest eyes.”

“The rest of the men should be here soon,” Jacob said, trying

to reassure the soldier. "I don't always get a good turnout. The men have a lot of work to do on their farms this time of year."

"That's all right. I'm in no hurry. It was good to get away from the fort on this grand day. How long you had this girl?" asked the soldier, still stroking her long black mane.

"I bought her just last month from a Canadien who lives just above Montreal. I'm going to give her as a gift to my new step-daughter. I'm getting married in September to the widow Cook. Her youngest daughter is Maria. She'll be twelve tomorrow. She's a beautiful little thing. Takes after her mother, know what I mean?" Jacob said with a smile. "I'm a very lucky man. I got two grown boys from my first marriage. You'll meet them this afternoon. Most of the men from Matilda should be here by two o'clock." He paused and looked down the road. "I don't know how many men will come from Williamsburg. It's a good hike to here."

"No mind. We'll do a few drills with whoever is here at two. I have to be back to the fort by dark. You think Private Smith over there is a little strange now, you should see him when it starts to get dark." The Sergeant pointed to the older soldier, who was pacing back and forth beside the barn, talking to himself and occasionally to an old black sow lying in the sun beside the chicken coop. He was short and mostly bald. His ears stuck out and pointed forward, much like the old sow he was talking to. His rugged face made him look over 60 but he still had the lean, wiry body of a much younger man.

Jacob and the young redcoat were standing in the yard beside Jacob's barn. It was a beautiful summer day. Jacob had a tidy two-storey clapboard house with several outbuildings including a lovely new barn. His property was on the river, near the Rapids du Plat, Lot 3, Concession 1, Matilda Township, Dundas County, just at the border of Williamsburg Township. The old Indian trail around the rapids was still visible in front of the King's Highway.

Sergeant Kearns was still a young man of only 28. He had a swarthy complexion, with black curly hair, big bushy black eyebrows,

and a large scar on his left cheek. He was a natural leader who had come up the ranks in just 14 years.

“Some of the men should be arriving soon. I should put this little lady back in the barn. Come and I’ll show you my animals.” Jacob beckoned to the soldier as he led the Canadian horse to the barn. “Come on, girl. I know you don’t want to go in on this nice day but we’ll be doing some shooting, and that could make you jumpy.”

They entered the barn through the large double doors at the front. Jacob tied Bessie beside another horse in the first stable to the left. Patting the other horse on its back, Jacob explained to the soldier: “This is Buck. He’s been with me for twelve years. Great horse. Don’t know how we would’ve managed without him. Big fellow for a Canadian. A full sixteen hands. I’ve lent him out to others so he’s got lots of offspring along the river. That’s why I had to get Bessie from away. I expect we’ll have a colt for Maria by next summer. What do you think, Buck, are you up to it, old fella?”

Both men smiled. Jacob then showed the soldier his pair of oxen in the next stall on the left and then the two cows in their separate stanchions. The pens on the right were empty. He explained that this was for when the hogs came back in the fall. The large double doors at the back of the barn opened to pasture. Above the stable and pens, on both sides, hay was stacked to the open roof rafters. The fresh hay gave the whole barn a beautiful sweet smell.

The soldier took in a big breath as he stood and gazed out into the back pasture where several sheep were grazing. Just outside the back door, off to the right in the shade, was a fenced area: muddy at one end but perfectly clean at the other. At the clean end was a large white sow nursing several little piglets that were pushing and climbing over each other, causing quite a commotion. The sow was completely undisturbed.

Sensing that the soldier might not understand all the fuss, Jacob explained to him: “This old gal had twelve little ones this

time, all lived, but she only has a place setting for ten, so as soon as she lies down you get all this pushing and shoving. Doesn't seem to bother her though. Have to keep them penned to protect them until they're weaned. Otherwise, we let the hogs run wild to feed themselves outside until freeze-up. 'Root, hog, or die,' we say. They're a tough breed. The piglets will be six weeks old by the end of August. If they all live, they're going to take a lot of feed this winter, but I'll get good money for them in the spring. The army pays top dollar . . . But, I keep forgetting, I suppose if the Yankees invade this fall, who knows what will happen. What do ya think? Are they coming?"

The soldier looked at Jacob and shrugged his shoulders. "Colonel Pearson says we have to be ready, even if it isn't likely. I'm told that he has contacts at Ogdensburg who say that it's already too late in the season for an invasion, but you hear a different rumour every day." Pointing to the large scar across the left side of his face which also caused the left eyelid to droop, the soldier continued: "I got this at Fuengirola three years ago. We lost three hundred good men in Spain that day. I'll fight if I have to. I'm a soldier, but war has no glory for me. I hope the Yanks stay at home."

The men walked back through the barn to the yard beside the house. The older soldier was still pacing, but then he stopped and took off his hat and said something to the inside bottom of his hat.

The Sergeant noticed Jacob looking at the soldier talking to his hat. "Don't mind him, Mr. Doran. He's completely insane but he's a pretty good soldier. Steals though. You have to watch him."

"Can you make out what the poor man is saying?" asked Jacob.

"A lot of the time he seems to be talking to his mother. When he's talking into his hat like that he pretends that there is a picture in there of her. But one of the men checked one night when he was asleep and there was no picture in his hat. When he teased Smith about it the next day, he got head-butted so hard that he got

his nose broken. Blood everywhere. Nobody teases Private Smith any more, especially about his mother.”

“Did he come over with you last summer?” asked Jacob.

“No, that’s the thing. He just showed up one morning last fall at Kingston wearing an old uniform. No identification. No first name. If it’s his coat, he used to be a sergeant because you can see where the three stripes used to be. Strange duck. Tough as nails. Eats anything. Hasn’t had a bath in a year, I would guess. Steals like a gypsy, then denies it. Always polite to officers but it’s too thick to be real. I wouldn’t believe a single thing that comes out of his mouth. He knows quite a bit of Spanish so he must have served in Spain. Hates Frenchies. We had to explain to him this spring that the Canadiens are not really French—not like Napoleon French. I hope he believes us. Have you ever seen anybody’s ears stick out like that?”

Jacob didn’t reply. He couldn’t be sure Smith couldn’t hear him and this was not a man you wanted to be on the wrong side of. Jacob changed the subject and asked: “Would the two of you like to come into the house for a cup of tea while we wait for the men to arrive? They should be here soon.”

“No, no thank you, sir. You wouldn’t want Smith in your house, believe me. While we’re waiting is there anything we can do for you?”

“No, thank you, Sergeant. Let me go into the house for a few minutes. I’ll be right back.”

With that, Jacob went inside. He was starting to worry about why at least some of the men hadn’t arrived by now. So many of them just didn’t seem to take their militia duties seriously enough. He didn’t want the Irish Sergeant to think that they were just a bunch of unreliable farmers who didn’t understand their duty. Duty and responsibility were very important to Jacob. The young men who hadn’t fought in the last war didn’t take the Yankee threat seriously enough and were too quick to say that if it came to a fight in the Eastern District, the redcoats would easily handle the amateur Yankees. That’s what Bourgoyne thought.

Jacob returned to the yard with bread and cheese for the two British soldiers. When Smith stopped pacing to take the food, his head started to jerk occasionally and he had a slight tic in his lower jaw. Then, surprisingly, he made a little bow and spoke in a clear slow voice with what appeared to be a slight Welsh accent: "Thank you, kind sir. You are very gracious . . . may I be so bold as to ask, sir, do you not have any women on this fine estate?"

"No, Private Smith. I'm a widower."

"Don't get me wrong, sir. Not asking for myself. Can't get it up any more anyway, you understand? I was tortured down there by the Froggies. Asking for the Sergeant here. He would be a fine catch for a good colonial girl. I was just talking to my dear mother about it this morning. She agrees." His chin tic returned.

The Sergeant rolled his eyes and shook his head. "That's enough, Private," he said. "Thank you for the food, Mr. Doran."

"It is my honour, Sergeant. We're grateful that you are here to help our men. They need some infantry practice. You know, we're better shooters than marchers. Unless they were at Ogdensburg, the young men have never been in battle."

"Don't worry about any of that. Hopefully, your farmers won't have to be real soldiers." The sergeant took a bite of the cheese. "Good cheese. Make it yourself?"

"Yes," Jacob replied, "we're pretty self-sufficient now."

"Lovely place you have here. You must be proud of your home. Great new barn."

"Yes, we had a bee here the last summer before the war. Built the barn in one day. Rafters are all hemlock. We've come a long way since '84. See that log chicken coop over there? That was our first house. Whole family lived in that one-room log cabin for the first six years. The winter of '87-'88 we nearly starved. Those were tough times."

Just then, a group of men appeared, coming down the King's Highway from the west. These were the men from Matilda Township. It wasn't long before the men from Williamsburg

began arriving from the east. Some came on horseback but most walked.

The men greeted each other warmly. They ranged in age from 14 to over 60. Some of the older men wore three-cornered hats and a few had straw hats, but most were bare-headed. They wore homemade farm clothes. None had uniforms. Some of the older men spoke Dutch or German to each other but most of the younger men spoke English. Some of the men lit up their long Dutch pipes while they stood in the yard in front of Jacob's house. Most stood staring at the river as they spoke.

By two o'clock, about 40 men had arrived. Jacob stood up on the steps at the side of his house. As a lieutenant, he was the most senior officer of the Dundas militia present, so he called the men to order. For most of the men, just getting into ranks seemed to be a complicated manoeuvre. Jacob explained to the men that two soldiers from the 89th had come from Prescott to help out with the drills. He introduced Private Smith and Sergeant Kearns. He then turned the men over to Sergeant Kearns, who jumped up on the step beside Jacob.

Sergeant Kearns explained that Captain Merkley, Captain of the Dundas militia, had asked Colonel Pearson for some help in improving some of the skills of the men. He explained that he had brought some extra powder and balls to distribute to them. These were not to be used for hunting but were to be saved in case they were needed, in the event of an American invasion.

The men were divided into four groups. Sergeant Kearns began to show the men some elementary marching drills. He explained the various musket positions while standing at attention. He brought Private Smith forward and used him as a model. Private Smith seemed to enjoy the attention. He did the drills to perfection.

Most of the farmer-soldiers seemed quite bored as they were ordered to repeat certain manoeuvres. Their lack of enthusiasm for the task and their clear lack of competence embarrassed Jacob.



After a couple of hours, Sergeant Kearns stood up on the step again and explained to the militiamen that they could be quite important in the defence of Dundas County if the Yankees decided to invade that fall. The Dundas farmers didn't seem that impressed.

Two of the men in the ranks were the Marselis brothers, Peter and Garrett. They were the younger brothers of Jacob's soon-to-be wife, the widow Catherine Cook. When the men were ordered to stand down to take a break, Jacob came over to speak to Peter and Garrett, who explained that their other brother Thomas hadn't come because he was clearing trees from his land back on the fifth concession. When Jacob pointed out that this was not the first practice drill that Thomas had missed, the two brothers were quick to assure Jacob that Thomas would make the next one.

Sergeant Kearns and Jacob put the men through a couple more drills and dismissed them at four o'clock. Some of the men started to head home while others lingered in Jacob's front yard getting caught up on the news.

Jacob thanked Sergeant Kearns and Private Smith for their help. He apologized that only 40 men had come. He explained again that this was a bad time of year to be away from the work on the farms. He hoped to himself that Sergeant Kearns didn't realize that there were over 200 men in the two flank companies of the Dundas militia, meaning that over 160 of the men had not even bothered to show up. Sergeant Kearns didn't seem concerned about the low turnout and thanked Jacob for his hospitality. When Private Smith made a little speech to say goodbye, strangely, he spoke in a distinctly Cockney accent.

Jacob's two sons, John and David, stayed on to visit with their father. All of the young men admired the new horse, but Garrett was especially excited. After about an hour, with the rest of the militia gone, Jacob asked Garrett to bring Bessie out into the yard, put on a harness, and lead her over the road to the river to cool off and get a drink. Garrett loved horses and was a natural horseman. As Garrett crossed the King's Highway out of easy hearing range,

Peter quietly explained to the others that their mother Oma was talking about selling Garrett's U.E. acreage which he had gotten the year before. She thought they could get 30 dollars for it because she had been told that was about what 100 acres on the back concessions were selling for now. She thought they could use the money to buy him a horse, he loved horses so much. Jacob offered to check with Mrs. Bouck, who might be willing to sell her late husband's horse. It was a good Canadian, a son of Buck.

The men sat on the front steps of Jacob's house looking at the river and watching Garrett and Bessie. Jacob smoked his old Dutch pipe. He had been upset by the low turnout but now he was relaxed. He reflected on how blessed he was to be sitting here on the steps with his two sons and Catherine's two younger brothers. It was a beautiful warm late afternoon. His crops were looking good. And in only 50 days he would be marrying the beautiful widow Cook. Just the thought of Catherine made him blush a little. He had never thought a man his age could be so in love.

"Come on, Father, come and join us. It'll be great." David was talking to his father, who was startled out of his daydreaming.

"What? What did you say, son?" Jacob could see the young men taking off their clothes.

"Garrett is yelling and laughing. Listen. He wants us to join him for a swim. There's no one around. Let's go." By now they were all giggling like little boys, throwing off their clothes onto the ground. John was trying to get his socks off when his brother pushed him. He fell over laughing.

"We're coming," Peter yelled to Garrett. "We're coming. Let me guess; it's not too cold once you get in, right?"

John finally got his socks off. He stood up and boldly threw off his underwear.

"Bare balls, right?" he shouted to his brother.

"Bare balls it is," said his father.

Three miles down the river at Lot 21, Concession 1, Williamsburg Township, Dundas County, Thomas Marselis, the older brother of Peter and Garrett, was not clearing his land. This was just an excuse that the brothers had made up to protect Thomas from more criticism that he wasn't doing his share. Most of the other Dundas County farmers had taken part in the drills that had been organized over the summer. Several of them had even seen action at the Battle of Ogdensburg earlier that February. Most had at least served as artificers constructing a bigger fort at Prescott that spring and summer. Thomas never had.

Handsome blond-haired Thomas Marselis wasn't clearing trees from his lot. He was making wine in the little shed behind his cabin on the St. Lawrence River. He was a young man of many enthusiasms but soldiering wasn't one of them. He had been born with an insatiable curiosity.

Last spring he had devised a new technique for collecting maple sap. Last summer, he had devoted many hours to starting apple trees from seeds and to beginning a new orchard on his cleared land. That these trees would not produce fruit for many years did not concern him. He had experimented with four or five different varieties. He planted several seeds that he had been given by John McIntosh, his neighbour on the back concession, as John had been impressed with a tree that he had found a couple of years earlier on his farm which produced a particularly sweet-tasting crisp apple.

This summer, Thomas had taken his old love of beekeeping in a new direction. He had learned the basics of beekeeping from his father as a boy and he had taken over management of the family hives after his father's death. In the four years that Thomas was away, his brother Garrett assumed the role of beekeeper and doubled the number of hives. Garrett's patience and mild manner suited the bees and Garrett's honey had achieved something of a local reputation by the time Thomas had returned. In the previous year Thomas had tried to make wine from the honey but the results

were not good. This spring he had met a man from Glengarry who made a beautiful mead and Thomas obtained his recipe and a better sense of what he had done wrong before. He knew now he had to boil his equipment and take greater care to minimize the amount of lees that got into the drink. The Glengarry man's recipe was for a mead he called cyser. It called for the addition of apple juice. Thomas had also purchased from the man a piece of hose that was of much better quality than the one he had used earlier. The new hose would help him do a better job of siphoning.

So, this fine day in July, while many of the other men from Dundas County were doing their duty at militia practice, Thomas was at home with his son JT showing him his new mead-making equipment and explaining what they would be doing later in the fall. JT was now three and a half years old. He loved to be with his father. Thomas explained to his son that later in the fall when the apples ripened, they would have to be picked, crushed, and strained. The honey would have to be collected from Garrett's hives, the wax separated for candle-making, and the pure honey added to the apple juice with yeast to make the mead. JT loved to see his father so happy and enthusiastic.

"Well, partner," said Thomas to his son as he took his hand, "let's go and see how your mother is making out with your poor little sister. There's nothing worse than a summer cold."

As Thomas and his son came around to the front of the cabin, they met Oma coming out the door. Thomas and JT could see immediately that Oma was not happy about something. Before Thomas could even ask what was wrong, Oma stopped, put her hands on her hips, and snorted contemptuously:

"That wife of yours! She won't listen to good sense. I was just trying to help."

"What's wrong now, Mother?" Thomas asked quietly, and held his son's little hand even more tightly. There was no disguising the tension.

“She never listens to me,” Oma continued, “and every time I try to be helpful she turns on me. She’s an ungrateful child!”

“She’s not a child, Mother.”

“Go ahead, stick up for her. You always do. You don’t see the side of her that I do.”

Thomas picked up JT, who was staring at his grandmother. JT had seen Oma like this before. Then he looked away and hugged his father’s neck.

“It’s all right, son. Everything is going to be all right,” Thomas whispered to his son and then looked at his mother, shaking his head. He said nothing more as he walked past his mother towards the cabin door. Oma stomped off towards her house which was next door, just across a small field.

Thomas carried JT into the cabin and found Allie sitting on their bed, nursing baby Aleda. Allie didn’t look at her husband but Thomas could see from her eyes that she had been crying.

“I’m sorry, Allie,” he said.

“Sorry? What good is that?” she snapped, wiping her eyes. “You have to speak to her. I can’t take this any longer. You think I’m happy that the baby has a cold and a fever? You should have heard what she said to me. You’d think I gave Aleda the cold!”

“What can I say?” Thomas pleaded.

“You can say that you will go and speak to her and tell her to stop interfering. I can’t take this any longer. She treats me like a child.”

“All right. I’ll speak to her,” he replied.

“No. No you won’t.” Allie’s voice turned more bitter now, more biting. “You won’t say anything to her. You’re afraid of her like everyone else. I can’t take this any longer.”

“Let’s talk about this later when the children are asleep,” Thomas said as he put JT down. JT didn’t walk away. He hugged his father’s leg while he kept staring at his mother. Thomas put a reassuring hand on his son’s head.

“Allie,” he said, pulling JT tight to his leg, “JT and I love you very much, don’t we, JT?”

“We love you, Mommy,” JT said.

Allie turned her head and looked at the two of them standing at the foot of her bed. She looked down and saw the baby now asleep at her breast.

“I’ll put the baby to bed now,” she said softly, the anger and bitterness now drained away. “You boys get your chores done and I’ll cook supper.”

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Late that same afternoon just before supper, in the city of Washington, in the new building that was called the White House, James Madison, President of the United States of America, took pen in hand and wrote, “approved and adopted,” on an Executive Order. The fateful decision was made. Abandoning the Lake Erie and Niagara frontiers, the bulk of the American armed forces were to be concentrated at Sackett’s Harbour at the eastern end of Lake Ontario, to prepare for what was to be the decisive assault on Montreal. With the defeat of Montreal, both the Canadas would soon follow. Unbeknownst to the Loyalist families settled along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, they were about to be thrust directly into the path of the largest military invasion ever mounted against Canada.