



REPORT TO THE STATUS OF DESIGNATIONS COMMITTEE

ISSUE: TO CONFIRM THE DESIGNATED PLACE OF BATTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA

AUTHOR: National Historic Sites Directorate, with David McConnell, Heritage Research Associates Inc., Consultant

Name of Place: Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada (Battle of Longwoods)¹

Location: about 6 km west of Wardsville, Ontario, on Highway 2 (Figure 1)

Previous Documentation on File:

- 1923 HSMBC Minutes, May meeting: Deferral of discussion on the “Battle of Longwoods”
- 1924 HSMBC Minutes, June meeting: Recommendation that the site is of national importance
- 1925 HSMBC Minutes, May meeting: Confirmation of amended plaque inscription
- 1926 HSMBC Minutes, May meeting: Deferral of discussion until next meeting
- 1927 HSMBC Minutes, May meeting: Recommendation that no further action is necessary

Purpose of the request:

To confirm the designated place of Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada because the HSMBC minute does not provide sufficient evidence.

Statement of Commemorative Intent (for information):

Battle Hill was designated a national historic site in 1924. The reason for designation, as derived from the 1925 plaque text, is:

- here was fought the Battle of the Longwoods, 4 March 1814.

Designated Place (proposed):

The proposed designated place is defined by polygon ABCD, surrounding the HSMBC monument, as illustrated on Figure 2.² Specifically:

- beginning at Point A located on the line between Lot 6 and Lot 7, Range 1 South, Mosa Township, 200 metres southeast of the centre point of Longwoods Road;
- proceeding in a southwesterly direction following a line 200 metres southeast of and parallel to the centre point of Longwoods Road, 300 metres to Point B;

¹ This designation is referred to under two different names: Battle Hill and the Battle of Longwoods. Board minutes, from 1923 to 1927, invariably refer to the Battle of the Longwoods (in 1924 omitting the definite article). The 1924 Minute, in which the site was said to be of national importance, was entitled “Battle of Longwoods, near Wardsville, Ontario.” The plaque text, on the other hand, is entitled “Battle Hill” and the *List of Designations of National Historic Significance* and Parks Canada’s *System Plan* both identify the site as “Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada”. Generally, the correspondence in RG 84 usually refers to the Battle of the Longwoods, although once J. H. Coyne wrote that he “motored to Battle Hill” to negotiate with the landowner, Roy Henderson. The Battle of Longwoods took place on Battle Hill and Twenty Mile Creek is now known as Battle Hill Creek. No name change is requested.

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- proceeding in a northwesterly direction along a line parallel to the lot line dividing Lots 6 and 7, to Point C, located 400 metres from Point B;
- proceeding in a northeasterly direction, 200 metres north of and parallel to the centre point of Longwoods Road, 300 metres to Point D located on the line between Lots 6 and 7;
- proceeding in a southeasterly direction along the line between Lot 6 and Lot 7, returning to Point A.

Figure 2 is an illustration representing these boundaries. If any discrepancy exists between the verbal descriptions above and the graphic representation in Figure 2, the verbal descriptions are definitive.

Components and Description of Property:

There are no known extant remains of the Battle of Longwoods at Battle Hill. Today, the area is composed of rural land on both sides of Highway 2 (Longwoods Road), comprising part of the valley of Battle Hill Creek (previously Twenty Mile Creek), the slopes leading up to the highway, and the level land above on both sides of the highway.

Analysis:*Background:*

Following the British defeat at Moraviantown, 5 October 1813, the western section of Upper Canada lay open to American forces. They did not occupy the region in strength, however, but contented themselves with waging a war of marauding incursions, often in search of supplies or prisoners. The British military authorities established posts of observation and, along with the local militia and their native allies, moved about the countryside attempting to counteract the American forays. Pitched battles were rare. One of the most memorable occurred on 4 March 1814 in a forest known as the Longwoods, about 6 km west of the present day village of Wardsville on Highway 2 between London and Chatham.

In late February 1814, the American commander at Detroit ordered a detachment to attack the British outposts at either Port Talbot or Delaware, the latter post just west of present day London. Fearing that the residents of Port Talbot had been forewarned, the American force marched inland to the Longwoods Road and moved towards Delaware. Before they reached their objective, they ran into a Canadian Ranger patrol and, learning that a force of British regulars and Canadian militia were following, they pulled back to the hills overlooking Twenty Mile Creek. There on a hill (known later as Battle Hill) they constructed an entrenched camp, with log breastwork, which lay on both sides of the Longwoods Road (Figure 3). When the main British force arrived late on the afternoon of 4 March, the British officer in command ill advisedly decided on an immediate attack. He sent the militia and Rangers to his left to circle behind the American position and the native warriors to his right flank. He then led the regulars in a frontal assault on the American position up a steep and slippery slope. After an engagement of about an hour and a half, with heavy casualties, the British withdrew and retreated back to Delaware. Although they had suffered less, the Americans did not attempt to follow up their success and pulled back to Detroit. Although technically an American victory, the fight at Battle Hill did succeed in frustrating an American attempt to destroy the British outposts at Delaware and Port Talbot.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada raised the possibility of the national significance of the Battle of Longwoods, in 1923, early in their mandate. In 1924, the site was declared of national significance

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and by the following year a plaque text was prepared and negotiations had begun with a local property owner for the acquisition of a parcel of land.

Issues relating to designated place:

Under section 1 of Guideline No. 7 for Designated Place, there is insufficient information to clearly define the boundaries of the site. The HSMBC Minute from 1924 merely refers to the “Battle of Longwoods, near Wardsville, Ontario,” without providing details on the precise location or extent of the battle. Section 6 of Guideline No. 7 does not apply since battlefields fall under the exceptions to this section. Therefore, section 5, the place considered by the Board at the time of designation, must be considered.³

There seems little doubt as to where the battle took place. According to J. I. Poole, who published an article in 1911-12 describing the battle:

The ground upon which this conflict took place is now known as south half of lot seven, in the first range north of the Longwoods Road, in the Township of Mosa, and County of Middlesex, and the north half of lot seven, in the first range south of Longwoods Road in the same township.

He goes on to write that old muskets, rifles, military buttons, bullets, and other artifacts were picked up on the battle site in the past, but no longer, and that the skeletons, possibly of two dead soldiers, had been ploughed up, one in the ravine and the other behind the position of the American camp.⁴

This accords with contemporary accounts. Captain James Basden, who ordered the attack reported that the Americans were encamped some five or six miles from 14 Mile Creek, that is at Twenty Mile Creek. There he reported: “...they were posted on the opposite side of a Ravine, on a High Bank close to the Road, & I thought I could perceive a slight Brush Wood Fence, thrown up as I presumed to obstruct the Road.”⁵ Another officer remarked: “...the American enclosure was only a brush wood fence, with an abattis on the outside to prevent a charge, no defence in front but almost inaccessible except by the Road”.⁶ With his report he enclosed a sketch of the ground that shows the American camp on the hilltop, straddling the Longwoods Road (Figure 3).⁷

It was on the edge of the hill where the Americans threw up their entrenched camp that General Cruikshank selected as a suitable location for the monument to the Battle of the Longwoods. In August 1921 he wrote to J. B. Harkin:

³ Parks Canada, “Guide to the Preparation of Commemorative Integrity Statements. Guideline No. 7, Designated Place,” February 2002.

⁴ J. I. Poole, “The Fight at Battle Hill”, *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Historical Society* (1911-12), republished in Morris Zaslow, *The Defended Border; Upper Canada and the War of 1812* (Toronto: Macmillan), 1964, p. 141.

⁵ William Wood (ed.), *Select British Documents of the Canadian War of 1812, Vol. II* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1923; reprinted, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 353, Basden to Stewart, 13 March 1814.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 354, Le Breton to Foster, 8 March 1814..

⁷ Copy in *Historical collections, collections and researches made by the Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan*, Vol. 15, (1889), p. 510; original in Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], RG 8, Vol. 682, p. 232. (The microfilm of the original is very poor.)

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I have to inform you that on August 12, I visited the scene of the action named in the margins [Battle of the Longwoods, March 4, 1814], in company with Dr. J. H. Coyne. It is situated on the farm of Roy Henderson, Lot 7 on the south side of the Longwoods Road in the township of Mosa, about 3 ¾ miles east of Wardsville. Mr. Henderson...intimated that he would be prepared to convey a suitable site for a monument, adjoining the south side of the Provincial Highway, known as the Longwoods Road, just west of the ravine formerly known as the Twenty Mile Creek.⁸

After a delay of a number of years, the Board consulted the Ontario Department of Highways to ensure that widening the highway would not interfere with the site. In reply the Divisional Engineer enclosed a plan of the area showing the proposed site (Figure 4).⁹ According to Dr. Coyne: “The site, as marked on Mr. Sear’s [sic] plan is the one approved by the General and myself on our visit some years ago, according to my remembrance.”¹⁰ Eventually, the usual 25-foot square plot of land was acquired from Roy Henderson¹¹ (Figure 5 and Appendix C) and the monument was erected in the summer of 1929 and unveiled on 16 September 1930.

Board Chairman, General Cruikshank, and Dr. Coyne believed that the site selected for the HSMBC monument was on the battlefield. In all likelihood, the General had seen the sketch of the battle site, given his labours in the National Archives where the sketch was preserved, although it was not published in his collection of documents on the War of 1812. It is fair to say that the Board knew generally that the battle had been fought in the area around the site for the monument. J. I. Poole had described it taking place on both sides of Longwoods Road. The challenge is to define the extent of the battlefield.

The battle did not extend over a wide area and was in fact little more than a skirmish. There were few troops involved: approximately 240 British and 164 Americans. Contemporary accounts describe the battle as essentially around the American camp on “Battle Hill.” The battle did not last long, approximately an hour and a half, before the British withdrew.

The proposed designated place uses the HSMBC monument as its centre point (Figure 2). The monument sits on a plot of land measuring 25 feet by 25 feet located 1382 feet (421 metres) northeast of the boundary between Lot 7 and Lot 8, Range 1 South, Township of Mosa.¹² The proposed designated place is polygon ABCD illustrated in Figure 2 and described as:

- beginning at Point A located on the line between Lot 6 and Lot 7, Range 1 South, Mosa Township, 200 metres southeast of the centre point of Longwoods Road.
- proceeding in a southwesterly direction along a line 200 metres southeast of and parallel to the centre point of Longwoods Road, 300 metres to Point B;

⁸ LAC, RG 84, Vol. 1345, File HS9-12-4, “Historic Sites - Western Ontario – Battle of the Long Woods”, Part 1, Cruikshank to Harkin, 20 Aug. 1921.

⁹ Ibid., Sears to Harkin, 29 Sept. 1925, enclosing plan.

¹⁰ Ibid., Coyne to Harkin, 12 August 1926.

¹¹ Statement of Account W.D. Moss with Department of Justice, July to November 1928, re: land transfer, 21 Nov. 1928.

¹² As defined by Ontario Land Surveyor 7 May 1928 (Appendix C) and illustrated on Figure 5. Longwoods Road is the boundary between Range 1 North and Range 1 South in Mosa Township.

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- proceeding in a northwesterly direction along a line parallel to the line dividing Lots 6 and 7, 400 metres to Point C;
- proceeding in a northeasterly direction, 200 metres north of and parallel to the centre point of Longwoods Road, 300 metres to Point D located on the line between Lots 6 and 7.
- proceeding in a southeasterly direction along the line between Lot 6 and Lot 7, returning to Point A.

Decision required:

The Board is requested to confirm the designated place of Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Minutes of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada

Excerpt from the HSMBC Minutes, May 1923

Battle of the Longwoods.

Moved by Judge Howay.

Seconded by Dr. Coyne.

That the further consideration of the Battle of the Longwoods be deferred until the next meeting.
Carried.

Excerpt from the HSMBC Minutes, June 1924

BATTLE OF LONGWOODS, NEAR WARDSVILLE, ONTARIO.

Moved by Dr. Coyne.

Seconded by Dr. Webster.

That the site be considered of national importance and that a cairn and tablet be erected in due course, Dr. Coyne to furnish the inscription.
Carried.

Excerpt from the HSMBC Minutes, May 1925

Battle of the Longwoods.

Moved by Dr. Coyne.

Seconded by General Cruikshank

That the following inscription as amended by [sic, be] confirmed and that steps be taken to obtain site on which to erect a cairn:-

Battle Hill.

Here was fought the Battle of the Longwoods 4th March, 1814. United States troops were entrenched on this hill. The British losses were Captain D. Johnson and Lieut. P. Graeme and twelve men of the Royal Scots Light Company and 89th Light Company, killed, fifty-two officers and men of these companies and of the Loyal Kent Volunteers, wounded.

Carried.

General Cruikshank stated that the proper person to communicate with in connection with obtaining the site would be:

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Roy Henderson, Glencoe P.Q., Lot 7 South, Longwoods Road, Township of Mosa near Wardsville.

Excerpt from the HSMBC Minutes, May 1926

Battle of the Longwoods.

Matter considered, action deferred until the next meeting of the Board.

Excerpt from the HSMBC Minutes, May 1927

Battle of the Longwoods, near Wardsville..

Matter considered, no action necessary by Board.

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Appendix B: Approved plaque text

Battle Hill

Here was fought the Battle of the Longwoods 4th March, 1814. United States troops were entrenched on this hill. The British losses were Captain D. Johnson and Lieut. P. Graeme and twelve men of the Royal Scots Light Company and 89th Light Company, killed, fifty-two officers and men of these companies and of the Loyal Kent Volunteers, wounded.

Ici se déroula la bataille de Longwoods, le mars 1814. Des troupes des États-Unies s'étaient retranchées sur cette colline. Les forces britanniques y perdirent le capitaine D. Johnson, le lieutenant P. Graeme et douze soldats des companies d'infanterie légère Royal Scots et 89^e, tués au combat; 52 officiers et soldats de ces companies et des Loyal Kent Volunteers ont été blessés.

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Appendix C: Description of the HSMBC monument location

Description of Part of Lot 7, Range 1, South[,] Township of Mosa

All and singular that certain parcel or tract of land and premises situate and lying and being in the township of Mosa in the County of Middlesex and Province of Ontario and being composed of part of lot number seven in range one, south of said township of Mosa containing by admeasurement six hundred and twenty-five square feet, which said parcel may be more particularly known and described as follows, that is to say, - Commencing at a point at the westerly angle of said parcel, and in the southeasterly limit of the Provincial Highway, said point being distant 1382 feet measured on a course north forty-two degrees and ten minutes east astronomically along said limit of highway from the southwesterly limit of said lot number seven and twelve feet southeasterly along said southwesterly limit of lot number seven from its westerly angle, thence south $47^{\circ}50'$ E. Ast. at right angles to said limit of highway, a distance of 25 feet, thence N. $42^{\circ}10'$ E. Ast., parallel to said limit of highway, a distance of 25 feet, thence N. $47^{\circ}50'$ W. Ast. at right angles to said limit of highway a distance of 25 feet, thence S. $42^{\circ}10'$ W. Ast. along said limit of highway a distance of 25 feet to point of commencing.

All of which is in accordance with portion coloured pink on plan of survey attached hereto.

(signed) J.W. Pierce
Ontario Land Surveyor
Ottawa, May 7th, 1928.

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Figure 1. The general location of Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada, near Wardsville Ontario. The site is about 6 km to the northeast on Highway 2. (*www.MapQuest.com, consulted September 2007*)

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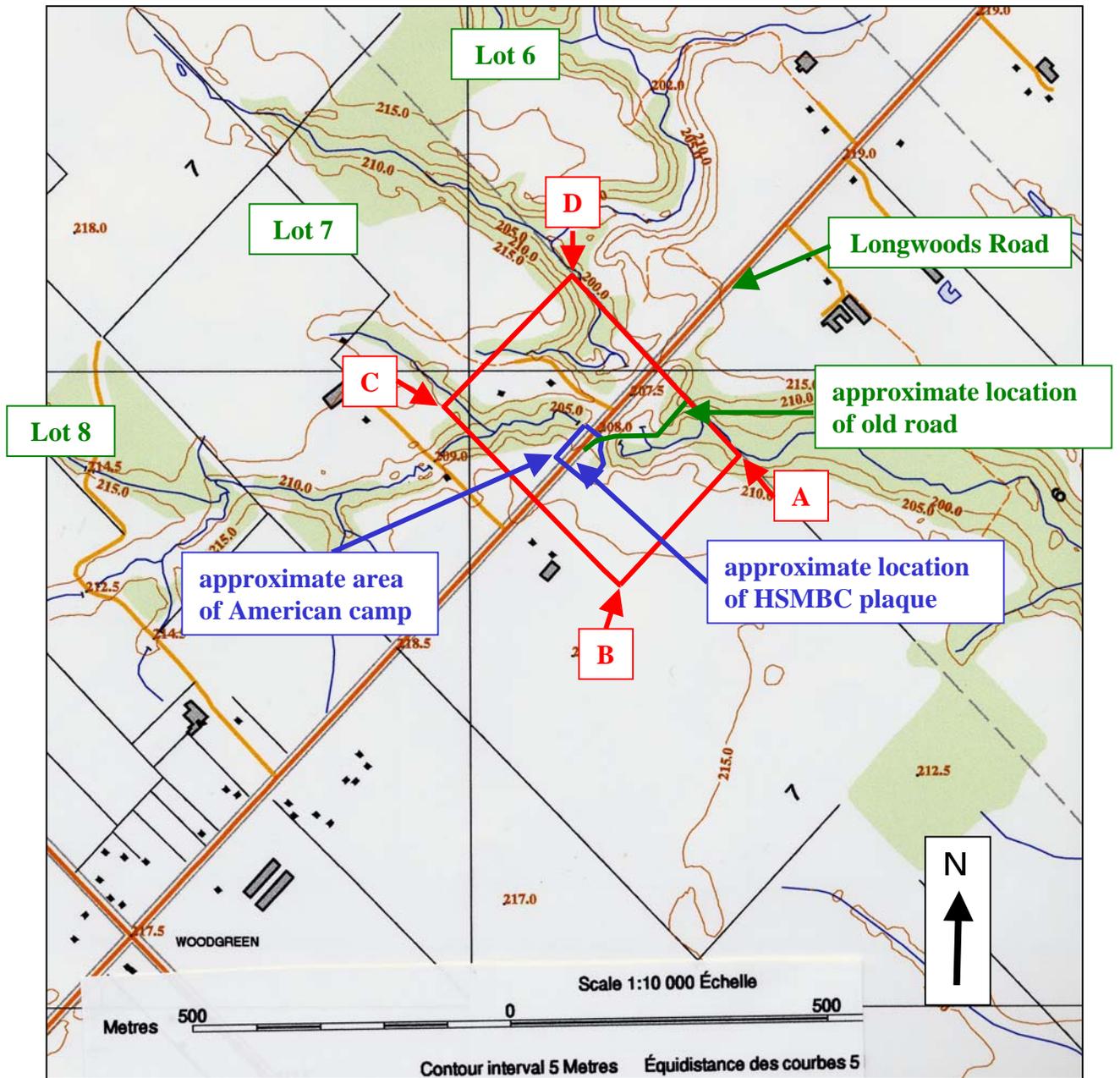


Figure 2. The proposed designated place is the polygon ABCD located on the general site of the battle, straddling Longwoods Road and surrounding the American camp and the present site of the HSMBC monument. The site is located on the north half of Lot 7, Range 1 South, and the south half of Lot 7, Range 1 north. (*Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Base Map 10 17 4400 47250, 1998, modified by David McConnell, September 2007*)

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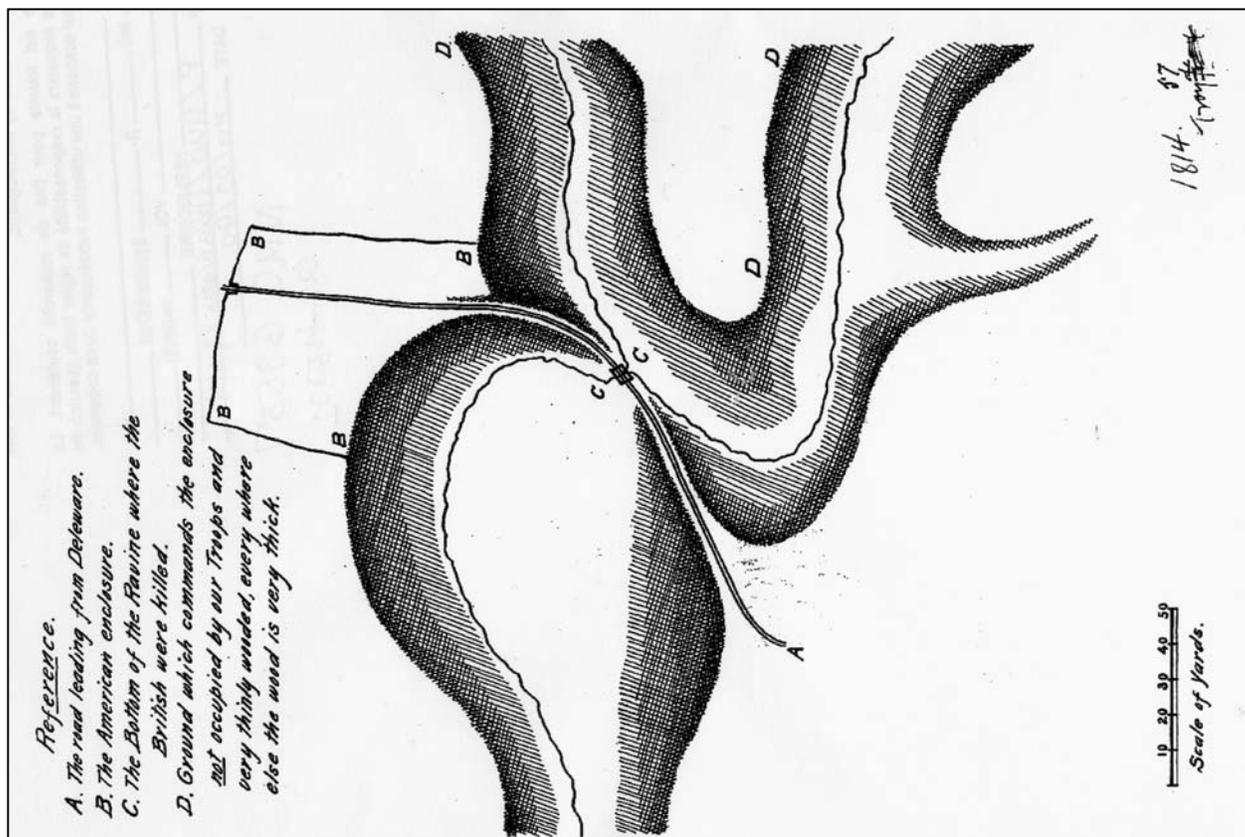


Figure 3. Contemporary map showing the site of the Battle of the Longwoods. It has been turned so that north is more or less to the top, and so that it can be compared with the map in Figure 6. For convenience the legend “Reference” is reproduced here:

- A. The road leading from Delaware [sic].
- B. The American enclosure.
- C. The Bottom of the Ravine where the British were killed.
- D. Ground which commands the enclosure not occupied by our Troops and very thinly wooded, every where else the wood is very thick.

(Library and Archives Canada [LAC], F/440/Delaware/1814, NMC 68557, original in RG 8, Vol. 682, p. 232)

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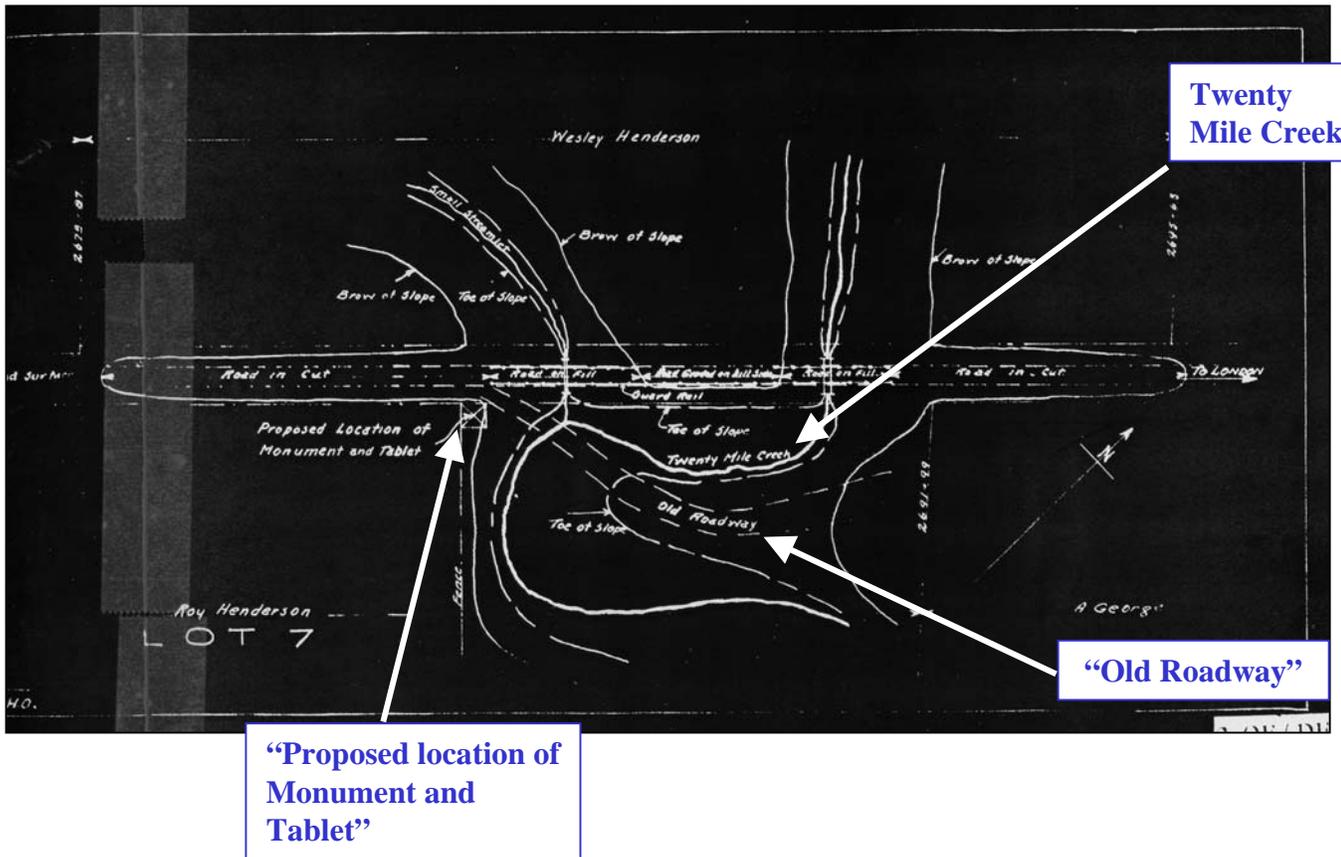


Figure 4. Sketch map of the proposed location for the HSMBC monument in relation to the creek and road as well as topographical features of the landscape. The road alignment has changed since 1814, but the configuration of Twenty Mile Creek and its streamlet still matches, more or less, that of 1814. It is clear that the monument site is on the edge of the 1814 American encampment. Compare with Figure 5. (*Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, Vol. 1345, File HS9-12-4, "Historic - Western Ontario – Battle of the Long Woods", Part 1, plan accompanying Sears to Harkin, 29 Sept. 1925, "Sketch Plan showing the Provincial highway, topographical features and proposed location of a monument and tablet at the site of the Battle of Longwoods, Lot 7 R 1, SLR [south Longwoods Road] Township of Mosa County of Middlesex, London September 28, 1925. Modified September 2007*)

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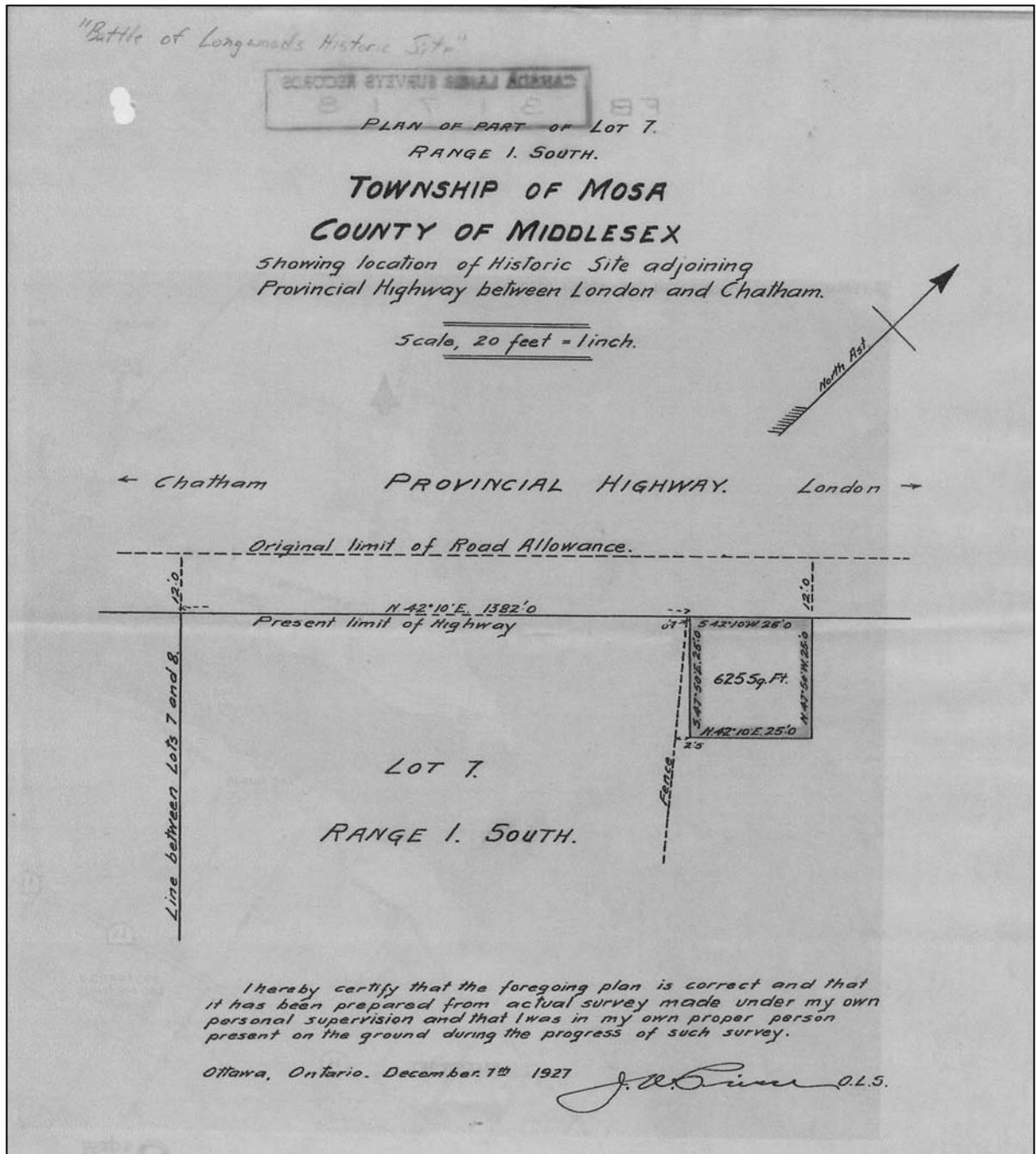


Figure 5. Plan of part of Lot 7, Range 1, South, Township of Mosa County of Middlesex, "Showing location of Historic Site adjoining Provincial Highway between London and Chatham," December 7, 1927. (www.lsd.nrcan.gc.ca, consulted September 2007)

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Figure 6. The HSMBC monument for Battle Hill National Historic Site of Canada.
(www.en.wikipedia.org, consulted September 2007)