Ten Generations of the Harris Family

I. **James Harris** (1642–1715)	married 1666	**Sarah (Eliot?)**
II. Asa Harris (1680–1715)	m.	Elizabeth Rogers Stanton (1673–1750)
III. **Asa Harris** (1709–1762)	m.	Anna Ely (1716–1788)
IV. **Ely Harris** (1755–1813)	m.	**Lucretia Ransom** (1756–1836)
V. **Rev. James Harris** (1785–1858) (brother of **Elijah Harris**)	m.	Laura ("Lorrainy") Janes (1787–1873)
VI. **James Harris** (1824–1885)	m.	Julia Ranney (1824–1880)
VII. Lydia Harris (1852–1925)	m.	Rev. George B. Davis (1848–1918)
VIII. Ada Minnie Davis (1870–1969)	m.	Rev. E. G. D. Freeman (1890–1972)
IX. George E. Freeman (b. 1921)	m.	D. June Maxwell (b. 1930)
X. Victoria Freeman (b. 1956)		

CHAPTER 16

Repeating Patterns

One thing I have noticed in the course of my research is the way in which patterns of interaction between the English and Native people that were established early on in New England were subsequently repeated, with variations, across great distances and over many generations. If the story of the Janes family reflects the lingering consequences of King Philip's War and the enduring race hatred it engendered, that of my Harris ancestors, who moved from Connecticut to New York State and then to Ontario, reveals a recurring pattern of English frontier settlement: the dispossession of aboriginal people, and their marginalization except for war-time alliance, as well as a recurring image of them as a degraded and vanishing race. These larger patterns, which I'll explore in this first chapter of the Harris family story, form the background for the story of my great-great-great-great-uncle Elijah Harris, whose life illustrates, among other things, the persistence of John Eliot's vision of converting and "civilizing" the Indians, and the continuity of a committed if paternalistic concern for their welfare on the part of a small minority of English settlers.

Elijah Harris was born in the late 1780s or early 1790s in Connecticut, one of eleven children born to Ely Harris and Lucretia Ransom of Colchester, Connecticut; he was the brother of my direct ancestor, James. They were descended from James Harris of Boston, born in 1642, whose

wife appears to have been Sarah Eliot, the daughter of John Eliot's brother Jacob.[1] This early James Harris had fought in the Narragansett campaign during King Philip's War and had moved to Mohegan in 1704. His children had married into the Rogers and Stanton families, among others, and like these families the Harrises had enjoyed friendly relations with and often been neighbours of the Mohegans.

But the Harrises also became involved in a bitter power struggle, which began in the 1730s and eventually split the Mohegan tribe. James Harris, Jr., the brother of my ancestor Asa and son of James Harris of Boston, vigorously supported the sachemship of Ben Uncas, the candidate favoured by the Connecticut authorities and considered a puppet candidate by the supporters of John Uncas, who constituted the majority of the tribe. Harris Junior even arranged for Ben Uncas to send an "Address to the King," congratulating the Prince of Wales on the birth of his second child, as a ploy to confirm Ben Uncas's legitimacy. He also solicited donations to support the Connecticut government in its legal battle against the Masons and the majority of the Mohegans in the Mohegan land case.

According to tribal historian Melissa Jayne Fawcett, "the Connecticut assembly and the English overseers (overseers were first appointed in 1719) supported a particular lineage of hereditary sachems who sold, leased and rented tribal lands to whites for individual profit." In fact, in 1745 the Mohegans complained to the General Assembly that James Harris, Jr., and my direct ancestor Asa Harris, Jr., had obtained twenty-year leases on their lands "of which none of ye Indeans knew any thing till after said Leas was obtained but Ben our Sachem who we think hath no Right to Leas our Lands without our Leave . . . and by all which Doings of ye said Harrises we are Exceedingly Distressed impoverished and allmost undone." Asa received a hundred acres of Mohegan land, for which he had only to plough one acre as rent "which we think is but a small rent for a hundred acres." He had fenced and ploughed the land, cutting "a vast deal of timber," and was about to build his house, but the Mohegans apparently succeeded in overturning the lease, for, within two years, Asa moved to Saybrook, where his son Ely, the father of Elijah and James, was born in 1755.[2]

Ely Harris, the great-grandson of James Harris and the great-great-grandson of Thomas Stanton and Jacob Eliot, accompanied his father and mother to Canada in 1761; they were my first ancestors to cross the border as settlers. Asa had joined a large migration of Harris and Denison relatives to settle in Horton Township, Nova Scotia, on lands vacated by the

expulsion of the Acadians in 1760. But Asa froze to death in a blizzard in 1762, and six-year-old Ely then went back to southeastern Connecticut with his mother. It would be another forty-one years before he returned to Canada.

At the age of eighteen, Ely Harris had married Lucretia Ransom of Colchester (the town whose land had been acquired for six shillings from Uncas's son Owaneco, while he was intoxicated) and began a family there, acquiring lands in Colchester and nearby Salem. Although he had been a private in the militia just before the Revolutionary War, there is no known evidence that he fought in it, though at least two of his brothers did. He sold his land in 1793 and by 1795 was in the colony of New York for the birth of his tenth child, Elijah Harris's younger brother, John.

The Harrises were among the thousands of Yankees who headed to New York in the late 1700s in search of new land. "Emigrants are swarming into these fertile regions in shoals, like the ancient Israelites seeking the land of promise," observed Elkanah Watson, a Yankee migrant and Albany promoter, for the newly cleared and cultivated farms were free of pests and produced superior yields during the first few years, as much as twenty to twenty-five bushels an acre, compared to the southern New England standard of twelve to sixteen bushels.[3] In addition, New York offered excellent transportation routes for the export market in wheat, which was booming in late 1780s and early 1790s, as a result of bad harvests and war in Europe. From 1790 to 1820 the population of New York quadrupled, from roughly 340,000 to 1,373,000: by then it was the most populous and dynamic state in the young republic. The new Yankee settlers soon acquired a reputation as hard-working, shrewd, pious, opportunistic, covetous, and hypocritical. To the frequent annoyance of their neighbours, they still saw themselves as God's favoured people and defined their actions in biblical terms.[4]

Ely Harris brought his family to the Otsego patent near Otsego Lake, a two-and-a-half-day journey west from Albany: by 1798 he was listed as ensign of a new militia company in Otsego County. He appeared in the 1800 census near his son Ariel and his brother Asa, with a household, but no land records have been found for him, so he was probably a tenant farmer or living with his oldest children, who had bought farms near Springfield, just north of Otsego Lake.

The history of the Otsego patent exemplifies the rapacious land speculation that fuelled the English settlement of New York. Ownership of the Otsego lands had first passed from the Iroquois to Col. George Croghan, an

Irishman who had been Pennsylvania's foremost fur trader and negotiator with the Indians (a Pennsylvanian version of Thomas Stanton) and a close friend and deputy of Sir William Johnson, the British Crown's powerful northern superintendent of Indian affairs. When, in October 1768, the English had concluded a treaty in which the Iroquois surrendered their lands lying east of the Unadilla River, including all of the country around Otsego Lake, Johnson, Croghan, and their friends met privately with the sachems and, in a move reminiscent of the Atherton Company's acquisition of the Narragansett lands, bought the title to almost all the land acquired within New York, thereby cheating the Crown that they were supposed to serve. In fact, by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, it was illegal for anyone other than the Crown to treat with the Indians. Croghan secured 100,000 acres known as the Otsego patent, as well as four other patents, all for less than one shilling per acre. He paid almost nothing down – he had no money but a lot of connections – and paid instead primarily in promissory notes secured by bonds. These were never honoured and were eventually recognized as worthless. The Iroquois received nothing from their bargain with Croghan or the other patent holders, and they never regained their land.

When the Revolutionary War broke out, the Tuscaroras, Mohawks, and Oneidas at Onoquaga, the largest and most impressive Iroquois village in the vicinity of Otsego, remained loyal to Britain, mostly through the influence of Joseph Brant, brother of William Johnson's Mohawk partner Molly Brant. (Brant had attended Moore's Charity School, a new school for Indians in Connecticut.) From Onoquaga, Brant led Loyalist rangers to attack settlements at Springfield and in the Mohawk valley. In 1778 the Americans destroyed Onoquaga; a month later Iroquois and English Loyalists retaliated. New York soon became a land of abandoned, plundered, and ruined homesteads, and by 1783, Otsego was virtually depopulated. George Croghan, proprietor of the Otsego patent, was ruined.

In 1782 the British were defeated and the following year gave up all of North America south of the Great Lakes, abandoning their Iroquois allies to the Americans. Refugees from Onoquaga followed Joseph Brant into exile and resettled on the Grand River in Upper Canada, where Elijah Harris would encounter them several decades later.[5]

After Croghan's ruin, the Otsego patent was acquired by an enterprising speculator named William Cooper under extremely questionable circumstances; Cooper paid half of its market value, mostly on dubious credit, and quickly brought in settlers to consolidate his hold on the land. Cooperstown

was founded in 1786 and, by the late 1780s and 1790s, Cooper's success in rapidly selling and settling Otsego made him a national, and then international, celebrity. The population of Otsego was 2,700 by 1790, and leaped to 21,343 by 1810. Cooper was named a judge in spite of his scanty education, and three years later he was elected to Congress. His son, the novelist James Fenimore Cooper, chronicled the settling of Otsego in his novel *The Pioneers*; perhaps it is fitting that his novel *The Last of the Mohicans* gave the fullest expression to the myths of the noble savage and the dying race.

For by the time young Elijah and his family arrived in 1795, the Iroquois population of New York had declined to 3,500, about a third of what it had been thirty years earlier. Most of the demoralized survivors were confined to small reservations some distance to the west of Otsego. It's quite possible that members of the Harris family subscribed to another prevailing myth of the time: the myth of the second creation, in which the settlers entered a land they called pure nature or wilderness, a dangerous adversary they were destined to conquer. Such a view of the land implied no human predecessors. "By telling themselves stories of their renewed creation of a wasteland, the victorious Americans erased from memory the accomplishments of the Indians. The newcomers cast the natives as closer to wolves and bears than to civilized human beings."[6] Yet the Six Nations had been a sedentary, agricultural people, whose agriculture was more productive per acre than that of the settlers. They had developed extensive trade networks, sophisticated diplomacy, and a well-established system of laws and individual legal rights, not to mention three levels of government: the village, the nation, and the League of Six Nations Confederacy.

Elijah may well have encountered some of the small groups of Iroquois and Mahicans (not to be confused with the Mohegans of Connecticut or with Cooper's fictional Mohicans) who returned to Otsego annually to hunt or fish, sell venison, fish, brooms, medicines, baskets, and deerskin moccasins, or beg for food. The sole Indian character of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*, Chingachgook, was based on one such wandering Mahican basket-maker and hunter named Captain John – it's possible that Elijah knew the very man. Cooper's fictional portrayal reveals the way many settlers would have thought about the Indians they encountered: Chingachgook, once a great warrior, hunter, and sachem, has become an aged, debauched, pathetic basket-maker, who laments his dispossession and degradation when drunk and at the point of death, but can do nothing

to change it. As historian Alan Taylor points out in *William Cooper's Town*, a history of the area, this depiction of helpless, hopeless Native victimhood would prove to be a tenacious and convenient stereotype.[7]

Otsego's settlers generally taught their children to hate and fear "Indians." Author Henry Clarke Wright recalled that no child was "allowed to grow up in that region, without imbibing more or less hatred and horror of the Indians. Tales of Indian cruelties were in the mouths of all mothers and nurses."[8]

Young Elijah Harris may have acquired these attitudes, at least to some degree, and his own family's participation in King Philip's War and the later intercolonial wars must have added a few horror stories of their own to the local, one-sided stories of Indian savagery. At the same time, Elijah's perceptions of Native people were likely also shaped by his extended family's long history with the Mohegans, in which real friendships had developed and been remembered over the generations.

Ely and Lucretia did not stay long in Otsego County. They left about 1802 to join in the early settlement of Oxford County, Ontario, taking their younger and unmarried children with them. In this they were not unusual, for most settlers departed Otsego within two decades, selling their farms to repeat the process of settlement farther north or west. Many settlers followed a pattern similar to those people today who buy houses, renovate them, and resell them for a profit. After 1799, there were a growing number of tenant farms in Otsego, as many settlers failed to fulfil their purchase contracts, were issued leases, and evicted if their rent was fifty days late. In fact, one-third of the taxpayers of Otsego Township in 1800 had departed within three years; nearly one-half of the heads of households listed in the census of 1800 had died or departed by the time of the federal census in 1810. For most settler families, Otsego was a temporary stop on the way to somewhere else. Many went to Ontario where, under certain conditions, they could find two-hundred-acre farms for free.

Family tradition has it that Ely Harris came to Canada as a United Empire Loyalist. This does not appear to be true, though politics may well have figured in his decision to leave the United States. It is more likely that he was a Federalist, as was Otsego's patron, William Cooper. Federalists were conservatives who believed in the necessity of a hierarchical and stable social order governed by gentlemen; they predicted anarchy, terror, and tyranny as the probable outcome of the democratic form of government

advocated by the Republicans. Although they had fought against the British in the revolution, they favoured reconciliation with the Loyalists, and the mistreatment of Loyalists prompted some to leave the new republic. While Otsego County had been largely Federalist in the election of 1792, with William Cooper pressuring Otsego residents to vote that way, the Republicans won every seat in Otsego County in the 1802 and 1803 elections. Perhaps, deploring this swing to Republicanism, Ely Harris decided to leave.

Ely, Lucretia, and their younger children, including Elijah, arrived at what is now Ingersoll, Ontario, along the Thames River, north of Lake Erie, in 1802. They were the first ancestors of mine to be permanent residents of Canada. There is a family tradition that Ely and his sons came to Oxford County by horseback, though pioneer settlers usually made the journey by wagon pulled by oxen, with the family cow following behind. After leaving New York State, Ely and his family followed the Detroit Path (an ancient Native path) from Niagara north to Ancaster and then westward north of Lake Erie. English settlements were few and far between, and most of the way would have been through dense forest. My ancestor, James Harris, was then about seventeen years of age, and his brother Elijah was probably slightly older.

The Six Nations territory on the Grand River was the last major settlement they passed on their way to Ingersoll, and there the Harrises would have encountered other refugees from New York State. Founded in 1784, it was now home to two thousand displaced Mohawks, Cayugas, Senecas, Oneidas, Onondagas, and Tuscaroras from Onoquaga who had followed Joseph Brant to safety in British North America after losing their homelands in the American Revolutionary War. Their considerable lands in Upper Canada had been purchased by the Crown from the Ojibwa (also known as the Mississaugas, Chippewas, and Anishinabe) in 1784 for £2000. However, in a move deplored by many of his kinsmen – though intended to raise funds for the Six Nations – Brant sold and leased considerable land to white settlers. By 1798, 350,000 acres had been transferred, with the result that a growing British population lived nearby. The Grand River settlement boasted houses, a church, a school, and missionaries. Ironically, the first mission was run by the same Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England for which Thomas Weld had raised funds and which had supported the work of John Eliot in the 1600s; the Society, now known as the New England Company, was itself a refugee from the revolution.

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Most of the territory north of Lake Erie was very sparsely populated. Except for a handful of French farmers along the Detroit River and a few isolated French trading posts (mainly in the north), what is now Ontario had been occupied exclusively by aboriginal people until the American Revolution. Three successive waves of aboriginal people had occupied the lands north of Lake Erie since the first European contact in the seventeenth century. The Neutrals, who were allied with the Hurons, had been numerous when, in 1615–16, Étienne Brûlé became the first white man to visit the area that later became Oxford County. After the (then) Five Nations defeated and dispersed the Hurons and Neutrals in the mid-1600s, they had used the area as hunting territory. By 1701 the Mohawks had been defeated and displaced by the Ojibwa and allied First Nations, and by 1768 an estimated twenty-five Ojibwa villages were located in southern Ontario.[9]

Most of the land through which the Harris family travelled on their journey to Oxford County, although still used by the Ojibwa and Six Nations as hunting grounds, was no longer in aboriginal hands, but had been sold to the Crown. In a significant departure from the earlier principle of *vacuum domicilium* often cited in New England, by which unimproved lands were considered vacant and available to settlers, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (which is still seen by many aboriginal people as the Magna Carta of aboriginal rights in Canada) had formally recognized Indian title to their hunting grounds, prohibited the purchase of aboriginal lands by individuals, and stipulated that land must first be surrendered to the Crown. Originally intended as a means of maintaining Britain's strategic alliances with aboriginal peoples, to England's credit the principle continued to be law even when it no longer benefitted England. Significantly, and in contrast to the practice in New England a century earlier, the chiefs alone did not have the power to surrender lands; all members of the band that owned the land had to be called together to consider a surrender before the appropriate chiefs could sign the treaties. In fact, one of the major factors leading to the American Revolutionary War had been the frustration of American settlers whose movement into "Indian country," especially the coveted Ohio valley, was restricted by this proclamation.[10]

Yet, after the revolution, many of the old patterns of interaction between Natives and newcomers that had developed in the New England colonies were transplanted to Canada along with the new settlers. For example, although the British formally recognized aboriginal title, the end result of

the surrenders was much the same as south of the border, for officials of the Indian Department – then a military department of the colonial government concerned with maintaining Indian allies – pressed the Ojibwa to sell their land. In several instances, land surrenders were demanded as a test of Indian loyalty – something the Native people wished to prove because the Americans were their only alternative. Indeed, according to historian Peter Schmalz, the Ojibwa considered the British nearly as bad as the Americans in taking away their land, but they feared the Americans would exterminate them.

Also, aboriginal people were recognized as possessing the land, but, in English eyes, did not fully own it. Indians were regarded as living autonomously under the Crown's protection on lands already part of the Crown's domain. As such, they were not free to sell or give away their own land to whomever they pleased, but could grant lands only to the British government – the European power that had "discovered" the land.

Between 1781 and 1806, as large numbers of United Empire Loyalists sought land in Canada, Britain acquired the waterfront along the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, the Niagara River, Lake Erie, the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair River. The area ceded was often incredibly vague, since the land had not been surveyed; the land cessions of one band often included the territory of several other bands, and some aboriginal people surrendered land they did not possess at all. A surveyor encountered trouble on the Thames River, for example, when the local Ojibwa told him that their lands were never sold. The surveyor then informed them that the head chief of the Mississaugas on the Credit River near York (present-day Toronto) had already ceded the land to the Crown. They objected that neither he nor the Indians of Lake Ontario had a right to those lands.[11] In 1792, the land that included the area around Ingersoll had been surrendered by the Ojibwa to the Crown for £1,180 7s.

By the time Ely Harris and his family arrived in Canada in 1802, white settlement extended for nearly twenty kilometres around the Bay of Quinte, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario, then became a narrow strip along the north shore of the lake to York, where farms stretched twenty-five kilometres up Yonge Street, then wended through the good farmland around the base of the Niagara Escarpment and even partway along the Lake Erie shore, where settlement was begun in the early 1790s.[12] By 1791, the non-aboriginal population of southern Ontario exceeded the aboriginal population (by

how much is not clear as estimates of the Native population of the time are sketchy) and was nearly twenty thousand.

Early European records tell of Ojibwa, Mohawks, and some Eries in an encampment along the banks of what the English called (once again) the Thames – the French called it "Rivière la Tranche" and the Natives Askum-e-se-be, or "Antlers like an Elk" – where the trail left the river and travelled southeast towards Brantford. This was the site of the settlement at the junction of two major Indian trails that first came to be known as Oxford on the Thames, later Ingersoll, where the Harris family headed.

Lieut.-Gov. John Graves Simcoe had visited the region in 1793; at that time the British population along the southwestern peninsula fronting on Lake Erie was virtually non-existent, except for small settlements protected by the forts at Niagara and Detroit. He was accompanied by Native guides furnished by Joseph Brant, and had passed through the area where Ingersoll now stands. He formulated a plan of settlement, which called for the provincial capital to be established at the lower forks of the Thames, with the name of London; farther down the Thames would be the town of Chatham, and farther up, at the middle forks, the town of Dorchester. At the upper forks would stand the town of Oxford. Above it a canal would link the headwaters of the Thames with those of the Nith River, which emptied into the Grand; this network of water transportation would open up the region. To encourage rapid settlement, he granted whole townships to companies of associates, in return for a commitment to bring in a fixed number of settlers within a certain length of time.

With the development of American lands bordering on Upper Canada posing a potential military threat to the colony in the late 1700s, Simcoe attempted to lure American land promoters to Canada. By settling the new American settlers inland, leaving the more-strategic lakefront and river frontages for the Loyalists, he hoped to forestall any efforts by the new settlers to bring Upper Canada into the United States.

The township of Oxford on the Thames was granted in 1793 to the Rev. Gideon Bostwick "in consideration of [his] well known loyalty" but Bostwick soon died and Thomas Ingersoll took over active leadership of the Oxford grant. Born in Massachusetts in 1749, Ingersoll – the father of Laura Secord – had fought on the rebel side in the Revolutionary War, but later condemned the treatment of the Loyalists in the American states after the war. In 1794, he led forty American families to Oxford on the Thames to

begin settlement of the township on two-hundred-acre farms sold at 6 pence an acre. Among these first forty settlers were two with family connections to the Janes and Harris families: James Piper and Samuel Burdick.[13]

These American newcomers, many of whom headed to Canada chiefly for economic reasons, were not welcomed by the Loyalists already there, and legal problems held up large-scale immigration for several years, jeopardizing the commitments of the proprietors. Lieut.-Gov. Simcoe left the province in 1796, his settlement plans largely unrealized. Chief Joseph Brant summed up Simcoe's achievements at settlement when he dryly remarked, "Gen. S. has done a great deal for this province, he has changed the name of every place in it."[14] But just before his departure, Governor Simcoe employed one hundred Natives to build a road along the Indian Trail, later known as the Old Stage Road, after which there was a rapid increase in the local population. There were two hundred settlers in Oxford County by 1798.

My Harris ancestors, arriving in 1802, were typical of the Yankee settlers brought in by Thomas Ingersoll. The Harrises "though physically small of stature were characteristically persistent in holding their own opinions, especially on moral or religious matters and lacking perhaps a keen sense of wit were persevering in the accumulation of wealth." They flourished and acquired a considerable amount of land in Oxford and nearby Dereham counties. Ely Harris became assessor in Oxford on the Thames in 1811 and 1812.[15]

It is likely that any Ojibwa that the Harris family encountered in its first months in Upper Canada were dispirited. In contrast to the Six Nations Iroquois, the Ojibwa had had little experience negotiating with Europeans over land or dealing with settlers. Those who signed the first Ojibwa surrenders, who could not read or write and were unfamiliar with the legalistic terminology of the treaties, had probably believed they were renting the use of their land in exchange for presents in perpetuity, just as the individual members of a band might use a section of a band's territory, without the band as a whole losing ownership of its territory. They believed they were granting the English tenant status, and that the English would establish only a few settlements along the lake. The surrenders seemed like a good idea at the time, because the Ojibwa had grown dependent on European trade goods and had lots of land to spare, given that their population was

small – especially after various epidemics. (Along 500 kilometres of lakefront on the north shore of Lake Ontario, for example, Mississauga Ojibwa numbered only about 200 warriors or 1,000 people in the 1780s.) It was only in the 1790s that they realized the true import of the treaties, by which time most of their land had already been ceded to the Crown. Indeed, as his tribal elders told Kahkewaquonaby, later known as Peter Jones, "Our fathers held out to them the hand of friendship. The strangers then asked for a small piece of land on which they might pitch their tents; the request was cheerfully granted. By and by they begged for more, and more was given them. In this way they had continued to ask, or have obtained by force or fraud, the fairest portions of our territory."[16]

Unfortunately, little of the revenue from these surrenders went directly to the aboriginal nations that had surrendered the land, for the policy of the Indian Department was to make the department self-sufficient through these land sales. Thus the Ojibwa received "benefits," paid for out of their own money but had no control over the expenditures of the Indian Department.[17]

In an inducement to part with their land that by now should be familiar to the reader, the Indian Department had told the Ojibwa bands that they would be permitted to fish and hunt in their ceded hunting territories as before (which meant among other things, that they would be able to continue to sell their harvested resources commercially), and would be protected from the encroachments of settlers. In fact, they were told that the settlers would help those Indians who wanted to learn farming and would give them access to the services of a doctor and a blacksmith who would repair their guns. But that is not what happened. In 1805, Chief Kineubenaie (Golden Eagle), speaking for the Mississauga chiefs of the Credit River band, told the officers of the Indian Department:

> while Colonel [John] Butler was our Father we were told our Father the King wanted some Land for his people it was some time before we sold it, but when we found it was wanted by the King to settle his people on it, whom we were told would be of great use to us, we granted it accordingly. Father – we have not found this so, as the inhabitants drive us away instead of helping us, and we want to know why we are served in that manner. . . . Colonel Butler told us the Farmers would help us, but instead of doing so when we encamp on the shore they drive us off & shoot our Dogs and never give us any assistance as was promised to our old Chiefs.[18]

Indeed, Ojibwa life in southern Ontario changed drastically. As had happened to so many Native people south of the border, European diseases, especially smallpox, had decimated the indigenous population. While the French traders had often lived closely with the indigenous people and intermarried, the Ojibwa found many English traders avaricious and totally ignorant of their culture. The Ojibwa also encountered the popular British belief that cultures could be ranked according to the means of production, and existed at three stages of development: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. In an echo of Puritan attitudes, agricultural society was seen as the pinnacle of civilization and the honest, hard-working farmer as the foundation of civil society. Those who worked the land therefore had a greater right to it than those who did not – it was the destiny of non-agricultural peoples to make way for farmers.[19]

Six years before Ely Harris and his family arrived in Upper Canada, tensions between the Loyalists and the indigenous population came to a head when Wabakinine, head chief of the Credit River band, and his wife were murdered by a white man at York (now Toronto). The murderer was acquitted for "want of evidence"; Indian witnesses had been invited to the trial to give evidence, but not understanding the English judicial system had not attended. (There had also been considerable unrest in 1772 when fur trader David Ramsay received no punishment for murdering – and scalping – several Natives, because the prosecution provided no Indian witnesses.) The situation almost caused an aboriginal uprising, which was only diffused when Joseph Brant, whom the Mississauga Ojibwa had approached to contribute four hundred warriors to the avenging of Wabakinine's murder, convinced them that, with Britain's military strength, such an expedition was doomed to failure.[20]

The government, fully aware of the possibility of a pan-Indian uprising, took advantage of existing divisions among the First Nations to "divide and rule," a policy that had been demonstrably successful in New England. In 1798, administrator Peter Russell had advised officials in the Indian Department "to do everything in [their] power (without exposing the object of this Policy to Suspicion) to foment any existing Jealousy between the Chippewas [Ojibwa] and the Six Nations; and to prevent as far as possible any Junction or good understanding between those two Tribes."[21] The Mississaugas could not turn further afield to other Native allies south of the Great Lakes, as the Shawnees, Miamis, and Delawares (Lenni Lenapes) who had defeated large American armies in their defence of the Ohio

territory, had themselves been defeated at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, and were no longer a significant military force.

It is no wonder that those Ojibwa who lived in close proximity to English settlements were dejected and demoralized. Increasingly they were no longer able to support themselves in traditional ways. Like the aboriginal people Elijah Harris had encountered in Otsego, or those encountered by my Ranney and Janes ancestors in Vermont, they were reduced to begging or selling baskets to the settlers to survive. One commentator has noted: "To a significant degree, the Mississauga and Chippewa [and the Ojibwa generally] financed the foundation of Upper Canada's prosperity at the expense of their own self-sufficiency and economic independence."[22] As virtually all observers, Indian and white, attested, alcohol abuse was also a serious problem, resulting in malnutrition and apathy. (According to historian Peter Schmalz, some of the highest officials of the Indian Department were involved in the whisky trade, knowingly weakening aboriginal morale and physical health.[23]) Soon there was a predictable increase in the instances of Ojibwa killing each other in drunken states. Many settlers came to share the opinion of Elizabeth Postuma Simcoe, wife of the first lieutenant-governor, that aboriginal people were idle, drunken, and dirty – but not all of them reacted with contempt. The terrible situation of the indigenous people in Upper Canada apparently made a deep impression on Elijah Harris, for he would later devote more than a decade of his life to their welfare.

By the time war again broke out in 1812 between the United States and Britain, with the Americans attempting to invade Canada and many of them hoping to finally drive the British from the continent, three out of five men living in Upper Canada were recently arrived Americans who had crossed the border for cheap land and generally did not think of themselves as British. They now faced the very unpleasant prospect of fighting their relatives south of the border. After Oxford's long-time member of Parliament defected to the enemy, along with a number of associates, all the residents of Oxford were viewed with suspicion. Col. Thomas Talbot, the senior military officer in London District, was instructed to "be pointed in his directions to the militia of Oxford," the area being known as a "very turbulent and refractory district." Reports appeared in American newspapers in early 1813 to the effect that the militia of Oxford Township had vowed to pay fines for non-service rather than march against the Americans; in actual

fact, there was considerable opposition to militia service everywhere, particularly as it came right in the middle of spring planting.[24] Nevertheless, Ely Harris signed the oath of allegiance to Britain on January 11, 1812, and four of his sons, including both Elijah and James, also fought for Upper Canada. James Harris would even fight at Fort Erie on the British side, while his cousin Asa P. Harris, a native of Erie County, New York, fought as a captain on the American side.[25]

Given the tremendous imbalance in population – there were no more than 500,000 settlers in British North America as opposed to six million Americans – the dubious loyalty of the militia and the passively pro-American bias of the bulk of the population of Upper Canada, the British soon realized that the security of this part of British North America depended on the use of well-disciplined British soldiers and the guerilla tactics of aboriginal warriors. Terror would prove to be a useful tactic: the Americans, with their long history of enmity with the Native American nations, were petrified of Indian attack, and the British made the most of this fear – as had the French.

The aboriginal nations, meanwhile, saw alliance with the British as their only hope of survival. Not only the Ojibwa, the Six Nations of Upper Canada and the various aboriginal nations in Lower Canada were allies. A huge army of more than three thousand warriors from south of the border joined the British, in the hope of regaining their lands taken by the Americans, particularly in Ohio, and exacting their revenge on the Long Knives, the frontiersmen who had defeated them and destroyed their villages following the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. The British promised to assist them in establishing the Ohio valley as an Indian territory that would be protected against British and American encroachment.

The warriors were inspired by the Shawnee Lalawéthika or "The Prophet," who urged them to go back to their old customs and teachings, give up alcohol, stop inter-tribal warfare, and return to the clothing, implements, weapons, and food of their ancestors. He declared that all aboriginal lands should be held in common, and could not be sold by individuals. His brother Tecumseh ("He Who Walks over Water"), perhaps the greatest orator of his time, hoped to realize Pontiac's dream of an Indian confederacy from Florida to Lake Erie, and became the leader of the Native forces.[26] Appealing to various Native nations to join his cause, he reminded them of the fate of the indigenous nations of New England:

> Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket, and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.
>
> Will we let ourselves be destroyed in our turn without a struggle, give up our homes, our country bequeathed to us by the Great Spirit, the graves of our dead and everything that is dear and sacred to us? I know you will cry with me, "Never! Never!"[27]

The role of the warriors under Tecumseh was decisive in several major battles, particularly at Fort Michilimackinac, the Battle of Beaver Dam, and Detroit in 1812. It was at the capture of Detroit that James and Elijah Harris saw Tecumseh's forces close up. Although the British general Isaac Brock had only seven hundred English and Canadian soldiers and militia to the more than two thousand American fighting men under Gen. William Hull, he boldly sent a message to Detroit demanding surrender: "It is far from my intention to join in a war of extermination but you must be aware that the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops will be beyond my control the moment the contest commences." The next day, after a full day's cannonade, Tecumseh and his warriors secretly crossed the Detroit River to the American side. While three hundred members of the militia – including James and Elijah Harris? – were issued cast-off crimson tunics to resemble regular British soldiers, Tecumseh and his warriors are reputed to have marched in single file across an open field, out of reach of fire but in full view, then vanished into the forest, only to circle back and repeat the manoeuvre three times, leading Hull's officers to believe there were more than 1,500 "savages." Apparently, even the officers of the British Indian Department dressed and painted themselves as Indians. The ruse worked and General Hull surrendered, writing to his superiors, "I have saved Detroit and the Territory from the horrors of an Indian massacre."[28]

In 1813, when American troops chased the British up the Thames River, the British and their allies were routed in the Battle of Moraviantown (between London and Chatham on the Thames River). When the British fled, Tecumseh's warriors stayed to fight and Tecumseh was killed. After their victory, the Americans rode eastward, through the Oxford area, burning and plundering, destroying the first meeting house in Ingersoll as they went.

The war ended in a stalemate in 1814, with neither the English nor the Americans conceding defeat. It's clear that the real losers of the war were the First Nations. Tecumseh's confederacy, which had sought to defend Native land, was shattered. In the peace negotiations, the British reneged on their repeated promise to secure an Indian buffer state between Canada and the United States, where neither could purchase land, and Native people south of the border were abandoned to their fate. Most lost their land and were forced to retreat westward, ending up on reservations in the Midwest.

The Ojibwa of Upper Canada, who been among the strongest supporters of the confederacy, were also devastated. The fighting had driven away wildlife, damaged hunting grounds, and inflicted heavy Native casualties, causing more than two thousand hungry Natives to flee the southwestern region of the colony to the Mississauga territory north and west of Lake Ontario, an area already incapable of sustaining its own indigenous population. Many leaders and tribal elders had been killed, and, as a result, much cultural knowledge was lost. The survivors "were psychologically traumatized, and . . . seem to have lost confidence in themselves as a people."[29]

The spiritual powers that had protected the Ojibwa in the past seemed to have deserted them. Nonetheless, some leaders made valiant efforts to restore confidence in the old ways. During the war, Mississauga Chief Kineubenaie (Golden Eagle) had a dream that he could not be killed by arrow, a tomahawk, or a bullet. Heartened, he gathered his followers together to tell them of his special powers and instructed a man to shoot him, holding only a tin kettle in front of his face to catch the bullet. He died instantly. This poignant incident, reminiscent of those Puritans who believed their Bibles would protect them during Indian raids in King Philip's War, further undermined the confidence of many members of the Mississauga band in their traditional belief system, which was already under considerable stress since the arrival of the Christian settlers, the advent of deadly diseases the shamans couldn't cure, and the decline in the game population in spite of scrupulous observance of traditional ceremonies. Among those whose faith in dreams and spirit helpers was shattered by this incident was the young boy, Kahkewaquonaby, mentioned earlier, who would later gain fame and cross paths with my Harris relatives.[30]

Unfortunately, the settlers of Upper Canada denied the Indian contribution to the war and magnified the role of the militia, as still happens to this day. "The Indians are feeble and useless allies, but dangerous enemies," was one view shared by many. "They were of little benefit to us during the

last war, being under no discipline or subordination; and generally taking to flight at the commencement of an action, and returning at its termination, that they might plunder the dead of both armies."[31]

By the end of the war, the non-aboriginal population exceeded the number of aboriginal people in what is now southern Ontario by ten to one. Upper Canada had been transformed from a country where Europeans were seldom seen to a burgeoning agricultural colony under the rule of English laws and institutions. To accommodate the large numbers of immigrants pouring into Upper Canada in the decade after 1815, the Crown arranged several large land purchases, which opened up new areas for settlement north and west of the first surrenders.

Once Native warriors were no longer necessary for defence, aboriginal people were no longer essential to any of the goals pursued by the newcomers; in fact, as had happened earlier in New England, they were now increasingly seen merely as obstacles to economic development. Indeed, their two economies were increasingly incompatible, for with the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company in 1821 Montreal was no longer the principal base for the fur trade, and the Native people of eastern North America were no longer needed as partners in the trade – after two centuries of co-operation. Given these circumstances, the British were able to unilaterally change their relationship with aboriginal people, beginning their efforts to dismantle the First Nations and integrate aboriginal people into the new, settler society. The administrators of Upper Canada also wanted to eliminate the expense of the Indian Department, which had seen its budget rise from £60,000 in 1811 to at least £125,000 during the last year of the war.[32]

In the decades following the War of 1812, commercial non-Native fishing and the widespread encroachment of farmers on land formerly used for hunting largely destroyed the traditional livelihood of the Ojibwa in southern Upper Canada. While some managed to find work or survived on meagre earnings from selling baskets, maple sugar, handicrafts, and fish to the settlers, as so many other Natives in similar situations had done, others were reduced to begging, and there was widespread hunger. Annuities from land sales and government assistance prevented mass starvation, but many people suffered a terrible loss of self-esteem and alcohol abuse became an ever more serious problem as demoralization deepened into despair. Others fought back, organizing petitions against white encroachment on Indian

fisheries, attempting to secure their land base, and asking for education to help them survive in the new world that had grown up around them.

Many Ojibwa now believed that their world had been transformed to such an extent by Europeans that radical cultural change was necessary to ensure their own survival. Furthermore, their traditional remedies in times of hardship – the spiritual ceremonies that normally restored the equilibrium between humans and the other-than-human world – had not rectified their situation, leading to a crisis of belief that left many aboriginal people even more bereft. It was partly in response to this economic and spiritual crisis that Elijah Harris and other Methodist missionaries were motivated to act.