

Regiment piquet, and—in the woods beyond—the Iroquois. On the first firing, the New York troops fled toward the British camp (located about one mile behind the Market Place store).

Return to the Main Street/Lockport Street intersection, turn left, and walk south along Main Street. As you come abreast of the Fyfe & Drum Restaurant, turn around and face the intersection again. Here, you view the battlefield from the perspective of the French troops as they rushed toward the British positions at about 8:00am. The French first drove straight along the road. As the fierce British fire halted their advance, the French began to move toward the right, attempting to form a line of battle over the ground in that direction.

Next, turn around again and continue south along Main Street approximately two-thirds of a mile. As you enter a small depression in the road, you are on the site of the opening engagement of the battle. Here, next to the river, the eleven-man party of British light infantry were attacked by French-allied Natives at about 6:00am on July 24. Probably somewhere beyond Bloody Run (south along Route 18F) the Iroquois held their conference with the Natives allied with the French that resulted in their withdrawal from the action.

There are several historical markers at this site, two of which pertain to the Battle of La Belle Famille. One marker (incorrectly) places the location of the battle here, and one marker is a memorial to Claude-François-Louis Virost, S.J., the Jesuit missionary who served as the chaplain of the French relief force.

Return to the center of Youngstown (the intersection of Main and Lockport Streets). The first settlements here came in the 1790s, and the village was incorporated in 1854. While walking along Main Street you will see many fine examples of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture where, on July 24, 1759, only oak and beech trees stood, parted by the all-important road to the Great Falls.

The Battle of La Belle Famille

A Walking Guide

La Belle Famille (“The Beautiful Family”) was a place just inside the woods about one mile south of Fort Niagara on the road to the Great Falls of the Niagara. No one knows how the spot got its name; historians have speculated that a religious shrine might once have existed there. Early on the morning of July 24, 1759, this peaceful spot would play host to one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles of the French & Indian War.

On July 6, 1759, 2,300 British regulars and New York Provincial soldiers, and about 900 of their Iroquois allies laid siege to French-held Fort Niagara. Their mission was to capture the fort and sever France’s supply route to the upper Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley. By July 17, the British had dug a system of trenches and artillery batteries east of the fort. British guns began to bombard the fortress.

On July 7 the fort’s commander, Captain Pierre Pouchot, had dispatched a messenger to summon reinforcements from the French post at Venango (Franklin, Pennsylvania). About 1,100 French soldiers and their Indian allies were gathered there. These forces quickly traveled northward, crossed Lake Erie, and landed above Niagara Falls, intent on breaking through to Fort Niagara.

Meanwhile, Iroquois scouts had informed the British commander, Sir William Johnson, that a French relief column was on the way. On July 23, Johnson ordered a detachment of 150 light infantrymen under the command of Captain James De Lancey to take up a position at La Belle Famille to block the French relief column’s advance. Just inside the line of the woods, De Lancey’s men built a log breastwork to provide them cover from the French attackers. They then spent a quiet night camped behind their temporary log fort.

As dawn came on July 24, De Lancey realized that artillery would greatly strengthen his position. The nearest available cannon were at Montreal Point (Niagara-on-the-Lake) across the river. He dispatched eleven men south along the portage road to a small run where boats were stored. Their mission would be to cross the river and bring back a cannon. As they entered the slight depression in the ground and prepared to launch their boat, they were suddenly attacked by Native warriors operating in advance of the French column. All were killed or taken prisoner. The dead were scalped, and their heads were impaled on poles. Henceforth, the place would be known as Bloody Run.

De Lancey heard the firing to the south and ordered his men to prepare for attack. He also sent a runner to the main British camp to summon reinforcements.

Suddenly, an odd pause in the action occurred. Two Iroquois interrupted the French advance by asking the French-allied Natives to stand aside from the battle. All but about 30 warriors agreed. Even though this left the French with only about 800 men, they remained confident that they could fight their way through to the fort. Prisoners seized at Bloody Run told them that only 150 British soldiers awaited them ahead.

While the Native warriors counseled, Sir William Johnson hurried reinforcements to La

Belle Famille. Three piquets of 50 men each from the 44th, 46th, and New York Regiments arrived only ten minutes after De Lancey dispatched his runner. In another fifteen minutes, 150 men from the 46th Regiment of Foot under Lt. Col. Eyre Massey arrived on the scene. The British now had 464 men at La Belle Famille blocking the road to Fort Niagara.

At about 8:00am, the French poured from the woods in a column twelve men wide, giving a “horrible yell” and firing toward the British troops. They approached Massey’s regulars and then veered east towards the breastwork. Massey’s men lay on the ground until the decisive moment. With the French at close range and struggling to form an effective line of battle, British troops stood and delivered several volleys of well-aimed fire, inflicting some 250 casualties in only a few minutes.

With their force in a shambles, the French began to retreat toward the safety of their boats above Niagara Falls. Suddenly, the Iroquois entered the action and hotly pursued the fleeing French, killing and capturing many more of the retreating soldiers.

With the French relief force defeated and Fort Niagara’s walls breached by British artillery fire, Captain Pouchot had little choice but to surrender. Fort Niagara passed into British hands on July 25, 1759.

To reach the battlefield site from Old Fort Niagara, exit the public parking lot and follow signs to the Village of Youngstown. When you exit Ft. Niagara State Park via the park’s south entrance, you are on Main Street (NY Route 18F). After two blocks you will see a gas station/convenience store on your right. The starting point for your tour is the small park adjacent to this store. Park along the street. Parking on Main Street is located only along the left (east) shoulder of the road. Parking along both sides of the street is available in the next block.

