

## DEFINING MOMENTS IN OUR HERITAGE

By Robert Williamson

In the month of June we annually commemorate the Battle of Stoney Creek as part of a **Defining Moment in Canadian history** when our national identity was preserved and American republicanism was rejected. A good thing considering the current presidential nomination debates!

During the 1812 Bicentennial, fellow volunteers on the former Hamilton Historical Board (HHB) identified **two other related defining moments or "Wow" factors** in Hamilton's history that have been overshadowed by the Battle of Stoney Creek. They happened at the foot of Hamilton Mountain and on Lake Ontario.

Realizing that most Canadians have no accurate perception of what was the key to the successful defence of Canada, HHB volunteers chose two additional themes for heritage plaques: Brock's early British success which gave Canadians confidence to resist invasion; and the control of transportation and communication on the Great Lakes so vital to military success.



Photo by Robin McKee

**Brock re-enactor, Rob Rennie, helps unveil Brock plaque.**

The "Brock Walk" program provided an opportunity to plaque Major General Brock's route to his spectacular victory at Fort Detroit in August 1812. Enroute to Lake Erie he collected regiments, militiamen and Indians. At the future site of Hamilton, he recruited 250 U.E.L. militiamen including several regional leading personalities (Hamilton, Hatt, Land, Durand). The plaque was unveiled at a 100-seat Loyalist dinner and installed at Brock's former camp site at the **foot of the Jolley Cut**. Following the "Brock Walk" theme the plaque is entitled "Brock Stepped Here"

and for a "Wow" factor states that the surrender of Fort Detroit and the Michigan territory was the largest territorial loss in U.S. history.

The HHB's plaquing subcommittee approved another bicentennial plaque based on my research about a naval battle known as the **Burlington Races**. It was a daring military clash at the head of Lake Ontario using superb seamanship to determine the outcome of the war and the future of Canada. Truly a "Wow" factor !



Photo courtesy Robert Williamson

**Burlington Races plaque at the Lakeview Banquet Centre**

On September 28, 2013, the bicentenary of this naval victory, my corrected version of the battle entitled, "From Fancy To Fact" was unveiled. The event took place beside the walking trail observation deck at the **Lakeview Banquet Centre** overlooking the Burlington shoreline with yours truly in 1812 naval costume. Despite the beautiful weather, no invited guests showed up. But suddenly a wedding party and their banquet guests appeared. We became part of their celebration with 200 people attending the unveiling. An auspicious beginning predicting that this plaque will give Canadians a better appreciation of our naval history.

**Mountain Memories**, written by **Robert Williamson** for the *Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society*, appears monthly. For more information about the society's activities see the *Society's Website (Hamiltonheritage.ca)*.