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J. C. A. Stagg
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The War of 1812
Conflict for a Continent

This book is a narrative history of the many dimensions of the War of 1812 – social, diplomatic, military, and political – that places the war’s origins and conduct in a transatlantic perspective. The events of 1812–1815 were shaped by the larger crisis of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. In synthesizing and reinterpreting scholarship on the war, Professor J. C. A. Stagg focuses on the war as a continental event, highlighting its centrality to Canadian nationalism and state development. The book introduces the war to students and general readers, concluding that it resulted in many ways from an emerging nation-state trying to contend with the effects of rival European nationalisms, both in Europe itself and in the Atlantic world.

J. C. A. Stagg is Professor of History at the University of Virginia. He is the author of two books on James Madison, as well as many articles on the political, military, and diplomatic history of the early American republic. He has edited or coedited seventeen volumes of *The Papers of James Madison*. He currently serves on the editorial board of *The War of 1812 Magazine* and the board of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation.

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For my colleagues on *The Papers of James Madison*
Unsung Heroes in an Unjust War

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Acknowledgments

Contrary to what some might imagine, I have not devoted my life to studying the War of 1812. There have been other, and very different, endeavors that have engaged my attention over the years. Nevertheless, I am grateful to Lewis Bateman and Donald Critchlow for giving me the opportunity to write this book. That opportunity was also opportune in the sense that we are about to commemorate the bicentennial of the War of 1812, although I suspect that occasion was not uppermost in the minds of the editorial staff of Cambridge University Press when it decided to commission a book on what has long been regarded as the most unsatisfying and least well understood of all the wars of the United States. It will, therefore, be interesting to see how the descendants of the parties to the war observe that bicentennial. Americans north of the forty-ninth parallel have already commenced their celebrations of what they regard as a decisive moment in the development of a Canadian nation. Americans south of the forty-ninth parallel are rather less certain about what to remember from a war that has been aptly described as “a nightmare from the nation’s childhood.” And it remains to be seen whether the British will decide to remember or to forget yet again the events of 1812–1815. For the Indian peoples on both sides of the Canadian-American boundary, the bicentennial will give rise to conflicting emotions. The First Nations of Canada made a decisive contribution to the preservation of their lands for the British Empire. In the United States it was generally assumed that the Indians had simply sided with the British, but that is not true. Many of them contributed to the defense of a republic whose citizens quickly forgot all that they had done.

The invitation to write this book also presented me with a challenge that I had not previously thought of taking on – to see whether I could compose to a brief that stipulated a word limit (of about seventy thousand words) and to do so in a style that would be accessible to readers in both the university world and the general public. I think I have managed with respect to the word limit. Whether I have succeeded with the other requirement will be for others to judge. But for facilitating the opportunity to meet both challenges, I am grateful to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia for a sabbatical that permitted me to finish a manuscript and also for some research funds that allowed Rick Britton to furnish the book with his elegant maps. Many of the problems that we encounter today in understanding the War of 1812 arise from the fact that the political geography of North America has changed greatly since 1815. Too many of the locations and place-names that were central to the conflict either have been changed or have disappeared from the map altogether. Unlike the decisive events and sites of the American Revolution and the Civil War, they no longer form part of a collective historical memory that we can continue to draw on as readily identifiable moments from the nation's past. If this book goes even a small way toward remedying that situation, it will have achieved some of its purpose. Here a special word of thanks is due to Eric Crahan, Brigitte Coulton, Katherine Faydash, and Abigail Zorbaugh for all their efforts in seeing this book through every stage of its production, from conception to final publication.

As the dedication is intended to make clear, I owe an enormous debt to my colleagues on *The Papers of James Madison*. Over the years they have tolerated and accommodated some of my peculiar agendas even as they go about making a much more important contribution than this book – or any other scholarly monograph for that matter – will ever make, namely the compilation of a comprehensive and reliable edition of the papers of the American president who was at the center of the War of 1812. Too many scholars believe that there is nothing more to be learned about the War of 1812 – or even that there is anything to learn at all. Such views are not merely wrong; they are also foolish. The errors and limitations of such thinking can be only hinted at in a work as short as this, but over time *The Papers of James Madison*, in conjunction with all the other modern editions of the papers of the founding fathers, will lead future generations of historians to provide us with vastly improved interpretations of critical developments in the formative years of the American republic, including the War of 1812. The importance of these modern scholarly editions has

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not always been appreciated as fully and properly as it should be and it is to be greatly regretted that the historical profession has not acquitted itself better on this score than it has done so far.

On a more personal note, I am grateful to many other historians who have worked on the early American republic and the War of 1812, in both the United States and Canada, and I look forward to their contributions in the years to come. Friends have also assisted with this project, especially by giving my drafts the benefit of their critical faculties – in every sense of the word *critical* – and it is a pleasure to acknowledge in this matter the generosity of Fred Greenstein, Joe Kett, and Ken Lockridge. Ken's contribution was all the more noteworthy for its being accomplished as he was in the throes of relocating to Sweden, and Sweden's gain will be America's loss. Some have helped by not reading the manuscript at all, and others have played a part by simply being friends, especially Brian and Karen Parshall and Philip and Therese Rousseau (fellow refugees from the Antipodes). In the preparation of the index, I am greatly indebted, as I have been on many occasions in the past, to Sue Perdue. And to Holly Shulman my gratitude, as always, can hardly be expressed adequately in words. I can only hope that my actions do not deviate too greatly from what those words should otherwise say.

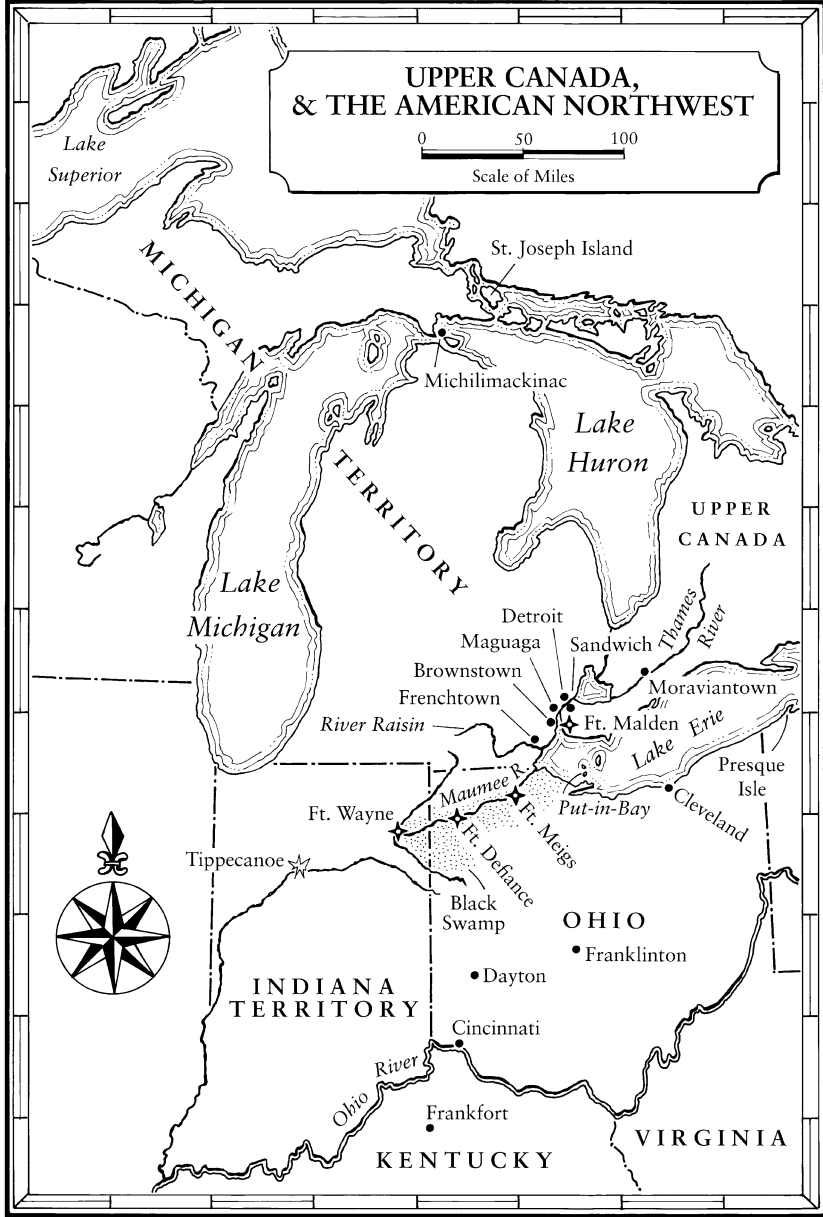
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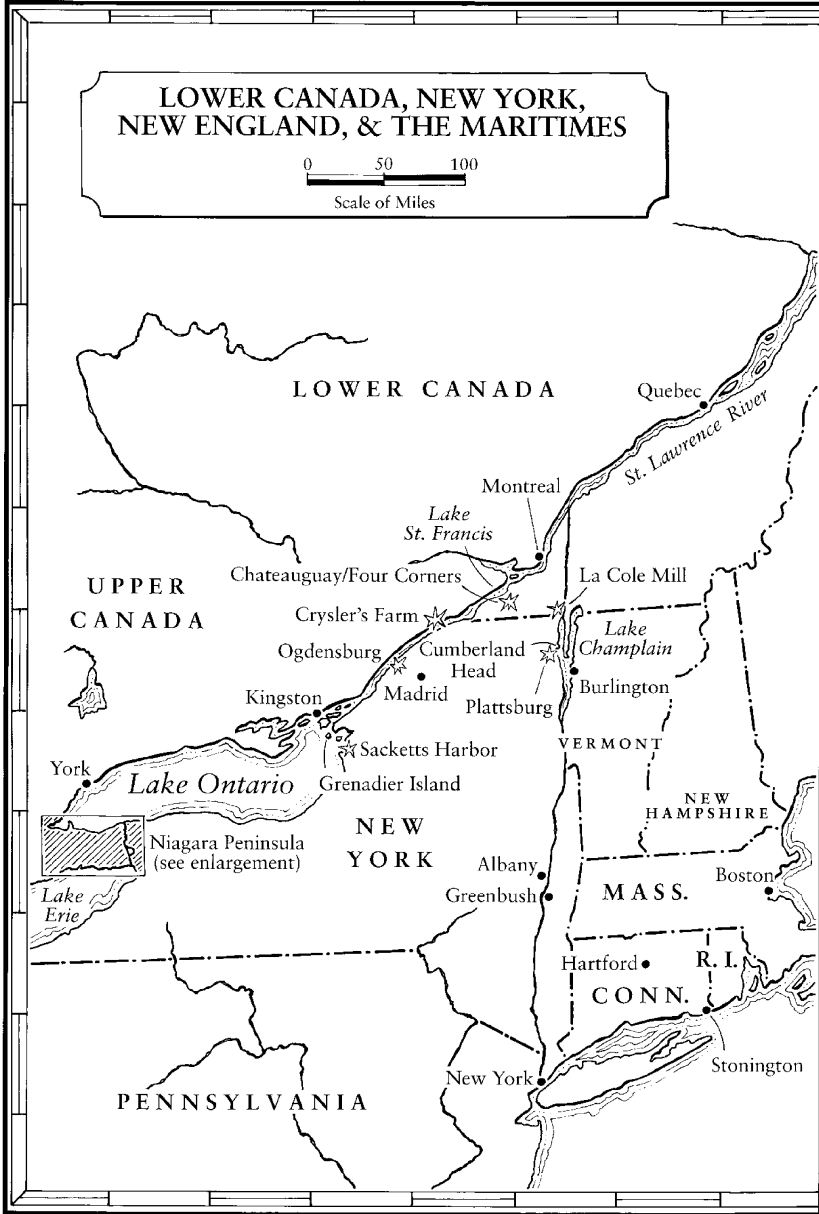
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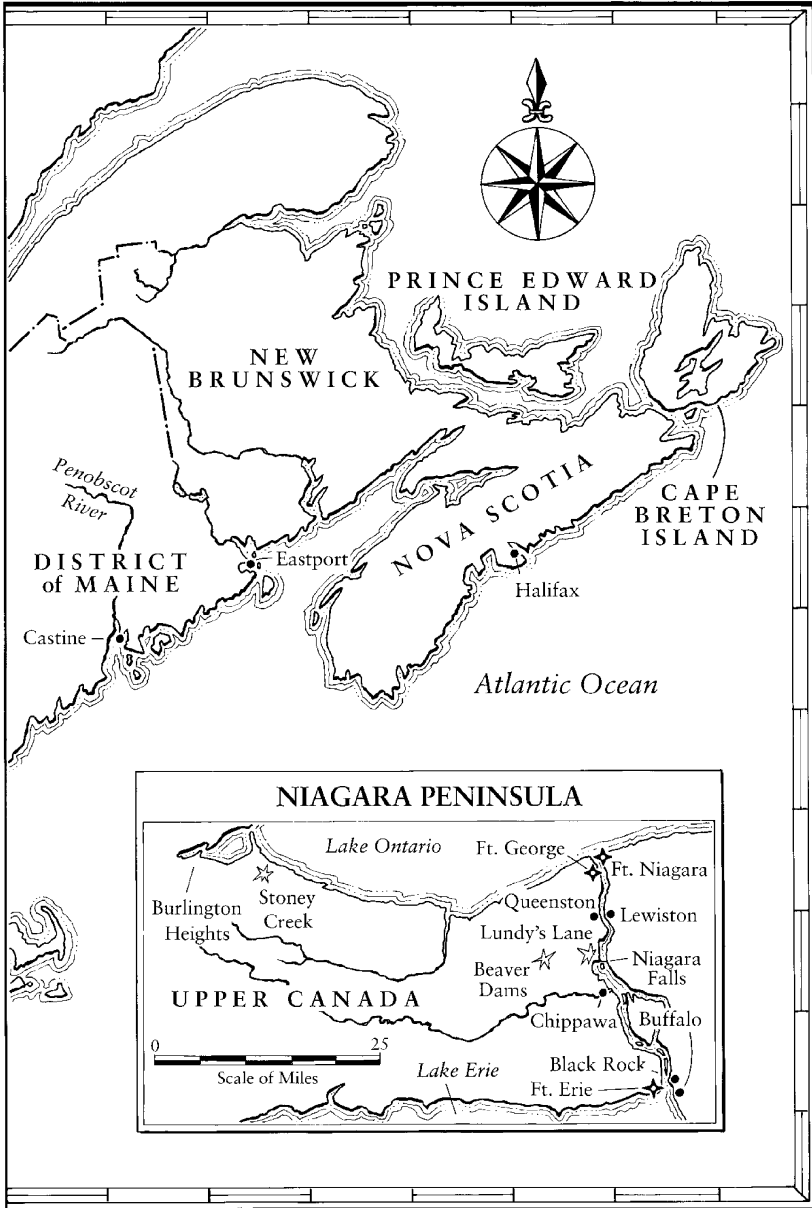


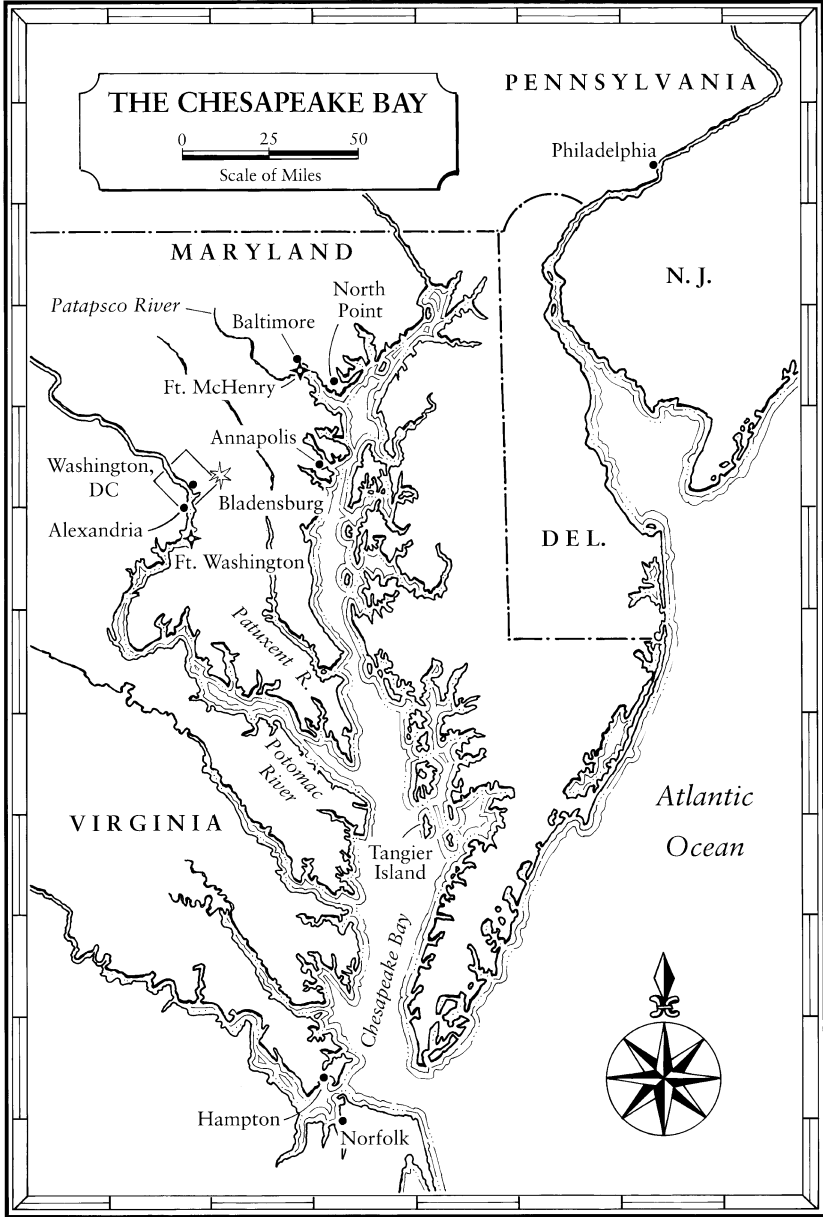
MAP I. Upper Canada and the American Northwest



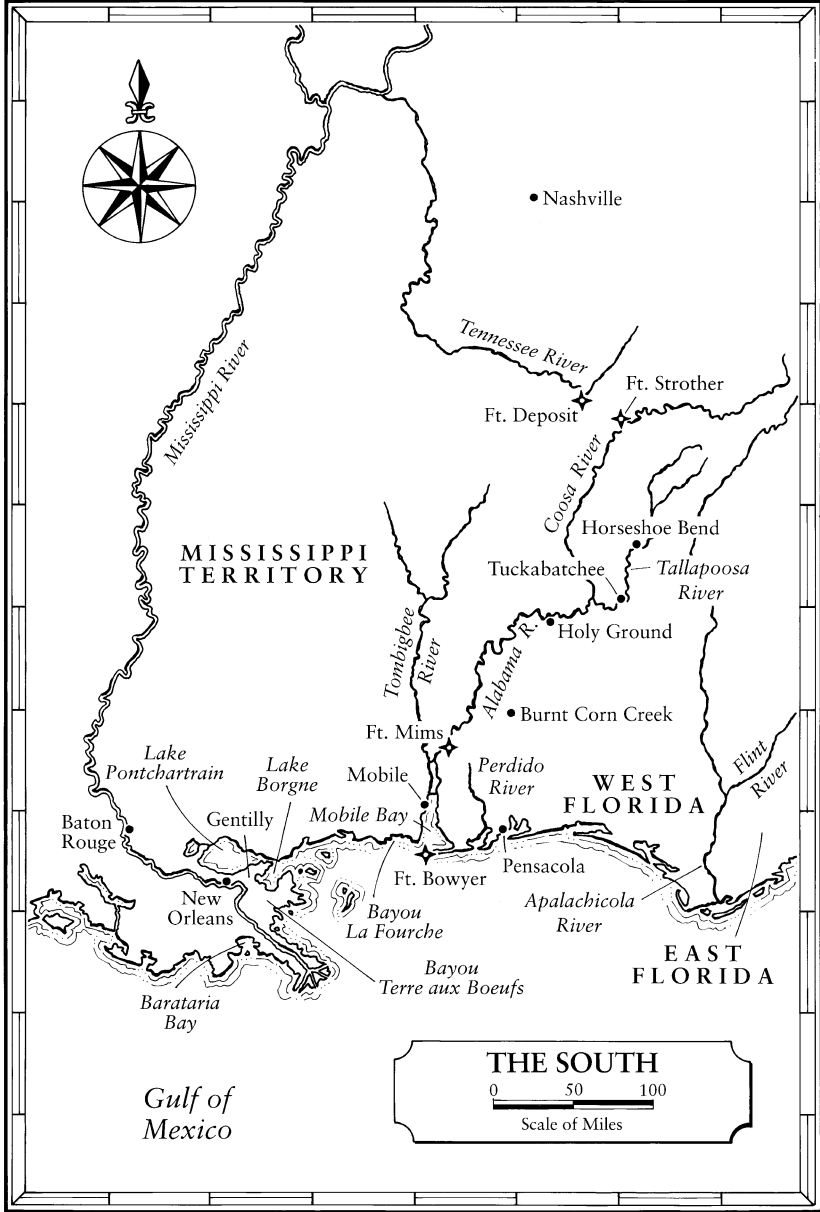
MAP 2. Lower Canada, New York, New England, and the Maritimes

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MAP 3. The Chesapeake Bay



MAP 4. The South